

## WHO WAS THOMAS WOLFE?

Thomas Wolfe was a writer who lived in Asheville, North Carolina, in the early 1900s. He was born the youngest of eight children to William Oliver (W.O.) and Julia Wolfe on October 3, 1900. His father was a stonecutter who carved tombstones and marble items for a living and he owned a monument shop that stood on Pack Square in downtown Asheville. Tom's mother ran one of the several boarding houses in town. She called it the Old Kentucky Home and Tom spent much of his boyhood growing up in that house.

Tom attended many schools in Asheville during his childhood. The first was the public Orange Street School. Later he attended a private school known as the North State Fitting School. He credited one of his teachers, Margaret Roberts, with recognizing his writing talents and encouraging him to go to college. When Tom was almost sixteen he left Asheville for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). After four years at UNC, Tom earned a degree in English. He continued his education at Harvard University and received a Masters Degree in Literature and Theatrical Arts in 1922. During his college years, Tom wanted to write plays and he spent many years trying to sell his works, but without much success. To support himself financially, Tom taught English classes at New York University.

In 1926, Tom began writing a novel that eventually became titled *Look Homeward, Angel*. The characters in the novel were based on his own family and the people who lived in Asheville. Tom placed himself in the book as the character Eugene Gant. *Look Homeward, Angel* was the story of Eugene's (Tom's) growing up in small town America at the turn of the century. When *Look Homeward, Angel* was published in

1929, many people in Asheville were very angry with the book—what Tom had written about them and their town was often not positive. They did not want Tom to come back to Asheville. Tom did not return to his hometown for over seven years. For most of his adult life he resided in New York City.

Tom frequently traveled throughout the United States and Europe during his adult years. He wanted to see the world. Eventually, he met a lady named Aline Bernstein on one of his trips to Europe. She became an enormous influence in his career. He later described her as the great love of his life, yet they never married. She encouraged him to write a novel about his experiences. When *Look Homeward, Angel* was published, Tom dedicated the book to her.

Tom's later books also dealt with his own life and with this career as an author. *Of Time and the River* continued the story of Eugene's adventures. It followed Eugene to Harvard and through his years of teaching and traveling. Tom's final two novels portray changes in the characters and setting, but they too drew upon his own experiences. They were titled *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. Both of these books were published after Tom's death.

A year before he died, Tom came back to Asheville for a visit. He hoped to renew acquaintances with his friends and family and to write. By this time, *Look Homeward, Angel* was famous and most of the townspeople were proud to be in his book. He spent the summer of 1937 in Asheville and then returned to New York. He died a year later of tuberculosis of the brain. He was almost thirty-eight years old. After his death, Wolfe was laid to rest in Riverside Cemetery in Asheville.



8. Thomas Wolfe's book about Asheville was called \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. *Of Time and the River*      C. *Old Kentucky Home*  
B. *Look Homeward, Angel*      D. *You Can't Go Home Again*
9. Thomas Wolfe dedicated his first novel to \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Julia Wolfe      C. Eliza Gant  
B. Elizabeth Nowell      D. Aline Bernstein
10. At the time of his death in 1938 Thomas Wolfe was almost \_\_\_\_\_ years old.
- A. 38      C. 65  
B. 29      D. 36

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ANSWER KEY

1. D
2. A
3. C
4. B
5. C
6. A
7. C
8. B
9. D
- 10.A