

An African American Poet

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was an American poet. Her grandfather was a slave who escaped from slavery. That grandfather fought in the Civil War. He was part of an important era in American history.

His son married a teacher, and they lived in Kansas. The family moved to Chicago when she was a baby. Gwendolyn Brooks went to Chicago public schools. She grew up in Chicago and stayed here for the rest of her life. She traveled many places but always came back to Chicago.

Gwendolyn Brooks enjoyed reading and writing. She wrote about her experiences. She wrote about Chicago. When she was just thirteen, a poem she wrote was published in a magazine. In time, she was published in books and then had books published that were only her poems. She became a noted poet, well known in the United States and in other countries. She won awards for her poetry.

It was not easy to get a job in writing. Gwendolyn Brooks worked for a while as a typist. She would type other people's words. But she continued to write her own words. She wrote poems that are important to many people around the world. Her poems inspired them.

In addition to being a poet, she also was a teacher. She taught college students in the Chicago area. She taught them about poetry. She taught them how important it is to make your ideas clear when you write a poem. There are hundreds of people who learned from her in those classes. Probably some of them are writing poems. And most of them also read poems better because of learning from her how to look for the ideas they communicate.

Illinois has a special role called Poet Laureate. Gwendolyn Brooks was named Illinois Poet Laureate in 1968. But that was one year after she was poet laureate for the whole country. She was very clear that what is important is the ideas a poet communicates—more than the prizes a poet may earn. But she earned many prizes. She is recognized today as a great poet and an important African American who influenced many people.

When she was 83, she became ill with cancer. In just a short time, she died. Her death in Chicago in 2000 affected people all over the world. She had accomplished much in her life. Her legacy is part of your heritage.

CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE

CCSSR2—clarify the main/central idea of a passage.

**What do you think is the most important legacy of this African American?
Use information from this biography to answer.**