



BLACK IN APPALACHIA **INITIATIVE**

part of The Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights

MONOLOGUE PROMPTS



BARTER
THEATRE



2022

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HOW TO USE

Below is some of the Black Appalachian subject matter that has been gathered in conjunction with Black Heritage and Cultural centers as well as Black community members. These story ideas are all used with permission and are intended to be used as a jumping-off point/inspiration for playwrights. We are excited to see what stories/points-of-view/etc. emerge from this material and other stories of the region that may be familiar to participating playwrights. We don't expect - nor do we want - a playwright to try to incorporate more than one story idea into a monologue.



Pictured: Vince McGill



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1. Cross Burning in Marion, VA 2020

PLOT OVERVIEW:

17-year-old Travon leads a Black Lives Matter march one June day. That night, a cross is burned in his front yard. The perpetrator? His white neighbor across the street.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-teen-led-a-black-lives-matter-protest-in-his-small-town-a-cross-was-burned-in-his-yard/2020/07/15/6ea6e3d2-c1ef-11ea-b178-bb7b05b94af_story.html

https://heraldcourier.com/news/marion-man-pleads-guilty-in-cross-burning-case/article_712b89ab-52e4-5303-aa1c-be88a982b8c8.html

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/virginia-man-pleads-guilty-in-cross-burning-that-targeted-black-teenager/2021/04/22/eaddf7aa-a3b3-11eb-a774-7b47ceb36ee8_story.html

2. The Sanctified Hill Disaster of 1972 - Cumberland, KY

PLOT OVERVIEW:

December 14, 1972. Mattye wakes up to find her house sliding down the hill - Sanctified Hill, a Black neighborhood in Cumberland, KY. Two weeks of heavy rains had produced a mudslide that decimated the neighborhood. Insurance companies declared it an act of God, this denying the homeowners the ability to file claims

“The Sanctified Hill disaster exposed racial inequalities embedded in Appalachian landscapes. By restricting working-class Black people to steep hillsides without city services, Black people were placed in an ongoing state of precarity. The Sanctified Hill disaster exposed the vulnerability of Black people to climate events due to a combination of placement and neglect...”

2. The Sanctified Hill Disaster of 1972 - Cumberland, KY (CONT.D)

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.aaihs.org/appalachian-hillsides-as-black-ecologies-housing-memory-and-the-sanctified-hill-disaster-of-1972/>

<https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/1762>

<https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/1761>

3. Lesley Riddle - Musician - Kingsport, TN 1920

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Lesley Riddle was born in North Carolina in 1905 and raised in Kingsport, TN. When he lost part of his leg to a cement factory accident, Lesley took up the guitar and became part of the Black music scene in eastern Tennessee. In 1927, Lesley met A.P. Carter of the Carter Family of country music fame. Soon Lesley was scouting around Appalachia with A.P., looking for old-timey music that the Carter Family would make their own. Lesley was one of the most important influences in country music today.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://birthplaceofcountrymusic.org/search-lesley-riddle/>

<https://traditionalvoicesgroup.com/biography/>



Pictured: Rita Cole

4. Bill Plummer – Mechanical Genius – Chilhowie/Tazewell, VA 1918

PLOT OVERVIEW:

There wasn't anything Bill Plummer couldn't build. A born machinist, he married his wife Maggie and moved from Chilhowie to Tazewell, where he worked as a sawmill engineer. Legend has it that Henry Ford, on one of the famous "Vagabond" camping trips he made with Thomas Edison and Harvey Firestone, viewed Plummer's work at the sawmill (it is believed that he invented a steam-powered saw) and offered him a job at his motor company in Detroit... to which Bill Plummer replied (to paraphrase), "Why would I go there when I have everything I need in Chilhowie?" Bill and his family moved back to Chilhowie where he became famous for his ability to fix/build anything, including a wooden bike and a Victrola cabinet (now on display in the Philadelphia Art Museum.)

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

https://swvatoday.com/smyth_county/news/article_7e0e6b6e-b8e9-11e6-8e5f-47cf49edc9b0.html

<https://www.newsleader.com/story/news/history/2014/05/16/henry-ford-friends-visited-valley/9195329/>

<https://roanokehistory.org/industry-vagabonds-camped-in-virginia/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Plummer

<https://www.aamearts.org/magazine/article/back-country-makers-william-m-plummer/2013072715584184173>

5. Katherine Goebel Johnson – Marion, VA

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Long before she was the mathematical genius behind Alan Shepherd's space launch, Katherine Goebel taught French and music at the segregated Carnegie school in Marion, VA. A West Virginia native who changed how we see the world – literally.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.nasa.gov/content/katherine-johnson-biography>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4j_LpKzcZQ

https://swvatoday.com/smyth_county/news/article_35c83f32-df64-11e6-a8e6-bfcf3ba856af.html

6. Eastern Kentucky Social Club – Lynch, KY 1969-present

PLOT OVERVIEW:

The Eastern Kentucky Social Club (EKSC) was founded in 1969 by Appalachian families who migrated out of the coalfields to mostly northern cities. This organization, with chapters all over the country, was established to provide continued connection and reunion for families, friends, churches and schools within the Appalachian diaspora.

