



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

launches the

Toni Morrison
WRITING PROGRAM

featuring

NIKKI GIOVANNI

Inaugural Writer-in-Residence

Monday, September 27, 2021 | 6:00 p.m.

A Virtual Experience

TONI MORRISON



Arriving on February 18, 1931, into an America of complex social, economic, and racial challenges, Chloe Ardelia Wofford, who would become known as Toni Morrison, was a product of working-class parents who moved from the Deep South to Lorain, Ohio, in search of greater opportunities. The Great Depression and the infamous Scottsboro Boys case illuminated America's social and racial injustice. Despite the challenges, Toni and her family were persistent, focused, and positive. They believed that change was possible, and Toni was able to develop a powerful tool to promote that change – namely, writing.

Toni Morrison was an avid reader. In high school, she sharpened her linguistic skills as a debater, yearbook committee member, and secretary to the school's librarian. A member of the Howard University Players, Toni's commitment to racial justice deepened. After earning her degree in English, Toni earned her master's degree from Cornell University in 1955. After teaching briefly at Texas Southern University, she taught at her alma mater, Howard University, for seven years where she taught such activists as Stokely Carmichael.

In New York, the future world-renowned writer was an editor for Random House and assisted many writers, including African American writers. A single mother to two sons, Ford and Slade, after her marriage to Harold Morrison ended, Toni Morrison continued her work as an editor. With an incisive mastery of language and superb capacity to explore the trials and triumphs of the life and culture of African American people, she began her writing career. At age 39, Toni Morrison published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. *Sula* came three years later and became a National Book Award nominee. *Song of Solomon* earned the National Book Critics Circle Award. A creator of complex yet compelling characters, Toni Morrison revealed an authenticity that became her trademark as evidenced in *Beloved*, a New York Times Best Seller for over two dozen weeks. *Tar Baby*, *Jazz*, *Paradise*, *Home*, *A Mercy* and *God Help the Child* are among her many books. Quite notably, Ms. Morrison taught at Princeton while managing a highly productive writing agenda.

A listing of Toni Morrison's well-deserved awards for her writing and her humanity fills pages. Standing in salient relief against all others, however, was her becoming the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the first to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Former President Barack Obama awarded her the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012. Toni Morrison was posthumously inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 2020.

About the Program

Thinking deeply, dreaming imaginatively, reading critically, reflecting incisively, and then writing compellingly is the very essence of what it means to give power to voice. Prairie View A&M University aims to educate its students to become change leaders in an increasingly more diverse, globally interconnected world. Students will be inspired to uncover their hidden talents and to hone their skills as they learn to craft the unique characteristics of various literary genres, comprehend the expectations of the publishing process and benefit from the resources available in a competitive yet supportive writers' world.

Led by Provost Emerita and Professor E. Joahanne Thomas-Smith and organizationally housed in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Program features an annual Writer-in-Residence who will offer public readings, master classes, lectures, class visitations, and critiques of students' works. There will come summer writing workshops, informal book discussions with prominent authors, contests whose winners will receive college scholarship, and eventually, a full curriculum supporting a degree program in creative writing and other linguistic expression. In keeping with the University's land grant mission, the University will include an outreach component wherein area high schools and elementary schools will become Toni Morrison Writing Program partners. A most prominent partner to the Toni Morrison Writing Program is the Ruth J. Simmons Center for Race and Justice, thus fostering exploration of social justice from the perspective of literature, public policy, entertainment, environmental science, athletics, health and other areas.

The Toni Morrison Writing Program was made possible via a substantial gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott in early 2021. Scott was a student of Morrison's during her time at Princeton and attributes much of her development as an author to Morrison's mentorship.

NIKKI GIOVANNI

Inaugural Writer-in-Residence



A constellation of experiences and circumstances shape the inner core of one's being. Yolande Cornelia Giovanni, Jr., whose sister would later dub her "Nikki," was impacted by storytelling, especially by her grandmother. "Nikki-Rosa" is a poem reflecting on her having grown up in a supportive, protective family. Nikki has always remained quite close to her family. She has a son, Thomas, her only child.

In the 1940s, Nikki's family like so many other African American families moved from the Deep South and headed north of the Mason-Dixon Line seeking a better life. Cincinnati, Ohio was not free from racism but it was

different from that practiced in Tennessee. Following in her grandfather's footsteps, Nikki graduated from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. She later studied at the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University.

In 1968, Nikki Giovanni published *Black Feeling Black Talk*. She boldly examined the place of race, the dimensions of power and the complexities of relationships. There were conversations with notables like James Baldwin. Her linguistic agility and superb vocal delivery spoke to the intellectual as well as the minimally educated. Her 1970 book, *Re: Creation* showcased her capacity to so adeptly use language to achieve purpose. The assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Medgar Evers jolted Nikki. She studied, spoke and wrote about race and gender inequities. She encouraged other African American women writers such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Mari Evans and others to find their distinctive voices.

In 1994, Nikki published *Racism 101*. She responded to the thinking of such brilliant minds as those of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Spike Lee and Toni Morrison. In 1996, *Shimmy Shimmy Shimmy Like My Sister Kate*, a collection of African American writing from the Harlem Renaissance appeared.

