Vocabulary

*Before reading, translate these words.*

Entomology

Praise

Fiction / Non-fiction

Condemn

Materialism

Handmaid

Repressive

Dealing with

Supposedly

Feminism

Unpublished

Device

Remotely

Reputation

Sense of humor

Procrastinator

Influential

Drought

Desertification

Radiation

Trilogy

biography

Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa, Ontario on November 18th, 1939. Her father researched forest entomology, so she spent a lot of her childhood in the nature of northern Quebec. Did didn’t attend school full-time until she was 12-years-old but she loved reading. She read the Dell pocketbook mysteries, Grimms’ Fairy Tales, Canadian animal stories, and comic books. Atwood began writing plays and poems at the age of 6. At 16 she decided to pursue a career in writing.

From 1957 to 1961, Atwood attended the University of Toronto. During that time, she published poems and articles in the college’s literary journal. Her major was English, but she also obtained a minor in philosophy and French. She received her master’s degree (MA) from Radcliffe College of Harvard University.

In her career as a writer, Atwood has received a lot of praise. She has published 18 books of poetry, 18 novels, 11 books of non-fiction, 9 collections of short fiction, 8 children’s books, and 2 graphic novels. She has won numerous awards, including two Booker Prizes, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, two Governor General’s Awards, the Franz Kafka Prize, Princess of Asturias Awards, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Book Critics and PEN Center USA.

Atwood has written about many different themes. In her early poetry collections (*Double Persephone, The Circle Game, The Animals in That Country*), she considers human behavior and our relationship to the natural world. She is an environmentalist, and she condemns materialism.

Her novels all center around women and their relationship to the world. *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) is perhaps her most famous novel. It has been turned into a film and an opera. It is about a woman living in sexual slavery in a repressive Cristian world. A sequel novel was published in 2019 called, *The Testaments*. It was the #1 bestselling Canadian book of 2019. It won the 2019 Booker Prize, making Atwood the oldest winner of the award.

*The Blind Assassin* (2000) tells the story of an elderly woman dealing with her sister’s suicide and her participation in a novel supposedly written by her sister but published after her death. Atwood has also written about Canadian identity, feminism, science fiction, animal rights, and politics.

In 2014, Atwood participated in a project called the Future Library. 100 writers joined the program and submitted unpublished books that will not be read for 100 years. The books are hidden in a vault under some trees. In 2114, the trees will be cut down and turned into paper. The paper will be used to publish the books (including the one from Atwood).

Atwood is also an inventor. She created a device called a LongPen. It is a robotic arm that can be used remotely. The robotic hand writes in ink what the person is writing far away. It was used by Conrad Black. He was under arrest, but did a book signing event remotely using her LongPen.

Atwood has a reputation for being silly. Even though she is a serious writer, she has a good sense of humor. She also considers herself a bad speller and a procrastinator. She is an influential Canadian writer. She has co-founded the Writer’s Trust of Canada and PEN Canada.

She is also an environmentalist. She shares a lot of environmental information on her twitter. She has also included environmental themes in her writing. She explores potential futures through her writing including droughts, desertification, radiation, dead zones in the ocean, and global floods. Atwood has also written essays about climate change. She is currently writing a trilogy of novels about climate change called the MADDADDAM trilogy.

Questions

1. Where was Margret Atwood born?
2. What did her father study?
3. When did she start writing poems and plays?
4. What is The Handmaid’s Tale about?
5. What is the sequel to The Handmaid’s Tale called?
6. What is the Future Library project? Why can’t we read her book until 2114? (<https://www.futurelibrary.no/>)
7. What do you think about the Future Library project?
8. What did Atwood invent?
9. What are some uses for the LongPen?
10. Does she have a good sense of humor?
11. What is her latest trilogy about?
12. Atwood writes about issues that she thinks are important. If you wrote a novel, what themes would you include?
13. <https://www.cbc.ca/books/81-surprising-facts-about-margaret-atwood-1.4091106>