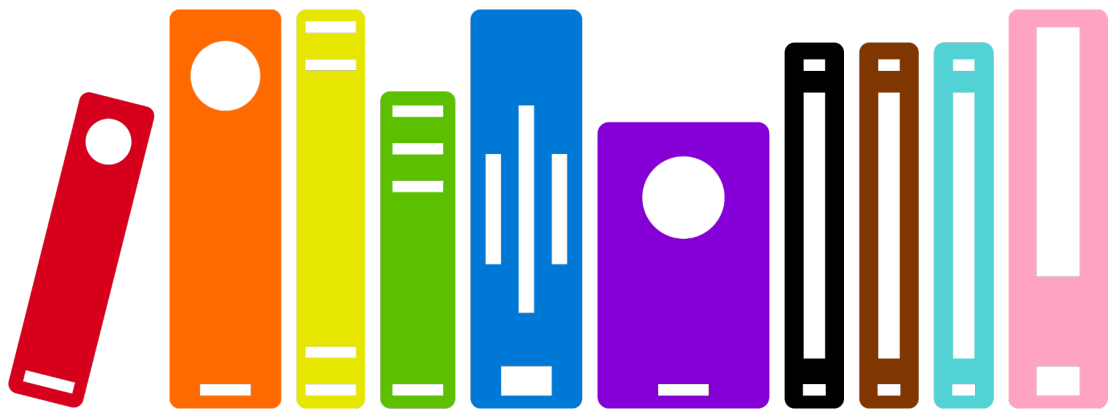


The 2025 Books That Saved Me Handbook



BOOKS THAT *SAVED* ME

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The Freedom
to Write

Partners



THE EDUCATIONAL
FOUNDATION
OF AMERICA



MAGIC CITY
Acceptance Center
A BAO Affiliated Program

About PEN America

PEN America stands at the intersection of literature and human rights to protect free expression in the United States and worldwide. We champion the freedom to write, recognizing the power of the word to transform the world.

Founded in 1922, PEN America is the largest of the more than 100 centers worldwide that make up the PEN International network. PEN America works to ensure that people everywhere have the freedom to create literature, to convey information and ideas, to express their views, and to access the views, ideas, and literatures of others. Our strength is our Membership—a nationwide community of more than 7,200 novelists, journalists, nonfiction writers, editors, poets, essayists, playwrights, publishers, translators, agents, and other writing professionals, as well as devoted readers and supporters who join with them to carry out PEN America's mission.

PEN America's more than 7,200 Members live in every state. Our PEN Across America initiative, launched in 2018, responds to mounting threats to free expression with opportunities for Members and their allies to mobilize locally through public programming, campaigns, literary events, workshops, civic forums, and other projects that expand engagement with PEN America's mission.

PEN America, a registered 501(c)(3) organization, is headquartered in New York City, with offices in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

PEN America's Mission

Our mission is to unite writers and their allies to celebrate creative expression and defend the liberties that make it possible.

About Books That Saved Me

Books That Saved Me is a summer-long workshop that will bring participants across generations together using poetry, a love for books, and a shared regional history as a bridge to better understand themselves, each other, and the power of the written word.

PEN Across America's Birmingham chapter will collaborate with local, Birmingham-based organizations to offer eight writing sessions in which an Alabama-based poetry instructor will lead 12 participants – six youth and six community elders – in the creation of original poems inspired by books that have had resonance in their lives and that have been banned at least once somewhere in the United States.

Through these mentor-led workshops, Books That Saved Me aims to build an intimate, cross-generational cohort of talented poets who occupy, write in, for, and about Queer spaces, advocating for the power of literature and against efforts to suppress it through censorship. The program will conclude with a public reading of selections of the participants' original work and the publication of an online zine on PEN America's website.

The goals of the program are to:

- Provide first-time opportunities and guidance towards creative expression for participants with little to no previous formal training in writing poetry;
- Bring participants into dialogue across generations, cultivating greater understanding and solidarity with their community;
- Affirm the power of, and necessity for, access to books that resonate with their readers, without the intrusion from state or self-designated censors;
- Generate new poems and new poets able to speak to the benefit and value of free, creative expression, and the writers and readers who benefit from it.

