



## **Gwendolyn Brooks**

**June 17, 1917 – December 3, 2000**

**Contributions:** A poet and writer. A teacher. The first black writer to win The Pulitzer Prize (1950)

### **Why is Gwendolyn Brooks an important figure in Black History?**

Born in Topeka, KS, but raised in Chicago, IL, Gwendolyn Brooks began writing at an early age. By the time she finished high school her poems were already a regular fixture in the Chicago Defender. She worked briefly for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, but she knew her passion was for a career in writing. Black urban life and the social issues of the times were the substance of her poems. Her first published book of poems, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), was followed by *Annie Allen* (1949), which told stories of a poor black girl growing up in Chicago. With this book Brooks won the 1950 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. She was the first black writer to win the prize.

Brooks used her experiences growing up in an environment fraught with poverty, prejudice, and discrimination to write about increasingly political topics. *In the Mecca* (1968), *Riot* (1969), and *Beckonings* (1975) were among her other popular works. Brooks went on to write two autobiographies and to teach writing at many prestigious universities, including the University of Chicago, Columbia University and City College of New York. At the age of 68 she was selected as the poetry consultant at the Library of Congress. She was the first black woman to be appointed to the post. In 2018, on what would have been her 101st birthday, a statue of her, titled "Gwendolyn Brooks: The Oracle of Bronzeville", was unveiled at Gwendolyn Brooks Park in Chicago.

Recommended reading on Gwendolyn Brooks:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gwendolyn-brooks>

<https://gwendolynbrooks100.org/>