After watching the YouTube video below, you might find inspiration to write a monologue about:

- a) A Black coalminer
- b) A Black FEMALE coalminer
- c) A Black woman raised in Long Island (or Chicago, or Los Angeles, etc.) whose parents were born and raised in Lynch, KY and who go back there every summer to see family.

6. Eastern Kentucky Social Club – Lynch, KY 1969-present (CONT.D)

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.kftc.org/blog/transition-stories-eastern-kentucky-social-club-binds-lynch-community>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCanT3QcDS4>

7. John Broddy – Smyth Co., VA Revolutionary War soldier 1780

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Broddy served with the Overmountain Men's militia along with his owner (and half-brother) William Campbell. Defeated the British at the Battle of King's Mountain in South Carolina. Considered a turning point in the War's southern campaign. Fought for his country's liberty while being denied his own – Broddy remained enslaved until 12 years after Campbell's death in 1781.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.nps.gov/common/uploads/teachers/lessonplans/African%20Americans%20in%20the%20Revolution.pdf>

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/overmountain-men>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kings_Mountain

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=315171523128111>



Pictured: Ronnie Pepper

8. Hannah Valentine – Abingdon, VA – 1830's

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Hannah Valentine was an enslaved woman at Mont Calm, a farm in Abingdon, VA owned by David Campbell. When Campbell was elected governor in 1837, Hannah's husband and children went with the Campbell family to Richmond while Hannah was left in Abingdon to run the house. Unlike most enslaved people at the time, Hannah and her husband Michael were literate, and so the letters Hannah wrote are some of the very few records we have from that point of view.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/09/13/the-forced-absence-of-slavery-rare-letters-to-a-virginia-governor-give-voice-to-the-faceless-and-forgotten/>

<https://menokinrubblewithacause.com/2017/09/15/the-letters-of-hannah-valentine-and-lethe-jackson-two-enslaved-women-who-belonged-to-a-virginia-governor-from-the-washington-post/>

<https://repository.duke.edu/dc/valentinejackson>

9. Berea College – Day Law – 1904

PLOT OVERVIEW:

In 1903, Berea College was the only fully integrated school in Kentucky, with a large Black population. Carl Day, a state representative from Breathitt County, referred to this mingling of students as a “stench in the nostrils of true Kentuckians.” He introduced a bill that came to be known as Day Law, “An Act to Prohibit White and Colored Persons from Attending the Same School.” The bill was signed into law in March 1904. The law’s “purpose” was to prevent racial violence and interracial marriage.

Where did these students go when they were forced to leave Berea?

RELEVANT LINK - <https://www.berea.edu/news/berea-college-and-the-day-law/>

10. Wendell Scott – 1st Black NASCAR driver – Danville, VA 1950's - 1960's

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Wendell Scott began his driving career running moonshine and evading the law. Then he saw his first stock car race and was hooked. But breaking into the all-white NASCAR circuit wasn't easy, and when Wendell won a race in 1963, they refused to wave the checkered flag because the winner was supposed to kiss a white beauty queen.



SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.sportscasting.com/nascar-legend-wendell-scotts-historic-1963-win-involved-racism-beauty-queen-3-hour-protest/>

"Hard Driving: The Wendell Scott Story" by Brian Donovan

11. John Henry – legendary railroader – Talcott, WV 1870's

PLOT OVERVIEW:

John Henry was the mythical steel driver who took on a mechanical drill (and beat it!), tunneling through a mountain, only to die once he made it through – or so the legend goes. The real story, what we know of it, may be more interesting.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/18/books/18grim.html>

<https://www.nps.gov/neri/planyourvisit/the-legend-of-john-henry-talcott-wv.htm>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Henry_\(folklore\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Henry_(folklore))

12. The Kingdom of the Happy Land 1860's-early 1900's

PLOT OVERVIEW:

In the years following the Civil War, an autonomous Black community, ruled by a King and Queen, and made up of ex-slaves, came to exist on a small piece of land near Tuxedo, NC.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.bpr.org/post/storyteller-ronnie-pepper-flips-script-whitewashed-history#stream/0>

<https://scalawagmagazine.org/2019/09/black-appalachia-kingdom/>

<https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/0207happyland-php/>

<https://conservingcarolina.org/ronnie-pepper/>

13. Opioid Epidemic in Black Appalachian Communities - Present

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Black Americans have always faced discrimination in health care. Here are some articles about how that played out for Black Appalachians.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5121004/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/upshot/opioid-epidemic-blacks.html>

This is a GREAT article! Wow.

