

About the Novel's Author

Theodore Taylor was born in 1921 in Statesville, North Carolina, where he grew up very poor, largely because his father was often away from home attending rallies and protests championing the "working man" rather than actually working himself.

From a young child, Taylor worked to help support himself and the family. From selling greens at the market to selling candy and newspapers, he helped keep his family out of the welfare system. At age 13, Taylor landed a job as a sports reporter for the Portsmouth (VA) Star, which started him on the path of a writing career.

Contributing to his love of words was Taylor's mother, who gave him an appreciation of the arts, and his four older sisters, one of whom supplied him with varied and plentiful reading material.

After attending Military Academy to attempt to finish high school, Taylor held a series of jobs, including copy boy, sports editor, and script writer for NBC, until eventually he joined the U.S. Merchant Marine. During the course of WWII, Taylor served on six different ships throughout the Caribbean, protecting the islands and gaining the experience that would eventually become part of his novels.

After the war, Taylor married Gwen Goodwin and continued working various jobs, writing biographies, making movies and pecking away at novels all the while. After 20 years of a marriage in which Taylor was largely absent due to his work, he and Gwen divorced. Taylor remarried and continued to write the stories that made him famous.

Taylor eventually published more than 50 books. He died in October of 2006, leaving behind his wife, Flora, three children, several grandchildren and plenty of admiring fans.

Background Information

Theodore Taylor often used his personal experiences combined with interesting stories he heard or read about as subjects for his novels because he felt real stories made for a more realistic and believable novel. Two major events that shaped *The Cay* are World War II and race relations in the 1960s.

The Cay is set during WWII on the island of Curaçao. Curaçao and other islands in the Caribbean were important to the war efforts primarily because of the oil refineries and their ideal location for refueling the large war and supply ships that cruised the ocean.

Also central to the novel is the interaction between black- and white-skinned people. For Theodore Taylor, race relations made an impression on him very early in life. At the age of four, he was witness to a Ku Klux Klan procession in front of his home in North Carolina. He said he never forgot the sight of prejudice and hatred.

Taylor wrote *The Cay* in the late 1960s during a time of national unrest regarding race relations. In larger cities, riots had pushed the issue of equal rights to the forefront of national awareness. Martin Luther King, Jr., was leading marches and proclaiming his message of equality up until his death in 1968.

All of this influenced Taylor as he wrote a story of a white boy who is shipwrecked on an island with a black man. When his story first came out, certain people thought Taylor was being racist, but after several years, many realized that Taylor wanted only to portray the relationship between Phillip and Timothy realistically to show that skin color should never matter.