



BARTER THEATRE

# MONOLOGUE PROMPTS

## SHINE:

**Illuminating Black Stories**



BARTER  
THEATRE

2023



# 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.



**BARTER**  
THEATRE



**2023**

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# 1. Cross Burning in Marion, VA 2020

## PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/18/us/burning-cross-activist-virginia-trnd/index.html>

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdva/pr/marion-man-sentenced-burning-cross-front-yard-african-american-family-june-2020>

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**The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:**

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### a) POV – TRAVON

Travon wakes up to the smell of smoke and light is flickering on his walls. He pulls aside the curtain and sees a cross burning in his front yard. Suddenly he hears his mother start screaming his little sister's name...

### b) POV – DINAH

Dinah is a Black woman in her late 60's and has lived in Marion all her life. As one of the first students to integrate Marion Senior High, she has many, many white friends and is a beloved member of the community. She disapproves of Travon's BLM march because she fears the counter-protests from white outsiders. And now, for the first time in decades, the peace has been breached - a cross has been burned. Fear has returned. Why did Travon have to stir things up?

## 1. Cross Burning in Marion, VA 2020 [CONT'D]

### c) POV – PJ

PJ is an 8-year-old Black boy who lives down the street from Travon. The night of the fire, P.J., like the rest of the neighborhood, is awake and on the street watching the firefighters put out the flames. He is mesmerized by the flashing red lights, by the gear the firefighters wear, by the equipment they use, by their camaraderie and know-how. None of them look like him, though. They are all white. As the burning cross smokes and crumbles to ash, PJ vows that he's going to change that.



Pictured: Vince McGill

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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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...”

### SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

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<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>

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#### a) POV – MATTYE

Mattye, a Black school teacher, has lost her home in a mudslide that destroyed the Black community of Sanctified Hill in Cumberland, KY. She just got off the phone with a friend, who informed her that state and federal emergency funds have been denied to the citizens of Sanctified Hill. Now Mattye has to decide whether to accept this news or fight for her people...

## 2. The Sanctified Hill Disaster of 1972 - Cumberland, KY [CONT'D]

### b) POV – MICHAEL

Michael, the son of a coal miner, is a senior at Lynch High School, where Mattye teaches. He remembers a time before integration (nine years earlier, 1963), when he attended Lynch Colored School. Michael isn't a fan of educational desegregation – he feels the Black students were forced to lose a big part of their identity in integrating with the whites. Michael's father wants him to work in the mines after graduation, but Michael isn't so sure. Then their home is destroyed in the Sanctified Hill mudslide, giving Michael one more reason to leave Appalachia forever...

### c) POV – ODELL

Odell is a Black barber in Cumberland, KY. Although he and his family had to evacuate during the Sanctified Hill mudslide, his home was not hurt and he was able to move back in. But a lot of his Black friends lost everything. A few weeks later, one of his most loyal customers comes into the shop – a white minister – and as Odell is barbering him, the minister remarks to other white customers that Sanctified Hill was an eyesore and it was God's will that it slid off the mountain. Odell thinks maybe it's time he enforced God's will on the minister's beautiful hair...



Pictured: Geovanday Jones

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### 3. Lesley Riddle - Musician - Kingsport, TN 1920

#### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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

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

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#### a) POV – LESLEY

The year is 1955 and Lesley Riddle is a school crossing guard in Rochester, NY, waiting in the cold and snow for the school's dismissal bell to ring. The night before, he heard Maybelle Carter and the Carter Family on the radio, which prompts him to remember another time, a warmer time: the summer he and AP Carter wandered the mountains of southwest Virginia collecting the old-timey songs that would make the Carter Family the most famous group in country music history – and leave him, Lesley Riddle, in obscurity...



Pictured: Lesley Riddle

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### 3. Lesley Riddle - Musician - Kingsport, TN 1920 [CONT'D]

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#### b) POV – ED

Ed Martin was Lesley Riddle's uncle. After Lesley was injured at work and had to have half his leg amputated, Ed bought Lesley a guitar and taught him how to play it. He also introduced Lesley to other Black musicians around Kingsport. One day, Ed and Lesley got into an argument over who owned a shotgun. In the scuffle, Lesley grabbed the barrel end, and Ed accidentally pulled the trigger, blowing off the middle and ring finger of Lesley's right hand – his picking hand. Not one to let that get in his way, Lesley learned to play with only three fingers, creating a picking and slide technique that he later taught to Maybelle Carter of the Carter Family. Maybelle became famous for it, and the technique became known as the Carter Scratch. The Carter Scratch went on to influence thousands of country music stars. Ed Martin thinks it's time everyone knew he's responsible for the Carter Scratch... after all, he's the one who shot off Lesley's fingers...

#### c) POV - RAY

Ray is a Black teenage girl living in Bristol, VA – and, unlike most of her classmates, Ray hates country music. In her mind, country music is definitely a white thing. When her father tried to teach her how to play his old guitar, but she would have none of it – rap is where she's at. So Dad's old guitar gathers dust in the corner while Ray works on her rhymes. Then last week, Ray's class took a field trip to the Birthday of Country Music museum. As she was strolling around, trying to find a way to duck out of there without being caught, Ray came face-to-face with the Lesley Riddle display. As she stared at Lesley's picture, his eyes seemed to call to her, telling her to pick up her daddy's guitar and claim her Appalachian roots. That night, she and her dad are having their first guitar lesson...



