

# [Black the need for quiet during the](https://assignbuster.com/black-the-need-for-quiet-during-the/)

Black Boy , an autobiography by Richard Wright, is an account of a youngAfrican-American boy’s thoughts and outlooks on life in the South while growingup.

The novel is 288 pages, and was published by Harper and Row Publishers in 1996. The main subject, Richard Wright, who was born in 1908, opens the bookwith a description of himself as a four-year-old in Natchez, Mississippi, andhis family’s later move to Memphis. In addition it describes his earlyrebellion against parental authority, and his unsupervised life on the streetswhile his mother is at work. His family lives in poverty and faces constanthunger. As a result his family lives with his strict grandmother, a ferventlyreligious woman.

In spite of his frequent punishment and beatings, Wrightremembers the pleasures of rural life. Richard then describes his family’s move to Memphis in 1914. Though notalways successful, Richard’s rebellious nature pervades the novel. This is bestillustrated by his rebellion against his father. He resents his father’s theneed for quiet during the day, when his father, a night porter, sleeps. When Mr.

Wright tells Richard to kill a meowing kitten if that’s the only way he can keepit quiet, Richard has found a way to rebel without being punished. He takes hisfather literally and hangs the kitten. But Richard’s mother punishes him bymaking him bury the kitten and by filling him with guilt. Another theme is seenwhen his father deserts the family, and Richard faces severe hunger. For thefirst time, Richard sees himself as different from others, because he mustassume some of the responsibilities of an adult.

In contrast to his abovecharacteristics, Richard soon shows his ability in learning, even before hestarts school, which he begins at a later age than other boys because his mothercouldn’t afford his school clothes. Rebellion, hunger (for knowledge and food), and the sense of being different will continue with Richard throughout this book. In the following chapters the Wrights move to the home of Richard’s AuntMaggie. But their pleasant life there ends when whites kill Maggie’s husband. Later the threat of violence by whites forces Maggie to flee again. Additionalunfortunate events include Richard’s mother having a stroke. As a result, Richard is sent to his Uncle Clark’s, but he is unhappy there and insists onreturning to his mother’s.

Later, Richard confronts his Aunt Addie, who teaches at the Seventh-DayAdventist church school. He also resists his grandmother’s attempts to converthim to religious faith. He writes his first story and blossoms in a literarysense. Richard then gets a job selling newspapers but quits when he finds thatthe newspapers hold racist views. Soon after this incident, his grandfather dies. Richard publishes his first story. The reaction from his family isoverwhelmingly negative, though they can do nothing to stop his interest inliterature.

When he graduates, Richard becomes class valedictorian. But he refusesto give the speech written for him by the principal. Upon entering the harshworld of actual adulthood, Richard has several terrifying confrontations withwhites.

In the most important of these confrontations, he is forced out of a jobbecause he dares to ask to learn the skills of the trade. These same harshrealities of life also force Richard to learn to steal. By stealing he acquiresenough money to leave the Deep South. Richard finds a place to stay in Memphis. The owner of his rooming houseencourages him to marry her daughter, Bess. As a result of his inborn fear ofintimacy, he refuses. Richard then takes another job with an optical company.

The foreman tries to provoke a fight between him and a black employee of anothercompany. In the culmination of Richard’s interest in literature, he borrows alibrary card and discovers the hard-hitting style of columnist H. L. Mencken andbegins to read voraciously. Finally, in the last chapter, Richard leaves for Chicago. When Richardtells his boss that he is leaving, he says that his departure is at his family’sinsistence. The white men at the factory are uneasy about a black man who wantsto go north.

They seem to consider that desire an implicit criticism of theSouth and thus of them. On the train north, Richard reflects on his life. Hewonders why he believes that life could be lived more fully. His answer is thathe acquired this belief from the books he read, which were critical of Americaand