

## **LEVAR BURTON**

### **Biography**

LeVar Burton launched his acting career while still a student at the University of Southern California. Cast in the groundbreaking role of Kunta Kinte in the landmark television series “Roots,” at 19 he found himself on the cover of Time Magazine. A seemingly impossible act to follow, Burton managed to do so in dramatic fashion, achieving further global acclaim as Chief Engineer Geordi La Forge in the iconic “Star Trek: The Next Generation” television series and in feature films. However, it has been his role as host and executive producer of the beloved PBS children’s series “Reading Rainbow” of which he is most proud. Airing from 1983 to 2009, it was not only one of the longest-running children’s television shows in history, but also one of the most acclaimed, earning over 200 awards including multiple Emmys and a Peabody.

Always committed to improving children’s education through innovative uses of storytelling, in 2012 Burton launched RRRKidz, a digital educational publishing company. In a deal that ended in August, 2017 his company held the global rights to the Reading Rainbow brand through a partnership with series creator, WNED/Buffalo. That partnership resulted in a successful relaunch of the Reading Rainbow brand for a new generation of children. SKYBRARY is a digital reading service filled with over 500 children’s fiction and non-fiction books, more than 150 newly-produced video field trips and new content added every week. With over 16 million books and videos enjoyed since launch, SKYBRARY is a top selling educational app on iTunes and recipient of numerous awards.

In 2014 Burton turned to Kickstarter to bring Reading Rainbow to “Every Child, Everywhere” -- especially to classrooms in need. The campaign met its 35-day goal of raising \$1 million in less than eleven hours, and set a crowdfunding record at the time with over 105,000 backers and a final tally of over \$6.4 million. With these funds, in May, 2015 Burton and RRRKidz brought the SKYBRARY product to the web, accessible to 83% of American households. Then in January, 2016, the education-specific, SKYBRARY SCHOOL rolled out for teachers and students, fulfilling the promise of the crowd-funding project.

Burton’s first children’s book, THE RHINO WHO SWALLOWED A STORM, a powerful and uplifting story to help children cope with the difficulties of everyday life, was published in fall 2014 by RRRKidz.

In 2015, he earned the Los Angeles Times Book Prizes Innovator's Award and the Chicago Tribune Young Adult Literary Award.

The honored recipient of 13 Emmy Awards, a Grammy and five NAACP Awards, Burton has demonstrated in his career that he can do it all -- acting, directing, producing, writing and speaking. He is often invited as a keynote speaker at leading education and technology events, most recently speaking at NASA, ISTE, The National Education Association, FAST COMPANY's Innovation Series and many more.

2016 saw Mr. Burton return to his own roots when he served as Co-Executive Producer of the A&E Networks re-imagining of ROOTS. The critically acclaimed mini-series introduced Alex Haley's family story to a new generation of Americans.

Now in his fourth decade in the industry, LeVar continues to exercise his vigorous passion for storytelling with his new podcast LEVAR BURTON READS, where each episode he chooses a favorite piece of short fiction and performs it. The first season was enormously successful reaching as high as #5 in the ranking of all podcasts on iTunes. Season Two of LEVAR BURTON READS premieres in January of 2018.

With millions of fans throughout the world, Burton continues his mission to inspire, entertain and educate.