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 <u>Paul Lawrence Dunbar</u>, <u>Carl Sandburg</u>, and <u>Walt Whitman</u> 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 booklength 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.

The critic Donald B. Gibson noted in the introduction to *Modern Black Poets: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Prentice Hall, 1973) that Hughes "differed from most of his predecessors among black poets . . . in that he addressed his poetry to the people, specifically to black people. During the twenties when most American poets were turning inward, writing obscure and esoteric poetry to an ever decreasing audience of readers, Hughes was turning outward, using language and themes, attitudes and ideas familiar to anyone who had the ability simply to read . . . Until the time of his death, he spread his message humorously—though always seriously—to audiences throughout the country, having read his poetry to more people (possibly) than any other American poet."

Langston Hughes died of complications from prostate cancer in May 22, 1967, in New York City. In his memory, his residence at 20 East 127th Street in Harlem has been given landmark status by the New York City Preservation Commission, and East 127th Street has been renamed "Langston Hughes Place."

Gary Soto and Langston Hughes Biography Questions

Answer the following questions in the spaces below, using complete sentences. In your answer, be sure to use the words that have been underlined to receive full credit.

1)	What is one interesting	<u>fact</u> you <u>learne</u> d	<u>l</u> about <u>Cynthia R</u>	<u>kylant</u> from h	er autobiography?

2) What is one odd job that Langston Hughes did in his youth before becoming a poet?

3) Both authors wrote about children who learn valuable life lessons. What is <u>one valuable life lesson that you learned as a child?</u>

4) Which author do you think wrote the story "Papa's Parrot?" Explain your guess.