



Toni Morrison

Writer
1931-Present

Born Chloe Ardelia Wofford on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, Toni Morrison has won numerous book prizes, including the Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes. She is best known for her epics, *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, which was later made into a movie.

As a student, Morrison took her studies seriously, reading voraciously of European literature and learning Latin. After graduating with honors from Lorain High School in 1949, she attended Howard University where she majored in English and minored in classics. From Howard, Morrison went to Cornell University where she earned a masters degree in 1955.

Upon completing her formal education, Morrison moved to Houston to teach English at Texas Southern University, where she stayed for two years before returning to Howard to teach. While at Howard, she met Jamaican architect Harold Morrison whom she married in 1958. Toni Morrison joined a writers group that met on the Howard campus. At that time, she began working on her first novel, which she had intended to be a short story.

After the birth of their first son and while expecting their second, Toni and Harold divorced. He returned to Jamaica and she to her home state of Ohio. She soon moved her sons with her to Syracuse, New York where she began working with a textbook publishing company. After two years, she went to work for Random House in New York City where she became a senior trade-book editor. Morrison used this position to advance black literature.

In 1970, the short story Morrison began many years before was published. *The Bluest Eye* did not sell well, but Morrison was on her way to becoming one of the most successful American authors of her time. In 2012, upon her retirement from teaching at Princeton University, *The New York Times Book Review* named *Beloved* the best novel of the past 25 years.

Today, Morrison is on the editorial board of *The Nation*, a political magazine. She has been awarded numerous honorary degrees and continues to write, speak and partake in a variety of artistic endeavors.

Name _____

Toni Morrison

1. Which two well known book prizes has Toni Morrison won?

2. Aside from honorary degrees, what is the highest degree Morrison holds?

3. Morrison did not intend *The Bluest Eye* to be a novel. What form of literature did she start out to write?

4. Why did Morrison move to Syracuse, New York?

5. Which of Morrison's novels did the *New York Times Book Review* name the best novel of the past 25 years?

6. Toni Morrison said, "At some point in life the world's beauty becomes enough. You don't need to photograph, paint or even remember it. It is enough." What do you think she meant?

SAMPLE



Sonia Sotomayor Supreme Court Justice 1954-Present

Born on June 25, 1954, in New York City, Sonia Sotomayor is the first Supreme Court justice of Hispanic descent. Nominated to the Court by President Barack Obama on May 26, 2009, she is the third female to have served and is among the youngest on the current Court (2016).

Sotomayor's first interest in law began after watching an episode of the television show Perry Mason. She recalled in 1998: "I was going to college and I was going to become an attorney, and I knew that when I was ten. Ten. That's no jest."

Sotomayor was born in The Bronx, New York City, to Puerto Rican-born parents. Her father died when she was nine, and she was raised by her mother. Her mother placed a strong emphasis on a higher education, pushing her children to become fluent in English and making huge sacrifices to purchase a set of encyclopedias that would give them proper research materials for school.

Sotomayor graduated from Cardinal Spellman High School and earned a full scholarship to Princeton University, from which she graduated in 1976 with highest honors. She received her law degree from Yale Law School in 1979. While at Yale, she was an editor at the Yale Law Journal.

Sotomayor passed the bar in 1980 and immediately began work as an assistant district attorney in Manhattan. In 1984 Sotomayor entered private practice while serving on the boards of several organizations. It was at this time that she gained the attention of Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who were partially responsible for her appointment as U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of New York City. On her 43rd birthday, June 25, 1997, she was nominated for U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals by President Bill Clinton. In addition to her work in the Court of Appeals, Sotomayor also began teaching adjunct law at New York University in 1998 and at Columbia Law School in 1999.

Sotomayor maintains a public presence, mostly through making speeches. She frequently speaks at university commencements where her talks focus primarily on ethnic identity and experience, the need for diversity, and America's struggle with the implications of its diverse population.

Name _____

Sonia Sotomayor

1. What historic first did Sonia Sotomayor achieve?

2. What caused Sotomayor to become interested in law?

3. In what way was Sotomayor's mother important to her success?

4. Who took notice of Sotomayor and helped her get her first appointment to a U.S court?

5. In addition to being a lawyer, judge and public speaker, what other job has Sonia Sotomayor held?

6. Sonia Sotomayor states, "If your child marches to a different beat, a different drummer, you might just have to go along with that music. Help them achieve what's important to them." Do you think this is good advice for parents? Explain your thinking.

SAMPLE



Rachel Carson Biologist and Writer 1907-1964

Rachel Carson was born on a small family farm near Springdale, Pennsylvania on May 27, 1907. As a child she spent a great deal of her time exploring the forests and streams around her farm, developing a great passion for nature. She especially enjoyed the writings of Beatrix Potter, Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad and Robert Louis Stevenson. The natural world, particularly the ocean, was the common thread of her favorite literature. She became a devoted writer at a young age and published her first story in *St. Nicholas Magazine* when she was just eleven years old.

Carson completed high school in 1925, graduating at the top of her class. The same year, she entered Pennsylvania College for Women (later Chatham College) as an English major. She became inspired by a biology teacher at her college however, and she switched her major to biology.

After her graduation in 1929 she held a summer fellowship at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. She entered Johns Hopkins University and completed her masters degree in marine zoology in 1932. Carson next wrote publications for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries. She also wrote radio scripts for a weekly broadcast, and the series on aquatic life proved surprisingly popular. She soon became a junior aquatic biologist at the Bureau, analyzing data on fish populations and writing brochures for the public. She was promoted to the position of Editor-in-Chief of all publications for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. With the growing popularity of her books (*The Sea Around Us* earned the National Book Award in 1951), Carson was able to leave the Bureau and work on her research and writing full-time. Carson moved with her mother to Southport, Maine in 1953.

Carson grew concerned about environmental problems that she believed were caused by synthetic pesticides. The result was the book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962. *Silent Spring* warned of a spring without songbirds and led to a nationwide ban on DDT and other pesticides. It inspired a grassroots environmental movement that led to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Silent Spring* is generally credited with inspiring the modern global environmental movement. In its collection of the 100 most important people of the 20th Century, *Time* magazine declared: "Before there was an environmental movement, there was one brave woman and her very brave book." Rachel Carson died from bone cancer in 1964.

Name _____

Rachel Carson

1. How did Rachel Carson become interested in nature?

2. How old was Carson when her first writing was published?

3. What was the theme of her favorite literature?

4. How did Carson combine her interests in biology and writing?

5. What is the title of the book she wrote that inspired the environmental movement?

6. Rachel Carson said, "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts." What do you think she meant by this? Do you agree with her – why or why not?

SAMPLE