

# Book Discussion Unites Area Residents Everybody Reads project debuts with book by African American

What if everybody reads the same book at the same time?

What if they talk about it – in supermarkets, in schools, in libraries at coffee shops and at over 50 free events around the Portland metro area?

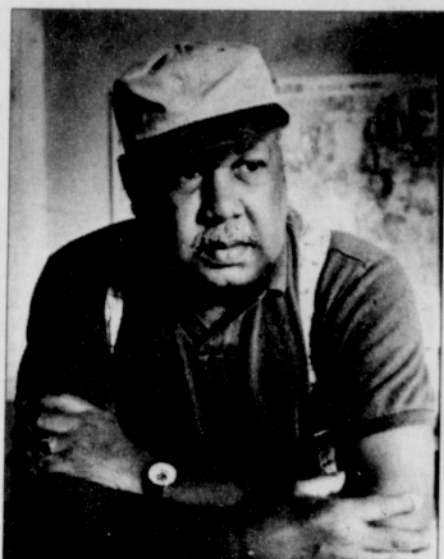
Those are the questions the Multnomah County Library and The Library Foundation asked themselves when they devised the Everybody Reads program, launched this month as Portland's first annual community-wide book discussion.

Inspired by similar innovative projects in Seattle, Chicago and other large cities across the country, the library has collaborated with community partners large and small to set the project in action with a critically acclaimed book, "A Lesson Before Dying," by African American novelist Ernest J. Gaines.

Set in a small Cajun town in 1940s Louisiana, Gaines tells the story of a young black man named Jefferson who is condemned to death for his reluctant participation in a liquor store shootout that killed the three other men involved and the white storeowner.

Another man, Grant Wiggins, has returned to the same small town after college to teach school children on a plantation. Uninterested in sinking into a centuries-old rut that keeps his family in the deep south, Wiggins wants to move to the north or go west. But after meeting Jefferson's grandmother, Wiggins' aunt persuades him to visit the prisoner and what follows is a tale of two men who, through no choice of their own, come together to form a bond and learn to find meaning and integrity in a difficult situation.

Copies of A Lesson Before Dying will be available at all Multnomah County libraries, along with event brochures, discussion guides, lapel pins and book marks. The book will also be discounted all month at



Ernest J. Gaines, author of "A Lesson Before Dying."

many area bookstores.

All 20 of the library's book groups will be discussing the book, and Starbucks Coffee will be hosting Everybody Reads book discussions at selected locations. More than 300 high school students will be discussing the book in class.

If that wasn't enough, several community forums and local events will focus on the book.

On Thursday, Jan. 16 at 10:30 a.m. Rev. Alcena Boozer and Rev. Dr. Alice Scannell will lead community members and senior citizens in a discussion about elders, leadership and community.

On Wednesday, Jan. 22 at 7 p.m., moderator O.B. Hill and other African American leaders will discuss the book in relationship to racial injustice, the importance of community and the need for healing at a community forum at Reflections Coffee and Books located at 446 N.E. Killingsworth.

The author of A Lesson Before Dying will be the host for 'An Evening with Ernest J. Gaines' at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall on Wednesday, Feb. 5 at 7:30 p.m. Admission is \$15 available though FASTIXX by calling 1-800-992-TIXX, or \$40 for priority seating and an author reception.

While in Portland, Gaines will also speak to youth about lessons in becoming a writer at Self Enhancement, Inc. at 3920 N. Kirby on Tuesday, Feb. 4 at 7 p.m. He will give a dialogue to incarcerated youth at the Donald E. Long School Juvenile Detention Home on Feb. 4 and a live interview on KBOO radio (90.7 FM) at noon on Feb. 5.

Portland's only black producing theatre company, PassionArt, will present live dramatic readings of Romulus Linney's two-act play adapted from Gaines' novel on Saturday, Jan. 18 at 2 p.m. at the North Portland Library, Sunday, Jan. 19 at 2 p.m. at the Central Library and Saturday, Jan. 25 at 2 p.m. at the Gresham Library.

There will also be screenings of a PG-13 film version of A Lesson Before Dying, starring Mekhi Phifer as the wrongly accused Jefferson, at several library locations throughout the month of January.

For more information, call 503-223-4008 or visit the Everybody Reads Website at [www.multcolib.org/reads/](http://www.multcolib.org/reads/).



The power of books and the city's first community-wide book discussion draws Wiley G. Barnett (from left), Carol White and Jerry Porter to the Albina Branch Library in northeast Portland.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/ THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

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## Kids Gear Up for Higher Education

PSU hosts students for MLK activities

Portland State University has scheduled two important events to highlight the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr. and commemorate the holiday as a nationally-recognized Day of Service.

On Friday, Jan. 16, the university will host 150 middle and high school age students on campus to familiarize them with higher education and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s message of social justice and equality.

Kevin Kecskes, PSU's director for community based learning, said the goal is to demystify higher education for potential students unfamiliar with the process of application and studies.

Sen. Margaret Carter will address the students on King's dreams and ideals.

PSU President Daniel Bernstine said he is excited to spread King's message.

"Hopefully these activities will help keep the story of King alive," he said.

On Monday, Jan. 20, PSU students, faculty and administrators will participate in off campus service projects at the Oregon Food Bank, Friends of Trees, the Community Energy Project, and Transitions Projects.

Before those events begin, a breakfast gathering at PSU will invite participants to discuss King's principals of social justice and service.

For more information about PSU and the Martin Luther King Jr. Days of Service, visit [www.oaa.pdx.edu/cae](http://www.oaa.pdx.edu/cae).

## The American Dream of Freedom



18th Annual Keep Living The Dream Tribute To:

## Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

University Of Portland's "Chiles Center"

5000 North Willamette Blvd.

Monday, January 20, 2003  
12:00 P.M. – 6:30 P.M.

Live Broadcast/Simulcast  
Portland Cable Access,  
Television Services (PPS) KBOO 90.7 FM

Donation: \$2.00 OR 3 cans of non-perishable food

For More Information Please Call (503) 816-9001

A Production of World Arts Foundation, Inc.

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## Gentrification Story

"Property," a 1977 film about gentrification in Portland, will screen at 7 p.m. Jan. 17 at the Northwest Film Center in the Portland Art Museum, 1211 S.W. Park Ave. Admission is \$6.50.

The film is a fictional treatment of a real event that neighbors took to keep from being forced out of their community by rising property val-

ues. The local residents attempted to buy a residential block in the Corbett-Terwilliger-Lair Hill neighborhood.

It was directed by community activist Penny Allen with an all-local cast ranging from poet Walt Curtis to former Portland Development Commission director Pat LaCrosse.

## Unemployment Extended

A temporary emergency unemployment compensation program which originally ended Dec. 28, received a five-month extension last week. Oregonians on unemployment who had not previously claimed 26 weeks of benefits are covered.

President Bush signed the bill

into law last Wednesday. The passage of the legislation means financial help for more than 20,000 Oregonians.

Any Oregonian who runs out of their original 26 weeks of unemployment benefits between Jan. 1 and May 31 may also qualify for the extended benefits.