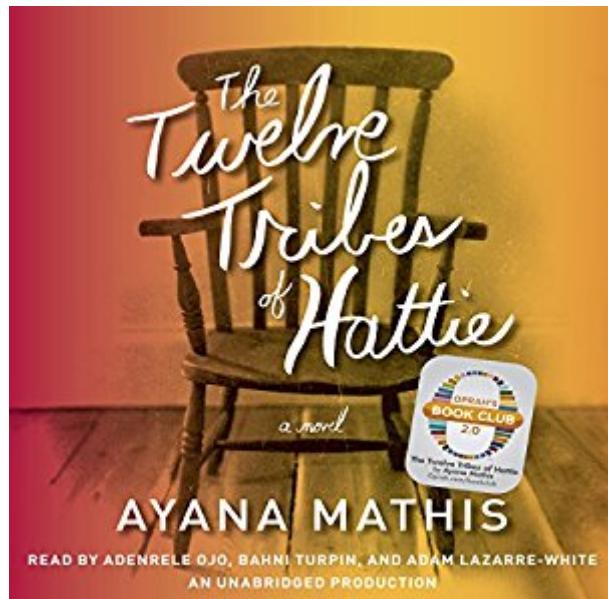


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# The Twelve Tribes Of Hattie (Oprah's Book Club 2.0)



## **Synopsis**

A debut of extraordinary distinction: through the trials of one unforgettable family, Ayana Mathis tells the story of the children of the Great Migration, a story of love and bitterness and the promise of a new America. In 1923, 15-year-old Hattie Shepherd flees Georgia and settles in Philadelphia, hoping for a chance at a better life. Instead, she marries a man who will bring her nothing but disappointment and watches helplessly as her firstborn twins succumb to an illness a few pennies could have prevented. Hattie gives birth to nine more children, whom she raises with grit and mettle and not an ounce of the tenderness they crave. She vows to prepare them for the calamitous difficulty they are sure to face in their later lives, to meet a world that will not love them. Captured here in 12 luminous narrative threads, their lives tell the story of a mother's monumental courage and the journey of a nation. Beautiful and devastating, Ayana Mathis's *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* is glorious, harrowing, unexpectedly uplifting, and blazing with life.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Thought this was a bunch of short stories loosely tied together, but it wasn't. It seemed to start out that way and I'm not fond of short stories, but it was actually the story of Hattie from 1925 to 1980. The narration was mostly through her eyes and sometimes through her children's eyes. But it moved along through time and kept the story riveting. Not sure if I liked Hattie, but I certainly sympathized with her. Not sure if I liked all of her children either. But it's really Hattie that the reader gets to know and reluctantly, at least for me, admire. Ayana Mathis, the author, writes beautifully. She weaves words like a maestro conductor. Her characterizations have depth and the plot has

tension and creativity. A slightly different kind of a book, but one that shouldn't be overlooked.

One star means you "hate" the book. Hate is such a strong word that I can say it's a little "over the top" in how I feel about this book, BUT not by much! You ever hear about a book or a specific artist and feel this overwhelming pressure that You Must Like It or you're not civilized or "cultured enough". I have felt this way before (shout out to Esperanza Spalding) and once again found myself saying I must love this book if Oprah and Essence says so. I mean I'm an African American woman born and raised in Philadelphia how can I not love this book. At first, I must admit I was smitten, yes each chapter ended abruptly, with no sense of closure just doom and gloom or a feeling of What The... But I kept thinking "It's got to get better and Mathis is surely going to get back to these characters. By 60% into the book (for all my fellow Kindle readers out there) I was more than annoyed and was wondering what is the point to all this misery. By the time I got to the "Bell" chapter I was "speed reading" through each click of my Kindle. A friend of mine, who also read this book and had the same reaction as I did said the book should be called "What Happen...to the Twelve Tribes of Hattie?" If someone out there does know, they sure didn't find out from reading this book. Mathis needs to find her "voice" as a writer and pick a lane while she is at it. Putting everything in a book including the kitchen sink does not make for a fascinating read. Also to Mathis CLOSURE is a good thing you should try it out in your next book.

The writing here is indeed superb, but the story is a bit disjointed and the treatment of black males in this novel is absolutely horrendous. Here is a quote from USA Today, "With one or two exceptions, the male characters in this book make Alice Walker's The Color Purple read like a celebration of the strong black man." That comes from a woman, and those exceptions she mentions are fleeting at best. The book starts off with a painful experience, but the writing and situation draws you in immediately. From that opening chapter it seems like everything goes downhill. Hattie never seems to quite recover from this event. Her husband August, is nowhere to be found during this calamity. The subsequent chapters are told from the 12 different children's perspective with varying degrees of effectiveness. Some of the chapters feel unconnected to the book as a whole, predicaments are mentioned and then never followed up on. I know this book and author have already been anointed as the next big thing, and based on her prose I do understand why. I could only go 3 stars because the misandry was suffocating, and I sincerely hope that doesn't account for all the attention this novel has garnered, I would find that very disappointing.

Overall it was a decent book with stronger portions and good writing throughout most of the book. I did enjoy the author's use of Hattie's children and grandchildren to tell Hattie's story but through all of that I still don't think I really fully understood what made Hattie tick and why she was so distant and cold. A heartbreaking loss is referenced early in the book but they way the author describes her, it seems that Hattie was this way even before the loss. It made it hard for me to empathize with her character. I felt more for her children if anything. Each chapter is basically a short story and some were more enjoyable than others. Some of the weaker chapters did not seem to connect back to Hattie or the other chapters from the other children later. I skimmed a chapter that I found uninteresting but I was able to read the following chapters without being confused. There were some chapters about some of the children that I think would make great novels by themselves, such as the story of her son Six who moves to the South to become a preacher or her daughter Belle. The main thing I wanted more of was a better connection of all the children and Hattie through the chapters. That is what is missing most.

How I love this book! The characters are so alive, the emotions are so real. I often had to stop, re-read a sentence and then just sit there to reflect as I ached for the lives of Hattie and her family. Or I would re-read to savor again a particular passage. Ms. Mathis writes with poetic beauty and a great storytelling style. She skillfully portrays the complexity of the human spirit and presents the characters with love and respect...even when they are behaving badly you can see the fragility of their souls. This would be a wonderful book club book. I plan to immediately read it again and recommend it to everyone. (I could have done without the Oprah notes, though.)

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