Octavia E. Butler’s Pasadena: A Literary Tour

Octavia Estelle Butler (1947-2006) was born in Pasadena and she and her family lived in the neighborhoods between the 210 highway and the San Gabriel mountains for most of her life. She spent much of the 1970s and 1980s in Los Angeles and her final years in Lake Forest Park, WA, the Seattle suburb to which she moved in 1999. This map of her Pasadena allows you to visit the public places and streets where she walked and found inspiration. The underlying map depicted here is a portion of a Los Angeles and Hollywood city map from the Papers of Octavia E. Butler in the Huntington Library. The colored highlighter annotations are Butler’s and mark neighborhoods in Pasadena and Altadena that she lived in and around, though the exact significance of these markings is as yet unclear.

Riding the Bus

Butler never drove, instead she rode buses as her primary mode of transportation. People on board and places out the window fueled her active imagination. The 70 and 71 Lines to Los Angeles were a frequent route; there are multiple schedules for them in Butler’s papers. Pasadena Bus Route 2 on Lincoln, Colorado, and Hill would have passed numerous in-town destinations, including Vroman’s Bookstore.

John Muir High School

Butler graduated from John Muir High School in 1965. Her yearbook is annotated with well wishes from students and faculty. She marked her senior portrait with a star, first in the second row on this page.

La Pintoresca Branch Library

La Pintoresca Branch Library is located in a neighborhood that would have been very familiar to Butler. She spoke at the library as a successful author.

Pasadena Public Library

Butler’s love of libraries started early. She recalls begging her mother for her own library card after a school trip to the Pasadena Public Library, so that she could select her own books. Mrs. Butler immediately and happily complied.

Former site of James A. Garfield Elementary School
(now Orangewood Center)

Butler attended James A. Garfield Elementary School, which was located on the northeast corner of California Blvd and Pasadena Avenue. According to her graduation program from 1959, young Butler read a poem at the event. Garfield Elementary closed in 1972 and was later developed as a shopping center.

Washington Junior High School,
now Washington STEAM Multilingual Academy

Butler attended Washington Junior High School. Now called Washington STEAM Multilingual Academy, the school named the library after their famous alumna in 2020 and installed a mural celebrating her.

Vroman’s Bookstore

Vroman’s was a favorite place for Butler to shop. Later, she also spoke there as a featured author.

Pasadena City College

Butler earned her A.A. degree from Pasadena City College. While a student there, she also earned her first money for her writing – a $15 prize in a college literary contest for her first place winning short story “To The Victor.”

The Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens

Butler bequeathed her papers to The Huntington Library. Since opening for research, the papers rank continually among the topmost-used materials at The Library, across all subjects.