



**Meet Kentucky's First Black  
Woman Poet Laureate,  
Crystal Wilkinson!**



Crystal Wilkinson has been named Kentucky's newest Poet Laureate! A poet, fiction writer, and essayist, Wilkinson is the first Black woman to be appointed to this role.

Wilkinson was born in Hamilton, Ohio, in 1962, but as an infant she was sent to live with her grandparents, Silas and Christine Wilkinson, one of the few African American families living in the community where Crystal grew up. Her grandfather farmed tobacco, corn, and sorghum, and her grandmother worked in the homes of local school teachers of Casey County. Crystal recalls having an "enchanted childhood," where she was given freedom by loving grandparents to explore nature and the world around her and to write down her thoughts and feelings about that world. She studied journalism at Eastern Kentucky University and later worked in Lexington as a news assistant, a public information officer, and volunteered her time to public service, especially in the literary community.

When she became involved with the Affrilachian Poets, their founder Frank X Walker, and South Carolina poet Nikky Finney, who was at the University of Kentucky at the time, Wilkinson began to blossom as a writer. She found that the Affrilachians provided a supportive and collaborative environment that inspired her as a poet and sowed the seeds of inspiration and creativity.

Her novel, "Birds of Opulence," was chosen as the 2021 *Kentucky Reads* selection by Kentucky Humanities. *Kentucky Reads* will offer 25 scholar-led discussions of *The Birds of Opulence* to community organizations throughout the Commonwealth.

As of 2020, Wilkinson is an associate professor in the English Department at the University of Kentucky, the Program in African American and Africana Studies. She also works with the UK Appalachian Center and the Gaines Center for the Humanities at the University of Kentucky.

Treat yourself and listen to her give a reading of her excellent short story, *Endangered Species: Case 47401* here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef2ex5hEC7A>