<https://scalawagmagazine.org/2021/02/black-appalachia-recovery-addiction/>

14. The Destruction of Vinegar Hill – Charlottesville, VA 1960's

PLOT OVERVIEW:

As the University of Virginia began to expand its campus, it often resulted in displacing Black communities. In the 1960's, the neighborhood that was destroyed was Vinegar Hill. There is so much to this story, including the bit about a poll tax that prevented Black citizens from voting on the project.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

https://www.cvillepedia.org/Vinegar_Hill

<https://timeline.com/charlottesville-vinegar-hill-demolished-ba27b6ea69e1>

<https://news.virginia.edu/content/uva-and-history-race-property-and-power>

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/thatworldisgone>

15. The Home Place – Limestone, TN 1939

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Ola Rollins was a little girl when her daddy bought property in Limestone, TN and the family moved to "the home place." And Life was wonderful - until the day the Klan rode up on horseback, intending to scare them away. Ola's daddy hurried them all in the house - and then he got his gun. The Klan wasn't used to being shot at, and turned and hightailed it out of there. Ola laughs when she remembers those Klansmen frantically galloping away, with their robes billowing out behind them.

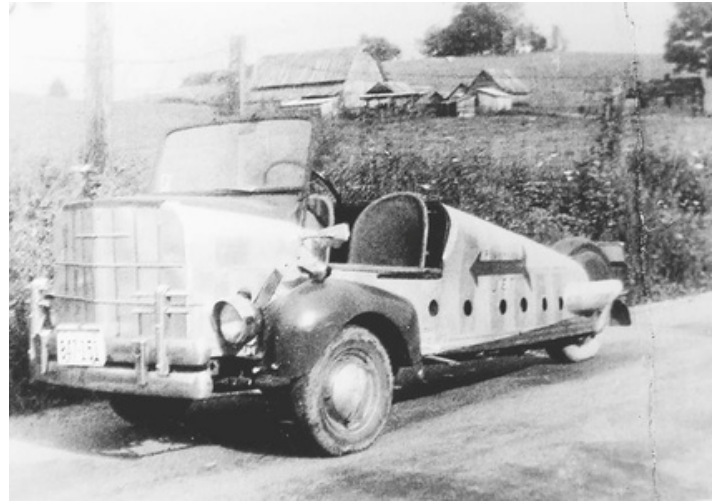


Pictured: Patrice Foster

16. Harry Plummer – The Plummer Comet – Chilhowie, VA 1950's

PLOT OVERVIEW:

Like his father (Bill Plummer, #4) Harry Plummer was a born machinist who invented the Plummer Comet, a three-wheeled automobile. Another interesting take on this story is Black archivist Diane Hayes's recent excursion to see the Plummer Comet. She traveled to the warehouse where it is currently stored, a warehouse flying a Confederate flag and guarded by a growling Rottweiler – yet Diane said that the men there truly wanted to help, showed her around, invited her to lunch... surprising her.



SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

https://swvatoday.com/smyth_county/news/article_7e0e6b6e-b8e9-11e6-8e5f-47cf49edc9b0.html

https://swvatoday.com/entertainment_life/article_b8b53e76-1384-11e9-ad9b-0b49146c94a3.html

17. Wilhemina Banks and the Nyumba Ya Tausi-Peacock Museum – Bristol, VA

PLOT OVERVIEW:

When Wilhemina Banks was a little girl, she fell in love with history and dreamed of one day owning her own museum. Years later, after moving to New York City and then Africa, Wilhemina returned to Bristol and made her dream come true. Housed in her family home, her museum contains a remarkable collection of over 6,000 pieces of African and African-American art, Bristol collectibles (including those from African-American doctors and herbal remedies), instruments of slavery, family heirlooms and other memorabilia, collected and preserved over a period of 50 years.