The broadness of her literary scope becomes evident as one reads *The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni, 1968-1995*; *Blues: For All the Changes*; *Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea: Poems and Not Quite Poems*; *Bicycles: Love Poems*; *Chasing Utopia: A Hybrid*; *A Good Cry: What We Learn From Tears and Laughter* and *Make Me Rain*. Themes of her children's books vary widely as shown in *I Am Loved*, *The Sun Is So Quiet* and *Rosa*.

Nikki Giovanni has taught at Virginia Tech since 1987, and in 2005, Oprah Winfrey selected her as one of "25 Living Legends." Nikki Giovanni's creative genius has led to her winning NAACP Image Awards, the Carl Sandburg Literary Award, the Langston Hughes Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Arts and Letters and the first Rosa Parks Women of Courage Award.

Program

WELCOME

Marquinn Booker

Senior, Criminal Justice

President, Student Government Association, 2021-2022

Prairie View A&M University

WRITING: RISING ON "THE HILL"

The Story of the Toni Morrison Writing Program Initiative

Ruth J. Simmons

President

Prairie View A&M University

A SALUTATION TO NIKKI GIOVANNI, INAUGURAL WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

Emanuelee Bean '08

Poet, Spoken Word Artist, Motivational Speaker

2021-2023 Houston Poet Laureate

POETICALLY

Nikki Giovanni

Inaugural Writer-in-Residence, Toni Morrison Writing Program
Celebrated Writer and Winner of seven NAACP Image Awards, the Carl Sandburg Literary Award, the Langston Hughes Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Arts and Letters, and the first Rosa Parks Women of Courage Award

A CONVERSATION WITH NIKKI GIOVANNI

ReShonda Tate, Moderator

Award-Winning Writer, Literary Consultant, Publisher, and

Managing Editor of the Defender

Glenn Shaheen

Poet and Assistant Professor of Creative Writing

Prairie View A&M University

Daisha Paul

Junior, English

Prairie View A&M University

IN GRATITUDE

Emma Joahanne Thomas-Smith

Provost Emerita and Director, Toni Morrison Writing Program

Prairie View A&M University

MUSICAL SELECTION

"Wake Me Up, Lord" by Uzee Brown, Jr.

Performed by: PVAMU Concert Chorale

Directed by: **A. Jan Taylor**

Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER 2021

Launch of the Toni Morrison Writing Program, featuring
Inaugural Writer-in-Residence Nikki Giovanni
(September 27, 2021)

Master Class
(September 29, 2021)

NOVEMBER 2021

Public Reading & Lecture
Master Class

FEBRUARY 2022

Public Reading & Lecture
Master Class

APRIL 2022

Public Forum
Writing Competition Scholarship Event

*Additional information regarding the events, dates, times, and registration process
will be provided at a future date on the University's website.
Dates, times, and activities are subject to change.*

K-12 Partners

Aldine High School	Jack Yates High School
Booker T. Washington High School	Klein Forest High School
Cypress Springs High School	Mirabeau B. Lamar High School
David W. Carter High School	Nimitz High School
Eisenhower High School	North Forest High School
George Washington Carver High School	Royal High School
H.T. Jones Elementary	Westbury Senior High School
Hempstead High School	Wheatley High School
Waller High School	

Leadership Committee

Emma Joahanne Thomas-Smith, *Chair*

Professor and Provost Emerita
Director, Toni Morrison Writing Program
Prairie View A&M University

Dorie Gilbert, *Co-chair*

Dean, Marvin D. and June Samuel Brailsford
College of Arts and Sciences
Prairie View A&M University

Emanuelee Bean '08

Poet, Spoken Word Artist, Motivational Speaker
2021-2023 Houston Poet Laureate
Houston, Texas

Teta Banks

Associate Professor, English and Humanities
Prairie View A&M University

Joanna Sanders Mann

Professor, English and Humanities
Prairie View A&M University

Shante Moore '13

Executive Director, Student Engagement
Prairie View A&M University

Melanye T. Price '95

Endowed Professor, Political Science
Director, Ruth J. Simmons Center for Race and Justice
Prairie View A&M University

ReShonda Tate

Award-Winning Writer, Literary Consultant, Publisher,
and Managing Editor of the Defender
Houston, Texas

Andrea Sankey

Senior Executive Director of Public Affairs,
Office of the President
Prairie View A&M University

Glenn Shaheen

Poet and Assistant Professor, Creative Writing
Prairie View A&M University

James M. Palmer, *Ex-officio*

Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
Prairie View A&M University

Planning Committee

Emma Joahanne Thomas-Smith, *Chair*

Carol Campbell '79 '99, *Co-chair*

Candace Johnson '02 '05, *Co-chair*

Hassan Abbasi

Ashley Albee

John S. Briscoe '02 '06

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Virginia Fowler

Jeffrey Hampton '14

John Hughes

Nicholas Hunt '16

Joey Longa

Andrea Sankey

Marchita Shilo

Charlene Stubblefield
