

# Toni Ann Johnson

Speaking Topics and Workshops



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Toni Ann Johnson** is the winner of the Flannery O'Connor Award for short fiction for *Light Skin Gone to Waste*, which was selected for the prize and edited by Roxane Gay. The book was also shortlisted for the Saroyan Prize and nominated for a 2023 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work. Johnson's novella *Homegoing* was a semi-finalist for the William Faulkner Wisdom Award in fiction and won Accents Publishing's inaugural novella contest. Her novel *Remedy for a Broken Angel* earned an NAACP Image Award nomination for Outstanding Literary Work by a Debut Author. As a screenwriter, Johnson won the Humanitas Prize for both *Ruby Bridges* and *Crown Heights*. Her forthcoming book, *But Where's Home?*, won the 2024 Fiction Screen Door Press Prize and will be published by the new imprint of the University Press of Kentucky in February 2026.

Visit her website at [www.toniannjohnson.com](http://www.toniannjohnson.com).

Find Toni Ann on Instagram [@treeladytoniann](https://www.instagram.com/treeladytoniann).

Johnson has been a playwright and screenwriter whose work focuses on race, and yet it was decades before she took on this fictionalized version of her family's experience as upper middle class African-Americans living in a white, mostly working-class town in Upstate, NY beginning in the 1960s.

A former college professor at The University of Southern California, she can bring a lively presence to any discussion of creative writing, screenwriting, writing careers, racism, classism, colorism, and complex family relationships. Toni Ann is an experienced public speaker and a compelling reader, drawing on her professional acting background. She's happy to participate in readings and panels.

## TESTIMONIAL

“Toni-Ann Johnson was one of our first Writers-in-Residence at Pasadena City College after Covid, and she helped bring the English & Language Studies Division together and energize our students. She met individual students, attended classroom events, joined faculty/student luncheons, and presented at a reading & Q&A that brought over 250 community members. Since she is also a trained actor, her readings were emotional and entertaining. It helps too that she is a talented writer and storyteller. Many students connected to her honest, unique fiction and essays. Her professionalism and generosity of time elevated the campus culture in a time when we deeply needed an occasion for community and scholarship.”

– Emily Fernandez, director of Pasadena City College Writer in Residence Program

## Notable engagements

- The Center For Fiction, *Light Skin Gone to Waste*, November 2022 - [Watch here](#)
- 92nd St Y in Conversation with Roxane Gay - [Watch here](#)
- The American Library in Paris, *Light Skin Gone to Waste*, February 2023 - [Watch here](#)
- Writer-in-Residence at Pasadena City College October 2023 - [Learn more](#)
- Louisville Book Festival, *Light Skin Gone to Waste*, October 2024
- The Writer's Center, October 2022- [Watch here](#)

## Select Past Events

- Palm Spring Public Library - Palm Springs, CA - 2026
- AWP Panel - “Judging the Flannery O’Connor Award,” Los Angeles, 2025
- AWP Panel - “Family Secrets: A Storytellers Blessing or Curse?” Los Angeles 2025
- AWP Panel - “Navigating Stormy Waters: Telling Your Tales When They’re Hard to Tell,” Kansas City, Missouri, February 2024
- AWP Panel - “Getting Girlhood Stories Past the Gate Keepers,” Kansas City, Missouri, February 2024
- AWP Panel - “Minding the Gaps and Mining Landscape in Linked Short Story Collections,” Seattle, 2023
- Pasadena Public Library - Career talk and Public Reading - February 2023 (virtual)
- Woodbury College - Visiting Writer, Writing Workshop and Public Reading, February 2023

## Past Venues

Pasadena City College, California State University Riverside, Roar Shack Reading Series, The Center for Fiction, Antioch University’s Literary Uprising, The Writers Center, 92nd St. Y, The American Library in Paris, Long Beach City College, Mt. San Jacinto City College, Skylight Books, Chevaliers, Watchung Books, 826LA, Village Well, and others

## BOOKS



### **Homegoing (Accents Publishing, 2021)**

A middle-aged African-American woman returns to her conservative, white hometown for a funeral after a miscarriage and the end of her marriage. Though her divorced, self-involved parents refuse to acknowledge the racism she endured growing up, she finds the courage to confront the people who hurt her. This book tackles issues of race, isolation, childhood trauma, abandonment, and ultimately healing.