17. Wilhemina Banks and the Nyumba Ya Tausi-Peacock Museum – Bristol, VA (CONT.D)

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.aamearts.org/magazine/article/banks-creates-community-through-art-and-history/202104272041295181>

<https://www.bristolhistoricalassociation.com/johnnobleton.html>

https://swvatoday.com/news/article_75f362d1-a85a-5596-837f-1afd8cc3acad.html

18. Going Home - Bristol, TN

PLOT OVERVIEW:

James grew up in Bristol, TN and couldn't wait to grow up and get out. At 18 he joined the Marines. He rose in rank and eventually served two tours of duty in Vietnam as a gunnery sergeant. He saw a lot of action. He saw a lot of things that hurt his soul. He eventually retired from the Marines and discovered that the mountains of eastern Tennessee were calling him home. He returned to Bristol and found his true calling as a minister. Slowly God and the mountains healed his wounded soul.

19. James Plummer and the NY Mets – Marion, VA 1965

PLOT OVERVIEW:

The New York Mets baseball organization used to have a minor league team – the Marion Mets – who played in the now defunct Appalachian League. In 1965, 12-year-old Jimmy Plummer became a batboy for the team – the first Black batboy for the team – and from there, his career with the Mets took off.

19. James Plummer and the NY Mets – Marion, VA 1965 (CONT.D)

SOURCES

/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://newyorkmets.medium.com/jimmy-plummer-the-real-mr-met-ed682dcdacde>

<https://www.nydailynews.com/sports/baseball/mets/ny-sports-endzone-mets-plummer-20180615-story.html>

https://swvatoday.com/smyth_county/news/article_fb1f9cc-7659-11e8-a05b-ffe76cf4384d.html

<https://nypost.com/1999/01/06/met-exec-was-ryans-bat-boy/>



20. Highlander Folk School – Monteagle, TN – 1950's-1960's

PLOT OVERVIEW:

When the sit-in movement erupted in 1960, Highlander became an important training ground for young Black activists. Even before SNCC's founding conference, Highlander hosted meetings of sit-in activists. The traditional Black hymn, "I'll overcome" was reshaped into "We Shall Overcome" by sit-in students meeting at Highlander in March 1960.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/alliances-relationships/highlander/>

<https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/highlander-folk-school/>

21. Evelyn Thompson Lawrence and Sallie's Crying Tree – Marion, VA

PLOT OVERVIEW:

A beloved teacher at both the segregated Carnegie High School and later, after integration, at Marion Primary School, Evelyn also became famous for her storytelling event, Sallie's Crying Tree, which relates the story of Evelyn's grandmother Sallie, a young, enslaved girl whose family is sold away from her and whose only friend is an oak tree she tells her troubles to. Evelyn was also the founder of the Mt. Pleasant Preservation Society, a museum dedicated to remembering and telling the histories of the local Black communities. Her motto: "Restore our voices. Reclaim our past."

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

https://swvatoday.com/smyth_county/news/article_479788ec-50fb-11e5-8c01-8ffcf5ce1ffe.html

<https://www.pr.com/press-release/42422>

22. The Appalachian African American Cultural Center – Pennington Gap, VA - Present

PLOT OVERVIEW:

A former one-room schoolhouse that served the Black community until integration in 1965, it now houses a collection of photographs and relics from that community's past. Founded and curated by Jill and Ron Carson, it also serves as a headquarters for workshops focused on dismantling racism.

SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

<https://www.aaaculturalcenter.org/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/26/us/black-appalachia-ron-jill-carson.html>

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/10/05/few-in-number-black-residents-in-appalachia-push-for-justice>



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MONOLOGUE COMPETITION

In 2020, Barter created the Black in Appalachia Initiative, which involved actively seeking out Black Appalachian plays, public readings and conducting a playwriting workshop for Black theatre artists. It is our hope that by connecting Black playwrights (wherever they are located) with stories from Black Appalachian communities, we can:

- Create monologues that can be developed into full-length plays
- Create/produce a canon of work that explores the Black Appalachian experience, both past and present
- Establish and cultivate relationships with Black playwrights and other Black theatre artists
- Give audiences accessibility to new perspectives on life in Appalachia



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MONOLOGUE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Playwright must be Black.
- Monologues must be set in Appalachia. (See link below for list of qualifying states/counties as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission)
https://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/CountiesinAppalachia.asp
- Monologues must be 5-7 minutes in length (190 words = 1 minute).
- Monologues must be unpublished and not have had a professional production.
- Monologues must be submitted electronically.

Please submit monologues to: cbush@bartertheatre.com

2023 Submission Deadline: December 1, 2022

5-7 monologues will be selected to be performed during Barter's Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights (Jan./Feb. 2023 – date TBD)



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Pictured: Terrance Jackson



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