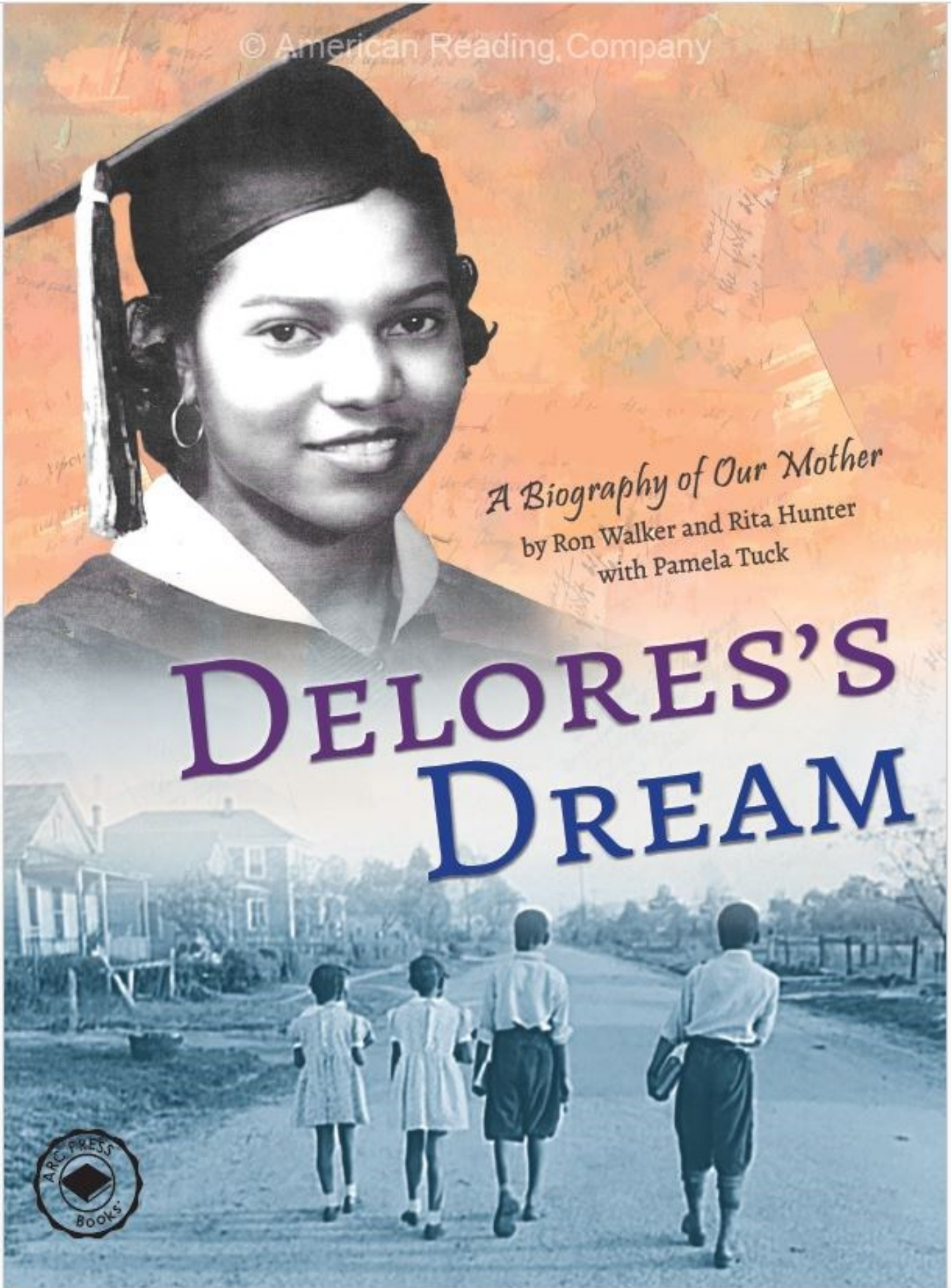


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*A Biography of Our Mother*  
by Ron Walker and Rita Hunter  
with Pamela Tuck

# DELORES'S DREAM



“We know how much going to college means to you, baby, and how hard you worked for this chance. But I don’t think you’re going to be able to go.”

“I know college is expensive, Daddy, but the scholarship takes care of a lot of the cost, and I can work to help you pay off the balance,” Delores pleaded.

“Yes, I know,” Willie said. “But I’m doing all I can just to feed y’all and pay the rent and other bills. If I can’t send your sisters and brother to college, then it wouldn’t be fair to let you go.”

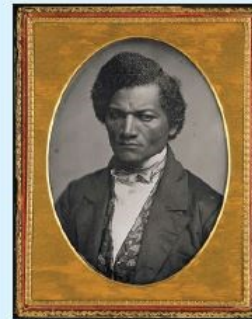


**West Virginia State University** (West Virginia State College until 2004) is a historically Black university. Before segregation was outlawed, most of the colleges in the southern United States served only white students. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) offered Black Americans some of their only options for a higher education. Today, there are 101 HBCUs in the United States. HBCUs give all students, regardless of race, an opportunity to learn.

Delores felt like hundred-pound weights hung from every limb. “I understand, Daddy,” she whispered.

Delores went to her bedroom and closed the door behind her. She took the first-place plaque and scholarship offer letter off her dresser and placed them in an old hatbox where she kept her prized possessions. She laid facedown on her bed and cried.

After a while, the first lines of her speech came to her: *Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.* “I’ll find a way to educate myself, just like Frederick Douglass did,” she whispered.



**Frederick Douglass** was a Black American leader of the antislavery movement. He taught himself to read and write as an enslaved child. After self-emancipating, he became a public speaker and author who fought to end slavery. Douglass also supported and fought for equal rights for Black people and women.





## CHAPTER FIVE

# Life in Philadelphia

**On May 28, 1941, Delores stood** in front of her mirror, dressed in a black cap and gown. Delores Gwendolyn Elmore was graduating from Paul Laurence Dunbar High School with honors. It was a day to celebrate. But Delores's reflection showed no sign of joy.

*So, where do I go from here?* Delores thought.

She waited, as if she expected an answer. "Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar came to mind.

Delores recited the final stanza.

## Delores's Dream

*I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,  
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—  
When he beats his bars and he would be free;*

She took a breath and continued.

*It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
But a prayer that he sends from  
his heart's deep core,  
But a plea, that upward to  
Heaven he flings—  
I know why the caged bird sings!*

Delores adjusted her cap and walked out the door.



*Delores's high school graduation photo*



After graduation, Delores continued to live with her family in Weirton. Then her father passed away. Her mother's brother, Bailey Kendrick, urged Lillie to move the family to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he lived. Bailey had a successful barbershop and had built a strong community in his neighborhood. His offer seemed promising. Lillie agreed to move to Philadelphia.