*Flygirl* Booktalk

The word passing can mean any number of things. Passing a test, passing a football, passing an ex-boyfriend in the hall. Passing a note in class. For Ida Mae Jones, however, in Sherri L. Smith’s historical novel *Flygirl*, passing means something entirely different.

Ida Mae Jones is a young woman living with her family on a farm in Louisiana in 1940. Having just graduated from high school, Ida Mae cleans houses with her friend Jolleen for extra money, but dreams of something more.

Her father, who died years before the beginning of the novel, taught Ida Mae how to fly using his small crop-duster. A certified pilot himself, Ida Mae’s father encouraged her to seek her own pilot’s license. But no flight school in Louisiana will certify a woman. Destined to remain a farm girl and housecleaner forever, Ida Mae is thrilled to read a war advertisement in the newspaper. “Attention all female pilots! Come fly planes for the US Army and help your country!”

Using her father’s pilot license, Ida Mae, against the wishes of her mother and Jolleen, sets out to fulfill her dream of becoming a pilot and serving her country. Unfortunately, her gender isn’t the only factor holding Ida Mae back from becoming a pilot. Ida Mae, with her pale skin and her straight hair, is also black.

In order for Ida Mae to become an Army pilot, she must “pass” as white.

History tells us of many instances where Black Americans have passed as white in order to seek the equality they so desired and deserved. In Sherri L. Smith’s *Flygirl*, we encounter one such individual who risks her family, her dignity, and her life to fly planes for her country, and fulfill the dreams of her father and herself.