



December 2017 Her Story ENewsletter Poet Laureates

Tracy K. Smith, the new poet laureate of the U.S., assumed her one-year term of office in September 2017. She stands on the shoulders of other women who have filled that office and the predecessor office. These women include Gwendolyn Brooks who served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1985-1986 and Rita Dove who served as Poet Laureate from 1993-1995 and later also served as a Special Bicentennial Consultant. Let's learn more about Gwendolyn Brooks and Rita Dove.

A woman of many firsts including the first African-American woman to hold the position of Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, and the first African-American woman to be inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about ordinary people and their lives.



Gwendolyn Brooks

Starting to write at an early age and encouraged by her mother, Brooks decided not to pursue a four-year college degree because she knew she was destined to be a writer and not a scholar. Her first poem "Eventide" was published in American Childhood magazine when she was 13 years old. She had written and published 75 poems by the time she was 16 years old. Many of her characters were based on the people whom she knew from her neighborhood - the inner city of Chicago. Her 1945 book of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville*, was critically acclaimed. Her next volume, *Annie Allen*, received the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. The Poet Laureate of Illinois from 1968 until her death in 2000, Brooks has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Rita Dove

Like Brooks, Rita Dove served as a state poet laureate and received the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. A top high school graduate academically, she received undergraduate and graduate degrees before pursuing a Fulbright Scholarship in Germany. She has published multiple poetry collections as well as short stories, a novel, essays and a play. She currently holds the chair of Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia and was the Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia from 2004-2006.

The recipient of more than 20 honorary degrees, Dove has received many honors including the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, the Sara Lee Frontrunner award, the National Humanities Medal (1996) from President Clinton and the National Medal of Arts (2011) from President Obama. She is the only poet to have received both the National Humanities Medal and the National Medal of Arts. Her poetry collections include *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), *Thomas and Beulah* (1986 - for which she won the Pulitzer Prize), *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), and *Sonata Mulattica* (2009, winner of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award).

Gwendolyn Brooks and Rita Dove are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Help us to tell women's stories!

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