**Study Guide for *Having Our Say***

(Refer to the Calendar for Reading Schedule)

The Preface

1. How did the author, Amy Hill Hearth, come to write the book *Having Our Say*?

2. Describe the first meeting between the author and the Delany sisters. What were Ms. Hearth’s impressions of the sisters that day?

3. Describe the public’s reaction to the story that appeared in *The New York Times.*

4. At first, the sisters doubted that their stories were interesting enough to become a book. How did they eventually come to view the writing of their story?

5. Describe the structure of the book. For example, who are the narrators? What is the sequence of the story?

Part I *Sweet Sadie, Queen Bess*

1. What do we learn about the two sisters simply by reading the title of Part I?

2. Who wrote this first section *Sweet Sadie, Queen Bess*?

3. What are some of the facts we learn about the Delany family in pages 1 – 11?

4. Sadie notes that their mother and father never called each other by their first names. Why?

5. Sadie spends some time discussing the relative color, or “shade” of the various family members. Why do you think she does this?

6. At the end of chapter 1, Sadie says she and Bessie “kind of balance each other out.” What does she mean?

7. Based on what you have read so far, compare and contrast Sadie and Bessie. Start a list like the one below. Write it in a separate section of your notebook. Add to the list as you continue reading the book.

8. Which does Bessie say was a bigger problem for her: sexism or racism?

9. Who were the “rebby boys”?

10. Why don’t the sisters have a phone? How do they cope with not having one?

11. The sisters emphasize the importance of having a sense of humor. Find a few examples where humor helped them through a bad time.

Part II *“I Am Free!”*

1. The sisters’ father, “Papa,” was born into slavery. Sadie and Bessie recall asking him about being a slave and about becoming free. Discuss some of his recollections of:

         a - when news of the “Surrender” came

b - the situation of Papa’s family contrasted with that of most ex-slaves

c - the name *Delany*

d - learning to read and write

e - Papa’s accomplishments.

2. Describe the sisters’ parents and grandparents, James Miliam and Martha Logan.

PART III *SAINT AUG'S*

1. What do we learn in the preface to Part III about the importance of education to black Americans?

2. Why were “black colleges … the crucial stepping-stone to progress…”?

3. According to Sadie and Bessie, what was the situation of many former slaves? How did the sisters’ parents treat former slaves who were “down on their luck?”

4. On page 86 Bessie says, “We lived a clean life, but, Lord, we had a good time.” What kinds of things did the Delanys do for a “good time?”

5. React to Bessie’s comment at the end of page 87: “We were good citizens, good Americans. We loved our country, even though it didn’t love us back.”

Part IV *JIM CROW DAYS*

1. a. According to Sadie and Bessie, what was the reason  Jim Crow laws were passed?

  b. Describe the “pecking order.”

2. Describe the sisters’ first encounter with Jim Crow.

3. How did Papa “put his money where his mouth was”?

4. Sadie says on page 103, “I never let prejudice stop me from what I wanted to do in this life.” Retell her anecdote about the shoe store that illustrates her point.

5. Contrast Bessie and Sadie’s reactions to racism. How did each cope with it? Add this to the list you began in Part I question #7.

6. Sadie tells us her father insisted she go to college, but NOT take a scholarship. Why does he insist she not take a scholarship? Do you think he was right?

7. What do Sadie and Bessie say about the fact they never married?

8. Bessie recalls hearing about the sinking of the Titanic. Describe her reaction to the news.

9. In 1913 Bessie came close to being lynched. Describe what happened. What is Sadie’s reaction to Bessie’s behavior?

Part V *HARLEM-TOWN*

1. Sadie and Bessie describe their first trip to New York City in 1915. How did they react to the sight of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor – that vision that has thrilled immigrants for more than a hundred years?

2. Sadie and Bessie contrast the demographics of North Carolina with what they encountered in New York City. How were the two cities different? What do you think Sadie and Bessie would say if they came to New York City for the first time today?

3. Explain why the sisters say that World War I “happened overseas but…created bloodshed among us here at home.”

4. a. Why did Sadie have a hard time at Pratt        
              Institute?

b. React to her comment on p 149: “The problem is, you don’t always know for sure whether people are being nasty because you’re colored, or for some other reason.”

5. Why does Sadie say she had a happier time at Columbia?

6. Why did Sadie decide to stay in New York after she graduated from Columbia?

7. What is Bessie’s opinion of Affirmative Action laws? Do you agree with her?

8. What does Bessie say about a woman combining marriage and a career? Do you think this is still true today? Explain.

9. a. What conclusion does Bessie draw about what a black person must do if he or she is “going to make it”?

 b. Do you think things have changed?

 c. Do you think other minorities suffer equally  from these problems?

10. How did Sadie manage to become the first “colored” teacher in New York City to teach domestic science in a high school?

11. One of the recurring themes of the book is **hard work**. How does Bessie describe her working life in chapter 19?

12. Why didn’t the sisters support the baseball team that eventually became the Yankees?

13. An acquaintance of Bessie’s, Albert Robinson, encountered a Columbia University professor who claimed Negroes were inferior to white people. How did Bessie react?

14. Why does Bessie say that sit-ins were not her “style of activism”?

15. Describe Bessie’s encounter with the Ku Klux Klan.

16. What does Bessie say was “one of the happiest days” of her life?

17. As we have seen, the Delanys knew most of the prominent black Americans of the times. In chapter 23 we learned their brother Hubert knew Fiorello LaGuardia. Describe the relationship between Hubert Delany and Fiorello LaGuardia.

18. How did Sadie, her mother, sister and brother avoid “trouble” on their car trip to Los Angeles?

19. Bessie talks about the Depression in Chapter 25. How does she contrast the situation of white and black people during this difficult time?

PART VI *THE TIES THAT BIND*

1.  Despite a lifetime of suffering from racism, the Delany family felt that nothing could stop them from achieving their goals. It took a family tragedy for the Delanys to realize “you can’t always get what you want in life.” What happened?

 2. Describe the experience of racism suffered by the sisters’ brother Manross during World War II.

3. Eventually the sisters decided one of them would have to quit working to take care of their mother. How did they decide which one would quit?

PART VII *OUTLIVING THE REBBY BOYS*

1. Recall a little about the sisters’ life after their mother died.

 2. What did the sisters do to maintain good health?

 3. It is Bessie who has “the last word” in the book. Explain what she means in the last sentence. Do you think this is an effective ending to the story of the Delany sisters?