

Richard Wright
1908-1960

“That Richard Wright became a writer at all is a tribute to his self-discipline and determination. The son of a Mississippi sharecropper and a domestic servant, Wright grew up in the relentless grip of the Jim Crow South, a culture that systematically degraded blacks as second-hand citizens” (“Richard Wright.” In Donald T. Hollenbeck). Wright only managed to get a ninth-grade education, but he was a voracious reader and showed early on that he had a gift with words (“Richard Wright.” Biography.com). Wright made his way to Chicago in 1927, and, after working numerous odd jobs, he joined the Federal Writers’ Project, a depression era work project. In 1938, a year after moving to New York, “Wright published *Uncle Tom’s Children*, a collection of four stories, and the book proved to be a significant turning point in his career. The stories earned him a \$500 prize from *Story* magazine and led to a 1939 Guggenheim Fellowship” that enabled him to continue writing full time (“Richard Wright.” Biography.com).

Wright published a best-selling novel, *Native Son*, in 1940. Irving Howe said in his 1963 essay “Black Boys and Native Sons,” “The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever. No matter how much qualifying the book might later need, it made impossible a repetition of the old lies . . . [and] brought out into the open, as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear, and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture” (Rayson). *Black Boy*, an autobiographical novel, appeared in 1945. *Black Boy* “depicts extreme poverty and his accounts of racial violence against blacks (“Richard Wright.” Biography.com). This novel’s success “paved the way for a formal invitation from the French government to visit that country,” where he was “accorded a celebrity’s welcome” (“Richard Wright.” In Donald T. Hollenbeck). After he returned to the United States he could no longer tolerate the racism he experienced. He still was not able to buy an apartment as a black man; furthermore, he hated the stares he, his white wife, and his family received on the streets, and being called “boy” by some shopkeepers. So, in 1947 he moved permanently to Paris (Rayson). Although he traveled extensively, Wright lived his remaining years in Paris.

Rayson, Ann. “Richard Wright’s Life.” *Richard Wright’s Life*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Jan. 2017. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/r_wright/wright_life.htm>.

“Richard Wright.” *Biography.com*. A&E Networks Television, 10 Nov. 2015. Web. 04 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.biography.com/people/richard-wright-9537751#synopsis>>.

“Richard Wright.” In Donald T. Hollenbeck and Julie West Johnson eds., *Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, 1984.

Between the World and Me*

[http://edhelper.com/poetry/Between the World and Me by Richard Wright.htm](http://edhelper.com/poetry/Between%20the%20World%20and%20Me%20by%20Richard%20Wright.htm)

(This is a printable site which includes multiple choice, short answer, and writing questions, as well as activities to use with the poem)

*This poem inspired the title of a 2015 award winning nonfiction book by Ta-Nehisi Coates. "Coates modeled his book after James Baldwin's essay "The Fire Next Time," first published in 1963, a time when the prevailing racial order was being challenged by young activists on a scale and with a fervor not seen since the Civil War. The first several pages of the book are styled in the form of a letter to Baldwin's 15-year-old nephew, offering advice about how to navigate the world he has been born into with black skin. Baldwin implores his nephew to awaken to his own dignity, humanity and power, and accept his responsibility to help 'make America what it must become.'" "Between the World and Me' ...carries a very different message, though it is also written in the form of a letter to a black teenage boy" (Alexander).

Alexander, Michelle. "Ta-Nehisi Coates's 'Between the World and Me'." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 16 Aug. 2015. Web. 04 Jan. 2017.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/books/review/ta-nehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me.html?_r.