

## WHO WAS THOMAS WOLFE?

Thomas Wolfe was a writer who lived in Asheville, North Carolina, in the early 1900's. He was born the last of eight children to William Oliver (W.O.) and Julia Wolfe on October 3, 1900. His father was a stonecutter who carved tombstones for a living. He owned a monument shop, which 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 would spend much of his boyhood growing up in this house.

Tom attended many schools in Asheville when he was growing up. The first was a public school known as the Orange Street School. Later he would attend 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 (UNC). After four years at UNC Tom earned a degree in English. He would continue his education at Harvard University and receive a Masters Degree in Literature and Theatrical Arts in 1922. At the point Tom decided that he wanted to write plays. He spent many years trying to sell his plays without much success. To begin supporting himself financially Tom taught classes at New York University.

In 1926, Tom began writing a book he would call *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 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 they read about themselves and their

town was often not very kind. They did not want Tom to come back to Asheville. Tom would not return to his hometown for over seven years. Most of his adult life would be spent in New York City.

Tom traveled a lot throughout the United States and Europe during this time. He wanted to see the world. He would eventually meet a lady named Aline Bernstein on one of his trips to Europe. She would come to have an enormous influence on his life. He later described her as the great love of his life, yet they never married. She would encourage him to write his novel. When *Look Homeward, Angel* was published Tom would dedicate the book to her.

Tom's later books also dealt with his own life and with this career. *Of Time and the River* continues the story of Eugene's adventures. It follows Eugene to Harvard and his teaching career and travels. The last two books change the characters and setting but once again draw on Tom's own experiences. They were called *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. Tom 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. He is buried at 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.
- A. 38                                      C. 65  
B. 29                                      D. 37

WHO WAS THOMAS WOLFE?  
ANSWER KEY

1. D

2. A

3. C

4. B

5. C

6. A

7. C

8. B

9. D

10.A