

TAKE YOUR POET TO WORK DAY

Celebrated the 3rd Wednesday in July

Lucille Clifton

Lucille Clifton, an American poet, was born Thelma Lucille Sayles in New York in 1936. She studied at Howard University and SUNY at Fredonia. Before entering academia herself, she worked as a clerk in the New York State's Employment Division and as a literary assistant in the Office of Education in Washington, D.C. She married philosophy professor and sculptor Fred James Clifton, and they had six children together.

She gained notoriety as a poet when a friend, writer Ishmael Reed, showed her work to Langston Hughes. Hughes included some of her poems in his 1970 anthology, *The Poetry of the Negro*. She would go on to receive awards for her poetry, including winning the Juniper Prize in 1980 for *Two-Headed Woman*, which also was nominated for the Pulitzer. Two of her collections were Pulitzer finalists, making Clifton the first to have two finalists the same year: *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir, 1969-1980* and *Next: New Poems*. She won the Ruth Lilly Prize in 2007.

Clifton's poetry is uniquely economical, what Robin Becker referred to as "poetics of understatement." Notable for their lack of punctuation and capitalization, Clifton's poems made powerful statements in their disarming simplicity. She wrote often on the black experience and on womanhood, employing poems such as "homage to my hips" and "homage to my hair" to celebrate them while also a means to reframing the way black bodies and black womanhood were understood.

Lucille Clifton served as Poet Laureate of Maryland from 1974 to 1985, and had a long academic career at Coppin State College, Columbia University, George Washington University, University of California at Santa Cruz, St. Mary's College of Maryland and Dartmouth College.

Clifton died in 2010.



*"Poetry is a matter of life,
not just a matter of language."*

How to take your favorite with you on Take Your Poet to Work Day

1. Color your poet
2. Cut out your poet along dotted lines
3. Attach a popsicle stick to the back of your poet with tape or glue
4. Take your poet to work



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