

## Part 1: Thomas Wolfe and Bullying

Part One includes two excerpts from Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*. In the first example he is the victim of bullying. In the next example he contributes to bullying others.

### Prep Time:

10 minutes to print attachments - excerpts from *Look Homeward, Angel*

### Materials:

Narrative about Thomas Wolfe (below)

Links to online resources about Thomas Wolfe

Excerpts about bullying from *Look Homeward, Angel* Attachment

Discussion Question Attachment

### Procedure:

1. Ask students to recall information about Thomas Wolfe and the Thomas Wolfe Memorial from their visit. For a reminder, use the narrative below.
2. Distribute the excerpt from Chapter 8 of *Look Homeward, Angel*  
Ask students to read the excerpt from Chapter 8 of *Look Homeward, Angel*, focusing their attention on how other students treat Tom.
3. Distribute the excerpt from Chapter 9 of *Look Homeward, Angel*  
Ask students to read the excerpt from Chapter 9 of *Look Homeward, Angel*, focusing their attention on how Tom treats other students.

### Narrative:

#### **Thomas Wolfe, his family and his book *Look Homeward, Angel*.**

"I don't know yet what I am capable of doing," wrote Thomas Wolfe at the age of twenty-three, "but, by God, I have genius—I know it too well to blush behind it." While in Europe in the summer of 1926 he began writing the first version of a novel, *O Lost*, which eventually evolved into *Look Homeward, Angel*. In 1929, with the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe gave the world proof of his genius. Wolfe said that *Look Homeward, Angel* is "a book made out of my life." It tells the coming-of-age story of Eugene Gant, whose restlessness and yearning to experience life to the fullest take him from his rural home in North Carolina to Harvard University.

Thomas Wolfe was born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1900 and was the youngest of eight children of William Oliver Wolfe (1851–1922) and Julia Elizabeth Westall (1860–1945). The Wolfes' lived at 92 Woodfin Street, where Tom was born. His father, a successful stone carver, ran a gravestone business. His mother took in boarders and was active in acquiring real estate. In 1906, Julia Wolfe bought a boarding house named "Old Kentucky Home" at nearby 48 Spruce Street in Asheville, taking up residence there with her youngest son while the rest of the family remained at the Woodfin Street residence.

Wolfe began attending the Orange Street School in 1906, though the city regulations stated he was too young. His friends, who were a bit older than Tom, began school, and

one day he decided to tag along. The teacher allowed him to stay and begin classes. In 1911, the principal of the Orange Street School, John Roberts, held a writing competition as a recruiting tool for a school he planned to open. His wife looked at the submitted papers and came across Tom's essay. She declared he was a genius and the North State Fitting School must have him. In 1912, Tom attended the new school and studied Latin, Greek, English, history, mathematics, German, and literature. Wolfe lived in the boarding house on Spruce Street until he went to college in 1916 at the age of 16. The boarding house is now the Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site.

In the *Look Homeward, Angel*, he named his hometown Altamont and called his mother's boarding house "Dixieland." His family was fictionalized under the name Gant, with Wolfe calling himself Eugene, his father Oliver, and his mother Eliza. Tom also writes about the bullying that he experienced in school due to his long hair, which Julia refused to let him cut. The Fauntleroy curls caused him so much anguish that he sat next to a friend with head lice in hopes that Julia would cut his hair. Further, Tom writes that he himself became a bully when he became a little older.

**Suggested Activities:**

- Have students answer the questions in the Discussion Questions Attachment
  - Tom's time in school later affected his writing. Have the students write a short story about their daily school routine.
  - Read another story or book on school life and/or bullying, such as *Loser* by Jerry Spinelli, and compare it to Thomas Wolfe's writing on bullying.
-