Calendar

July			
Workshop #1	Wednesday, July 9th, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
Workshop #2	Wednesday, July 16th, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
Workshop #3	Wednesday, July 24th, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
Workshop #4	Wednesday, July 30th, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
August			
Workshop #5	Saturday, August 9th, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
Workshop #6	Saturday, August 16th, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
Workshop #7	Saturday, August 23rd, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
Workshop #8	Saturday, August 30th, 2025	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center
Public Performance	DATE TBD	Time TBD	Magic City Acceptance Center

Teaching Artist Erika Wade

Erika E. Wade, a 34-year-old writer, producer, and actor from Birmingham, Alabama, has been a dynamic force in the entertainment industry, championing diversity. She made her debut as a teenager with the publication of her poetry book, *“eyestodewhurld.”* Her performances have been showcased Off Broadway, in Los Angeles festivals, and in the Tampax #LiveRadiant campaign. Erika earned an MFA from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2016 and was a semi-finalist at the Kennedy Center MFA Playwrights Workshop.

Her production company, Glenda’s Baby Productions, is celebrated for its diversity programming. Back in Birmingham, Erika has launched various stage and screen projects and taught workshops in the Birmingham City School District. She is a Southeast EMMY award-winning voice actress and was selected for the inaugural Rideback Rise “The Circle” Cohort, aimed at bridging Hollywood’s equity gap. Erika’s goal is to bring her magical vision of Alabama to stage and screen.





The Freedom
to Write

Community and Workshop Guidelines

Attendance policy: Attendance and punctuality are important and mandatory components of our program. After two unexcused absences, participants are no longer eligible to receive their stipend. Please note: tardiness of more than 30 minutes is considered an absence.

Workshop Etiquette: Books That Saved Me is committed to a safe and equitable space, so no aspect of identity will suffer direct or indirect hostility. Please be kind and respect each other. That said, the program's director reserves the right to remove you from the program should your behavior go against the code of conduct.

Workshop Participation: Preparation for a good workshop meeting requires intention and attention to content and process, what we're studying, and how we're studying it. Your presence in this class announces that you are here to learn, to read, to write, to review, to listen, to interpret, to empathize, to understand, to consider, to reflect upon, to discuss, and to contribute.

Deadlines: Out of respect for your classmates, instructors, and PEN staff, deadlines must be met. If an assignment or requested document is submitted after the deadline, please note that it might not be accepted.

The Books that Saved Me Agreement

As a participant in PEN America's 2025 Books that Saved Me Program, students commit to all requisite components of the Program:

- Attendance at 8 teaching artist-led, in-person workshops
- The participation and completion of an online zine featuring their collected poems
- Participation in a public performance, reading selections of their own writing from the program
- Active participation in additional opportunities, as presented throughout the program, to the best of your ability.
- Meeting all deadlines for writing, paperwork, and evaluation.
- Consistent and clear communication with the program director, Andrew White (awhite@pen.org), about the state of the project and if availability changes at any point in the program timeframe.

As part of this Program, participants will receive:

- An honorarium of \$70/session (eight sessions and two culminating performances) for a total of \$700.
- Publication in a digital zine
- Poets will retain all ownership of work and any profits, in full, that may benefit from the publication of the created work.

Upon reviewing the terms of the agreement and understanding, if participants fail to honor any component of the agreement, their participation in the program may be forfeited.

Creative Integrity

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires the highest level of personal and creative integrity from both administration and fellows. As members of a creative community, each one of us is responsible for participating in discourse in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and creative integrity.

Like scholarship, the creative process, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building upon one another. Collaborative creativity requires the study of other writerly work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that informs our own.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our creative community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Participants failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave the program.

Code of Conduct

PEN America is dedicated to providing a safe and harassment-free environment for all of its employees, participants, instructors, and fellows. To that end, we have a zero-tolerance policy regarding harassment and discrimination. This includes any and all harassment and discrimination made on the basis of race, age, sex, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, disability, medical condition, religion, veteran status, marital/domestic partnership status, citizenship, or any other protected classification under applicable law.

Participants in PEN America programs may not harass or discriminate in the context of their role within the program. Harassment may include any differential treatment based on an individual's protected classification (including, but not limited to, those listed above), as well as any unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility, aversion, or preferential treatment toward an individual because of their protected classification or lack thereof. This includes sexual harassment as well as harassment based on any other protected classification.

Finally, PEN America notes that harassment does not include respectful disagreement or reasonable and respectful critique made in good faith. PEN America continues to welcome and appreciate the presentation of controversial ideas, free speech, and creative artistic expression.

If you have been subject to or a witness to any harassing or discriminatory behavior during or in connection with your fellowship with PEN America, please do not hesitate to contact program director Andrew White directly at awhite@pen.org.