

## Ann Petry

HAVING BEEN BORN BLACK AND FEMALE, I regard myself as a survivor and a gambler, writing in a tradition that dates back to 1859 when *Our Nig*, the first novel written by a black woman in this country, was published in Boston, Massachusetts.

I write about the relationship between black people and white people in the United States: novels, short stories, poetry, books for children and young people.

When I write for children I write about survivors: Tituba of Salem Village, indicted for witchcraft in the seventeenth century; Harriet Tubman who helped runaway slaves escape from the South before the Civil War.

When I write for adults I write about the walking wounded: Lutie Johnson in *The Street*; Abigail Crunch and Link Williams in *The Narrows*; Charles Woodruff in the short story "The Witness."

Like all writers, black or white, I work against odds, real or imaginary, against hostility, against indifference. I keep seeking uninterrupted time in which to write and so I wage a war against interruptions. I am usually defeated by my archenemy the telephone or by people who do not regard writing as work and drop in to visit.

I regard myself as a survivor because I have written eight books and had them published.

I regard myself as a gambler because each one of these books was written against odds that it would ever be finished, enormous odds that only a gambler would have accepted. (253)

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## Activities

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### Writing/ Reading/ Learning Resources and Information Technology

- Research Ann Petry and her Old Saybrook connections, the family business etc., and write a report about her.

### Creative Thinking/Writing

- Ann Petry called herself a gambler – she took risks when she wrote her books about the relationship between black and white people in the United States. She knew that there would be people who did not like what she had to say. Examine the Hall of Fame trading cards and timeline and identify five other women who took risks to accomplish their goals.

### Reading/Creative Thinking

- Read either *Tituba of Salem Village* or *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*, both written by Ann Petry.
  - a. Create your own illustrations for the book; OR
  - b. Write a description for the back cover of the book that would convince other kids that it is a great book and they should read it.

### Learning Resources/Information Technology

- Ann Petry wrote biographies of historic African American women. Two of her best known biographies, of Tituba, accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692, and of the abolitionist Harriet Tubman, took place in the early years of American history. Using your library and the internet, identify three other women from American history about whom you think someone should write a biography. Write a paragraph explaining why you chose each of the three women.