

Ernest J. Gaines

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Ernest J. Gaines



Gaines at Fall for the Book

Born
Ernest James Gaines
January 15, 1933 (age 84)
Oscar, Louisiana, USA

Occupation
Writer

Nationality
American

Notable works
A Lesson Before Dying
The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman
A Gathering of Old Men

Notable awards
National Humanities Medal
Ordre des Arts et des Lettres

Spouse
Dianne Saulney^[a]

Ernest James Gaines (born January 15, 1933) is an African-American author whose works have been taught in college classrooms and translated into many languages, including French, Spanish, German, Russian and Chinese. Four of his works have been made into television movies.^[a] His 1993 novel, *A Lesson Before Dying*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction. Gaines has been a MacArthur Foundation fellow, awarded the National Humanities Medal, and inducted into the French *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* (Order of Arts and Letters) as a Chevalier.

Biography

Gaines was among the fifth generation of his sharecropper family to be born on a plantation in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. This became the setting and premise for many of his later works. He was the eldest of 12 children, raised by his aunt, who was crippled and had to crawl to get around the house. Although born generations after the end of slavery, Gaines grew up impoverished, living in old slave quarters on a plantation.

Gaines' first years of school took place in the plantation church. When the children were not picking cotton in the fields, a visiting teacher came for five to six months of the year to provide basic education. Gaines then spent three years at St. Augustine School, a Catholic school for African Americans in New Roads, Louisiana. Schooling for African-American children did not continue beyond the eighth grade during this time in Pointe Coupee Parish.

When he was 15 years old, Gaines moved to Vallejo, California, to join his mother and stepfather, who had left Louisiana during World War II. His first novel was written at age 17, while babysitting his youngest brother, Michael. According to one account, he wrapped it in brown paper, tied it with string, and sent it to a New York publisher, who rejected it. Gaines burned the manuscript, but later rewrote it to become his first published novel, *Catherine Carmier*.

In 1956, Gaines published his first short story, *The Turtles*, in a college magazine at San Francisco State University (SFSU). The next year he earned a degree in literature from SFSU. After spending two years in the Army, he won a writing fellowship to Stanford University.

From 1981 until retiring in 2004, Gaines was a Writer-in-Residence at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. In 1996, Gaines spent a full semester as a visiting professor at the University of Rennes in France, where he taught the first creative writing class ever offered in the French university system.^[a] As of November 2013, Gaines lives on Louisiana Highway 1 in Oscar, Louisiana, where he and his wife built a home on part of the old plantation where he grew up.^{[b][c]} He had the church he grew up with moved to his property.^{[b][c]}

Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence

A book award established by donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation in 2007 to honor Gaines' legacy and encourage rising African-American fiction writers. The winner is selected by a panel of five judges who are well known in the literary world. The winner receives a US\$10,000 award and a commemorative sculpture created by Louisiana artist Robert Moreland.^[a]

Name:

Date:

Ernest James Gaines Biography

- Which detail is necessary to support the central idea of the text?
 - Gaines served in the army.
 - Gaines wrote his first story at 17.
 - Gaines is now 84 years old.
 - Gaines build a house with his wife.
- According to the second paragraph, what effect did growing up as a sharecropper have on Gaines?
 - It made him realize that he was better at writing than farming.
 - It made him appreciate the ability to travel when he joined the Army.
 - It made him experience the impact of racism and poverty on a community.
 - It made him pursue becoming a teacher at a plantation school for 5 months.
- Which quotation supports the central idea of the text?
 - "Ernest James Gaines is an African-American author whose works have been taught in college classrooms and translated into many languages, including French, Spanish, German, Russian and Chinese."
 - "Schooling for African-American children did not continue beyond the eighth grade during this time in Pointe Coupee Parish."
 - "In 1956, Gaines published his first short story, 'The Turtles,' in a college magazine at San Francisco State University (SFSU)."
 - "He had the church he grew up with moved to his property."
- What is the impact of including the information about the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence?
 - It reveals that Gaines has impacted other writers.
 - It shows how many people dislike his writing style.
 - It points to the fact that other writers are better.
 - It explains that many writers are motivated by money.
- What does the author mean by "Gaines grew up impoverished" in the second paragraph?
 - He couldn't go to school to learn about writing.
 - He was not raised by his biological parents.
 - He had little clothing, food, or luxury items.
 - He experienced being handicapped himself.
- Cite a textual evidence supporting the fact that Gaines was frustrated with his first attempt at a novel:
 - Cite a textual evidence supporting the fact that Gaines was frustrated with his first attempt at a
- Cite textual evidence that explains Gain's childhood: