



2013 Inductee
to the
South Carolina
Academy of Authors

Nikky Finney was born on August 26, 1957 in Conway, SC. Her parents were both involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Her father, Ernest A. Finney, Jr., was the first African-American Supreme Court Justice for South Carolina. As a writer and photographer, Finney was heavily influenced by the African-American struggle that took place in South Carolina during the sixties and seventies. In 1979, she received her bachelor's degree from Talladega College. She left graduate school at Clark Atlanta University in 1981 to focus more intently on her art.

From 1984 to 1986, Finney worked hard as a writer, photographer, and editor of Atlanta's National Black Woman's Health Project. It was during this time she also published her first book of poetry, *On Wings Made of Gauze* (1985). In 1989, she was asked to be a visiting writer at the University of Kentucky and, in 1991, was hired as an assistant professor. In 2012, the university appointed her as the Guy Davenport Endowed Professor of English.

Exactly one decade after the publication of Finney's aforementioned first collection, she published *Rice* (1995), which won her the PEN America Open Book Award. According to Finney's website, the collection "explores the complexity of rice as central to the culture, economy, and mystique of the coastal South Carolina region." Her third book, *The World is Round* (2003), contains poems that successfully attempt to capture the essence of the human experience; the book won the Benjamin Franklin Award for Poetry in 2004.

Finney received very positive reviews and national recognition for these collections, and her fourth collection only reinforced her good reputation. In 2011, she published *Head Off & Split*. This landmark collection won the 2011 National Book Award for Poetry; and her intense, emotionally powerful acceptance speech for the award went viral and increased her fame exponentially. *Head Off & Split* was influenced greatly by her lineage as an advocate for racial equality; the book carries on "a sensitive and intense dialogue with emblematic figures and events in African-American life," including – but not restricted to – Rosa Parks and Condoleezza Rice.

In 2013, Nikky Finney left Kentucky and moved back to South Carolina to become a member of the English faculty at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

- Blake Bolen



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Nikky Finney