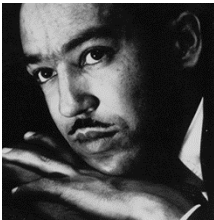


Cynthia Rylant Biography from Scholastic.com



As a child in West Virginia, Cynthia Rylant never dreamed of becoming a writer. In her free time, she devoured Archie comic books and paperback romances and enjoyed the outdoors. But after taking one college English class, she was, “hooked on great writing... I didn’t know about this part of me until I went to college—didn’t know I loved beautiful stories.” And one night, inspired by the Southern writer James Agee, she sat down and wrote *When I Was Young in the Mountains*. Named a Caldecott Honor Book and an ALA Notable Book, it was an instant success.

Since that night, Rylant hasn’t stopped creating wonderful books. Her stories explore friendship, love, grief, and other mysteries, and often draw on her memories of growing up in Appalachia. “I get a lot of personal gratification thinking of those people who don’t get any attention in the world and making them really valuable in my fiction — making them absolutely shine with their beauty.” She lives with her many pets in the Pacific Northwest.



Biography from poets.org

James Mercer Langston Hughes was born February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. His parents divorced when he was a young child, and his father moved to Mexico. He was raised by his grandmother until he was thirteen, when he moved to Lincoln, Illinois, to live with his mother and her husband, before the family eventually settled in Cleveland, Ohio. It was in Lincoln that Hughes began writing poetry. After graduating from high school, he spent a year in Mexico followed by a year at Columbia University in New York City. During this time, he held odd jobs such as assistant cook, launderer, and busboy. He also travelled to Africa and Europe working as a seaman. In November 1924, he moved to Washington, D. C. Hughes’s first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, (Knopf, 1926) was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1926. He finished his college education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania three years later. In 1930 his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*, (Knopf, 1930) won the Harmon gold medal for literature.

Hughes, who claimed Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg, and Walt Whitman as his primary influences, is particularly known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of black life in America from the twenties through the sixties. He wrote novels, short stories and plays, as well as poetry, and is also known for his engagement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing, as in his book-length poem *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (Holt, 1951). His life and work were enormously important in shaping the artistic contributions of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Unlike other notable black poets of the period—Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen—Hughes refused to differentiate between his personal experience and the common experience of black America. He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter, and language itself.

