



Born 1916, in Charleston, South Carolina, Alice Childress was nine when her parents separated, forcing her to live with her mother and grandmother in Harlem. While in high school, Alice's mother and grandmother passed away. She dropped and worked a number of jobs. She married actor Alvin Childress in 1934 and began to study drama in 1939. At the American Negro Theatre in Harlem, she worked as costume designer before her debut role in "Anna Lucasta" in 1944. Her performance earned a Tony Award nomination, and the play became, at the time, Broadway's longest running plays performed by an all-African-American cast. Childress later acted in "Natural Man", "Rain", and "The Emperor's Clothes". In 1949, she wrote "Florence", a one-act remembered for its empowerment of African-American women. "Florence" premiered at the American Negro Theatre and was published in a magazine specializing in African-American literature.

In 1950, Childress adapted Langston Hughes' "Simple Speaks His Mind" as "Just a Little Simple" and wrote eight more plays, including "Gold Through the Trees" (1952), "Trouble in Mind" (1955), "Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White" (1966), "String" (1969), "Wine in the Wilderness" (1969), "Mojo: A Black Love Story" (1970), "Sea Island Song" (1977), and "Moms: A Praise Play for a Black Comedienne" (1987), about the life of pioneering comedienne Jackie "Moms" Mabley. Set in Charelston, "Wedding Band" tells of a romance between an African-American woman and her Caucasian lover. Published in 1962 and first performed in 1966, "Wedding Band" was not performed in New York until 1972. When adapted for the television screen, most television stations refused to air it. Childress wrote five more books, including *Like One of the Family* (1956), *A Short Walk* (1979), *Rainbow Jordan* (1981), *Those Other People* (1989), and *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich* (1973), which won the Jane Addams Award for a young adult novel and was adapted as a film. Childress also won the ALA Best Young Adult Book of 1975, the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, and the Paul Robeson Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Performing Arts. She was at work on a memoir about her great-grandmother, who was born a slave, when she died of cancer on August 14, 1994, in Queens, New York.

- Anna Patton

1990 Inductees to the South Carolina Academy of Authors



Alice Childress