



# An American Childhood

By Annie Dillard

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A book that instantly captured the hearts of readers across the country, *An American Childhood* is Pulitzer Prize-winning author Annie Dillard's poignant, vivid memoir of growing up in Pittsburgh in the 1950s.

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## An American Childhood By Annie Dillard Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

Annie Dillard remembers. She remembers the exhilaration of whipping a snowball at a car and having it hit straight on. She remembers playing with the skin on her mother's knuckles, which "didn't snap back; it lay dead across her knuckle in a yellowish ridge." She remembers the compulsion to spend a whole afternoon (or many whole afternoons) endlessly pitching a ball at a target. In this intoxicating account of her childhood, Dillard climbs back inside her 5-, 10-, and 15-year-old selves with apparent effortlessness. The voracious young Dillard embraces headlong one fascination after another--from drawing to rocks and bugs to the French symbolists. "Everywhere, things snagged me," she writes. "The visible world turned me curious to books; the books propelled me reeling back to the world." From her parents she inherited a love of language--her mother's speech was "an endlessly interesting, swerving path"--and the understanding that "you do what you do out of your private passion for the thing itself," not for anyone else's approval or desire. And one would be mistaken to call the energy Dillard exhibits in *An American Childhood* merely youthful; "still I break up through the skin of awareness a thousand times a day," she writes, "as dolphins burst through seas, and dive again, and rise, and dive."

### From Publishers Weekly

Dillard's luminous prose painlessly captures the pain of growing up in this wonderful evocation of childhood. Her memoir is partly a hymn to Pittsburgh, where orange streetcars ran on Penn Avenue in 1953 when she was eight, and where the Pirates were always in the cellar. Dillard's mother, an unstoppable force, had energies too vast for the bridge games and household chores that stymied her. Her father made low-budget horror movies, loved Dixieland jazz, told endless jokes and sight-gags and took lonesome river trips down to New Orleans to get away. From this slightly odd couple, Dillard (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* acquired her love of nature and taut sensitivity. The events of childhood often loom larger than life; the magic of Dillard's writing is that she sets down typical childhood happenings with their original immediacy and force. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc.

### From School Library Journal

YA Dillard has amassed a following for her eloquently-written nature essays with their deeply philosophical, theological slant. In this current work she reveals a personal view of her childhood and early adolescence in which she first awoke to the world and its implications. Dillard grew up with a relentlessly inquiring mind in a moneyed Pittsburgh family during the '50s. Her liberal-minded parents allowed her free rein to grow up exploring her city, taking up hobbies and projects, and reading everything she found on the public library's adult shelves. Especially compelling is her picture of her teenage years, the time when she "morally disapproved most things in North America, and blamed her innocent parents for them." She captures that fine, open innocence of the '50s and that hungry pain of the '60s. This book should be read by young people far enough away from childhood to enjoy looking back at how they were, by young people just discovering themselves, and by those teenagers who can identify with Dillard's description of herself as "a live wire. . . shooting out sparks that were digging a pit around me, and I sinking into that pit." Assuredly, it will be appreciated by those who enjoy reading wonderfully crafted prose. Her's is a smooth, knowing voice that can deliver a punch line. Carolyn Praytor Boyd, Episcopal High School, Bellaire  
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**Betty Ahlstrom:**

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