

## Robert Hayden

### Poet Description:

Robert Hayden was born Asa Bundy Sheffey to a couple in financial and personal difficulty. When they separated, Hayden was taken in by a foster family and received a new name. The new family, unfortunately, was equally conflicted, and Hayden's childhood was frequently traumatic. Reading was a form of escape, but it also prepared him for a career. He enrolled at Detroit City College but left in 1936 to research black history and culture, including Michigan's Underground Railroad, for the Federal Writers' Project. Then, in the early 1940s, he studied with W.H. Auden at the University of Michigan. The other major development in his life occurred when he committed himself to the Baha'i faith in the 1940s, eventually editing its journal, *World Order*, in the late 1960s and in the 1970s.

All this experience finds its way into his poetry, for he wrote about his Detroit neighborhood and about black history, as in "Middle Passage" and "Runagate, Runagate." Technically meticulous, Hayden adapted his style and voice to the subject matter, using montage and mixing narrative and lyric passages in "Middle Passage," and adopting imagist and symbolist techniques, varying line length considerably. Some of his poems are meditative, others strongly narrative. He also aimed for a universal audience, believing that African American history had vital lessons for all readers. And he refused to write exclusively about black subject matter, despite crafting a distinctive form of rhetorically intricate protest and deploying it for decades. Hayden taught for many years at Fisk University, returning at the end of his career to the University of Michigan.

### Race/Ethnicity:

African [1]

### Picture:



**Gender:**

Male [2]

**Sexuality:**

Straight [3]

**First Name:**

Robert

**Last Name:**

Hayden

**Birth & Death Dates:**

Monday, August 4, 1913 to Monday, February 25, 1980

**School of Poetry:**

Other [4]

**Birth Place:**

Detroit , Michigan

United States

See map: Google Maps [5]

Michigan US

**Death Place:**

Ann Arbor , Michigan

United States

See map: Google Maps [6]

Michigan US

**Group visibility:**

Private - accessible only to group members

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[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/race-ethnicity/african>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/gender/male>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/sexuality/straight>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/school-poetry/other>

[5] <http://maps.google.com?q=46.880607+-87.363281+%28%2C+Detroit%2C+MI%2C+%2C+us%29>

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