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April 27, 2023

Highlights Foundation Names Cottage in Honor of New York Times Bestselling Author Renée Watson; Watson Tells Writers and Illustrators to ‘Keep Going’

Honesdale, PA – Highlights Foundation has established the Renée Watson Cottage on its campus. It is open now, and was personally designed by Watson to be a space where children’s writers and illustrators will feel inspired to reflect and create.

On a visit this spring, Watson worked with the staff of the Highlights Foundation to bring in art, photos, writing prompts, memorabilia, and books to accomplish her goals, including a painting of Langston Hughes by renowned artist and illustrator Frank Morrison.

"It's important for writers to have uninterrupted time to think, process, and generate work—and I hope this space feels calming and nurturing. The inclusion of artwork that honors Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Lucille Clifton, Maya Angelou, and Audre Lorde are meant to remind guests of the perseverance, boldness, and grace it takes to make art. These creatives made work during perilous times. They understood the power of storytelling and not only documented their world as it was, but they imagined what the world could be. The books, the writing prompts, the vinyl records are all here as reminders, as encouragement, and as a call to action to keep going, keep creating, and keep on and on," says Watson of the meaning of the space.



Photo credits: Danielle Coons Photography

The dedication of the Cottage is a continuation of Watson’s work and ongoing partnership with the Highlights Foundation.

She first established a scholarship for Black women writers to attend a Highlights Foundation workshop via the I, Too Arts Collective, an organization she founded in 2016 to nurture voices from underrepresented communities in the creative arts.

In 2022, she established The Renée Watson Scholarship, which annually supports a week-long independent writing retreat for a Black woman writer.

The scholarships, like the Cottage, have made space for writers.

“I wanted to provide an opportunity for Black women writers to have space and time to create. I hope the scholarship helps to relieve some of the financial pressure many writers face when trying to carve out quality time to write and produce work,” said Watson.

Author Monique Fields was the inaugural recipient of The Renée Watson Scholarship. She is the author of *Honeysmoke: A Story of Finding Your Color*, a picture book about a biracial girl who discovers her skin color. She took a retreat last year, and had a transformative experience.

“Without the scholarship, there is no way that I would have been able to take time off work and dedicate so much time to my writing. I wasn't at all sure what to expect. Would I be able to write? Would I feel inspired? Would I meet other writers? I did all three. The change of scenery reset my creativity, and I wrote more words for longer periods of time than I've ever written before. I can't thank Renée Watson and the Highlights Foundation enough for providing a scholarship,” said Fields.

“Bloomsbury is proud to be Renée Watson’s publishing home for more than a decade, and as her editor I’m always honored to witness, alongside so many wonderful books in her lauded career, Renée’s steadfast dedication to her readers, especially Black girls, creating stories where they feel seen and reflected and celebrated. As an author, speaker, activist, teacher, and colleague, Renée makes a safe space for so many with her graceful craft, generous spirit, constructive energy, and dedicated work. What a fitting complement to that work to offer a safe creative space to other writers at the Highlights Foundation,” said Sarah Shumway, Renée’s editor and Editorial Director of Bloomsbury Children’s Books.

The Highlights Foundation is honored to count Watson among its most fervent supporters.

“Renée’s prolific career and generous spirit have impacted her young readers, and her fellow creatives. It's such a beautiful example of our mission in action—a community dedicated to inspiring kids through story,” said George Brown, Executive Director of the Highlights Foundation.



Photo Credits: Danielle Coons Photography

“My earliest memory of Highlights is getting the magazine when I was a young child. I devoured those short stories and loved the puzzles and activities. It feels like a full circle moment to connect with the Highlights Foundation as an author who now writes for young readers. My involvement comes from our shared commitment to fostering diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces. Over the years, I have witnessed firsthand their earnest and intentional approach to the work of diversity and inclusion, and am honored to do this work alongside an organization that strives to live out its mission in practical, thoughtful, and inspiring ways,” said Watson.

About Renée Watson

Renée Watson is a #1 New York Times Bestselling author of books for young readers. Her books have sold over one million copies. Her young adult novel, *Piecing Me Together*, received a Coretta Scott King Award and Newbery Honor. Her children's picture books and novels for teens have received several awards and international recognition. Many of her books are inspired by her experiences growing up as a Black girl in the Pacific Northwest. Her poetry and fiction center around the experiences of Black girls and explore themes of home, identity, body image, and the intersections of race, class, and gender. She founded I, Too Arts Collective, a nonprofit that was housed in the Harlem brownstone where Langston Hughes lived the last twenty years of his life. The organization hosted poetry workshops for youth and literary events for the community from 2016-2019. Renée grew up in Portland, Oregon, and splits her time between Portland and New York City.

About the Highlights Foundation

The Highlights Foundation positively impacts children by amplifying the voices of storytellers who inform, educate, and inspire children to become their best selves. The organization offers workshops and retreats to bring education, support, and encouragement to children’s authors and illustrators of all experience levels. [Learn more about visiting the campus and the Renée Watson Cottage here.](#)

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