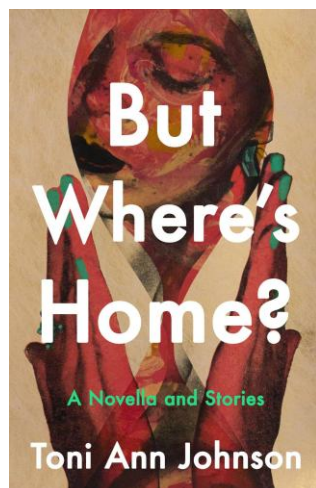
*\*Homegoing won the Accents Publishing Inaugural Novella Contest*



### **Light Skin Gone to Waste (UGA Press, 2022)**

The stories begin in 1962, with Philip and Velma Arrington's move to the small town of Monroe. After initial racist resistance, they settle in. Phil joins the tennis club, begins his private practice, and soon has affairs with white women. Velma opens an antique shop and hires a white maid. They have a child, buy new homes, collect art, go skiing, and have overseas adventures. It seems they've made it in the white world. However, their daughter Maddie, one of the only Black kids in the town, faces the brunt of the racism her family's money, education, and light skin can't protect her from. As the stories unfold, we learn how childhood trauma, race, class, and colorism have played a part in both Phil and Velma's development. Simultaneously, we follow how these same effects develop Maddie's multifaceted identity.

*\*Light Skin Gone to Waste won the Flannery O'Connor Award*



### **But Where's Home? (UPK Press, 2026)**

Deeply emotional, funny, and unflinchingly honest, *But Where's Home?* exposes Black life in America, addressing racism, classism, narcissistic abuse, and parent-child dynamics. In *But Where's Home?*, the Arringtons are an affluent Black family residing in a picturesque, predominantly white town. Spanning from the 1960s to 2022, readers see their lives from multiple perspectives. Daughters Livia and Maddie navigate narcissistic parents. Their father, a psychologist, has affairs with white women; their volatile mother deals with infidelity while raising daughters in a place that rejects them.

*\*But Where's Home? won the Screen Door Press Fiction Prize.*

## Speaker Topics

*Each of these talks is created for 45 to 60 minute time frames. Talks can be customized in scope and length to best suit the event and audience.*

### **But Where's Home?**

In this talk, Toni Ann Johnson speaks about her short story collections, *But Where's Home?*, as well as her previous collection, *Light Skin Gone to Waste*, and the novella *Homegoing* all of which are connected. She discussed realities of Black life in America, confronting issues of racism and classism as well as narcissistic abuse and parent-child relationships.

Attendees will also hear a reading from *But Where's Home?* and engage in a short Q&A session.

### **Writing Autobiographical Fiction**

In this talk, Toni Ann Johnson discusses strategies for writing autobiographical fiction. Excerpts from her short story collection, *But Where's Home?* will be read as examples. The talk will conclude with a Q&A session.

### **Careers in Fiction and Screenwriting**

Toni Ann Johnson discusses her experience as a playwright, screenwriter, and fiction writer and shares practical advice and encouragement for how to navigate these careers as well as how to take care of oneself while living a writer's life.

Attendees will also hear a reading from *But Where's Home?* and engage in a short Q&A session.

## TESTIMONIAL

“Toni Ann Johnson came to Woodbury University as a guest of three campus organizations: MORIA, the campus literary magazine; the Black Student Association; and Black Intellectual Groundworks. She conducted a writing workshop for the literary magazine class; our passionate students really enjoyed the workshop. In addition, she gave a reading from her beautiful and riveting book, *Light Skin Gone to Waste: Stories*. The short story she read kept members of the diverse audience riveted, and many listeners stayed afterward in order to buy a copy of the book. I really appreciated her generosity in giving her time to our students, faculty, and staff, and I look forward to having her on campus in support of her new book *But Where's Home?*”

– Ayanna Gaines, Library Director and Associate Professor at Woodbury University

# Workshops

*Each of these workshops is created for 45 to 60 minute time frames. Talks can be customized in scope and length to best suit the event and audience.*

## **Your Life as a Story**

In this workshop, Toni Ann Johnson will discuss strategies for writing autobiographical fiction and lead a writing exercise. Excerpts from her short story collection, *But Where's Home?* will be read as examples. Attendees will engage in a writing exercise designed to get them thinking of events in their childhoods.

## **Beginnings and Endings in Fiction**

Toni Ann Johnson will engage with participants to teach skills that will improve the beginnings and endings of their stories. Johnson will use examples from her own writing process from different short stories she has had published.

# Rates & Travel

While fees and payment plans are negotiable, it is important that Johnson's time and value are honored in the collaboration.

Travel fee waived for the Los Angeles metropolitan area. IRS rates are used for mileage outside of the area. If driving time exceeds 3hrs lodging is to be included. If driving time exceeds 4hrs a flight is preferred.