

A Tribute to Virginia Hamilton



Author Jane Yolen wrote about Virginia Hamilton: "If there is a Great Spirit in the world of children's books, Virginia is it. She has been a True North to the rest of us, and we are all the better for her having guided us."

Virginia Hamilton, award-winning author of more than 35 books for young readers, died on February 19, 2002, of breast cancer. Ms. Hamilton, wife of poet Arnold Adoff, was the recipient of every major award in her field, and was the only author to ever receive the Newbery Medal, the National Book Award, and the *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* for one book, her *M.C. Higgins, the Great* (1974). Ms. Hamilton wrote in many genres. Two of her Newbery Honor books, *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1972) and *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (1982) are fiction; the third, *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World*, is a collection of myths. Two of her most memorable works are the collections of African American folktales, *The People Could Fly* (1985) and *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* (1993).

Ms. Hamilton was also the only children's writer

ever to be awarded the MacArthur Fellowship. In addition to the numerous awards for her books, Ms. Hamilton received four honorary doctorates, and taught in the Education Department Graduate School, Queens College, New York, and at The Ohio State University Graduate School. The Virginia Hamilton Conference in Multicultural Literature for Youth was established at Kent University in Ohio, and continues as the oldest annual event of its kind.

The grandchild of former Ohio slaves, Hamilton described her work as "liberation literature." Those who have read it recognize her innovations as a story teller who has, as her Blue Sky Press editor Bonnie Verburg notes, "a fine ear for the sound of oral literature and [a] remarkable ability to capture its essence in written form."

Virginia Hamilton's upcoming novel, *Time Pieces*, will be published by the Blue Sky Press of Scholastic in October, 2002.

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