## 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://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://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Plummer)

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



Pictured: Bill Plummer

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## 4. Bill Plummer – Mechanical Genius – Chilhowie/Tazewell, VA 1918 [CONT'D]

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The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:

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### a) POV – BILL

The strangest thing happened today. I was at work at the sawmill in Tazewell when my boss introduced me to a middle-aged white man named Henry Ford. Seems Mr. Ford had been camping in the area with his buddy Thomas Edison and heard talk about this mechanical genius name of Plummer who worked at the sawmill – hence the introduction. Mr. Ford told me about his automobile factory in Detroit. Told me he was looking for good engineers to work there. He offered me a job. “Talk it over with the wife,” he said. I asked Mr. Ford if there were mountains in Detroit. “No,” said Ford, “but we’ve got a big lake to swim in.” I just laughed – I don’t know how to swim and I ain’t in in any hurry to learn. So, I told Henry Ford “No, thank you, I have everything I need right here” and Mr. Ford and Mr. Edison left. I’ve seen only one of them Tin Lizzie’s in my life, and what I seen ain’t impressed me much. You ask me, the days of the automobile are numbered...

### b) POV – MAGGIE

Maggie is Bill Plummer’s wife and, unlike her husband, she yearns to leave small-town Appalachia and move up North where there is more opportunity for Blacks in the workforce. Maggie has always dreamed of living in a city, of good schools for her children, of going to a butcher shop for her meat instead of butchering her own, of maybe even having a flush toilet. So when Bill comes home from work one day and tells her he was offered a job up in Detroit – and that he turned it down – Maggie has something to say...

### c) POV – NIPPER THE DOG

Nipper, the British mixed terrier dog who was the mascot for RCA Victrola, talks about his likeness being carved into William Plummer’s phonograph cabinet on permanent display in the Philadelphia Art Museum. Of all the phonograph cabinets he’s associated with, Nipper likes Plummer’s the best – it’s made out of 300 pieces of wood, and has other meaningful symbols carved on it that represent the folklore of Plummer’s people and of the region. Nipper appreciates that sort of pride in one’s heritage – he has it himself. He is a proud Brit.

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## 5. Katherine Goebel Johnson – Marion, VA

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4j\\_LpKzcZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4j_LpKzcZQ)

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#### a) POV – KATHERINE

It's not that Katherine doesn't like teaching at the Carnegie School in Marion, VA. She knows the importance of a good education, especially for Black children in the south, whose opportunities have been limited by Jim Crow. And she is a good teacher, brought to Marion to teach math. But teaching math to high school students isn't enough; she still yearns to solve the mystery locked in numbers. The way they fit together in an equation to answer all the questions humanity has about the existence of the universe. The numbers held all the answers. Someday the numbers would reveal their secrets to her...



Pictured: Katherine Goebel Johnson

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## 5. Katherine Goebel Johnson – Marion, VA [CONT'D]

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### b) POV – VIVIAN

Vivian is a junior at the Carnegie School in Marion, VA – and she hates it. No matter how hard she studies, she fails every math test she takes. The equations and formulas don't make any sense to her – who needs this stuff anyway? When she graduates high school, the only job she's going to get will be cleaning some rich white woman's house – and that's only if she's lucky. No wonder her mama drinks so much. Then Miss Coleman starts teaching at Carnegie, and suddenly the clouds part and the numbers begin to make sense. And with that clarity, Vivian understands that there's more to this world than cleaning houses in Marion, VA – that she can do anything she sets her mind to...

### c) POV – HOWARD

Howard is old-school; when he comes home from work, he expects his wife Debra to have supper on the table. He expects his house to be clean. He expects a woman to know her place. That's how his parents did it, that's how their parents did it, so on and so forth until the time of Adam and Eve. Now that Howard's retired, nothing has changed... except he doesn't need to set an alarm to get up in the morning. So when Debra suggests a late-night movie down the road in Abingdon, he agrees. The movie is Hidden Figures, the story of Katherine Johnson's time at NASA. Howard is dumbstruck – who knew a woman could be so smart? He finds himself rooting for her to get the rocket's trajectory right so she could show those white engineers just who the real brain is! On the way home, Debra reveals that her parents were taught by Katherine at the Carnegie school back in the day. Howard is shocked! "You mean to tell me a woman that smart once lived in Marion, Virginia?" To which Debra replies "There are a lot of smart woman in Marion, Virginia – and one of them is riding in the car with you."

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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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.

### SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

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<https://www.blackinappalachia.org/eksc>

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

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**The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:**

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#### a) POV – GENE

The year is 1947. Gene Turner doesn't know what to do. His son Wilson is determined to leave Lynch for city life up North. Gene doesn't understand – he loves Lynch. He's proud of the work he does in the coal mines – but Wilson insists that he has no future here. Gene reminds Wilson how his father, Dooly, back in 1918, escaped from his life as a sharecropper in Alabama, smuggled out in a wagon filled with watermelons driven by a recruiter from US Steel. It was a harrowing experience, fleeing the injustice of the Jim Crow south, where Black sharecroppers were still at the mercy of the white population. Dooly had been recruited to work in the mines in Lynch, KY. When Gene got old enough, he joined his father in the mines. Now his own son wants to give up the good life they've created in the mountains. Yes, the mining industry is slowing down, but it will never go away. People will always need coal... right?

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## 6. Eastern Kentucky Social Club – Lynch, KY 1969-present [CONT'D]

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### b) POV – WILSON

Wilson, his wife Lorraine, and their three children live in Connecticut now. The year is 1967. Wilson has a good job, his kids go to good schools – Life is looking up. Then last night, his youngest daughter reported all she had learned in school that day about the state of Connecticut, including the state flower – the mountain laurel. Suddenly Wilson is flooded with memories of his childhood and he discovers – to his surprise – that he is homesick for Lynch, homesick for the mountains. In his mind, it is spring, and the mountain laurel is blooming everywhere. He wants to introduce his children to the world in which he was brought up. He wants to show them the school he attended. He wants them to show them what a coal tippie looks like. He wants to take them wading in the creek and hiking up the mountain. He picks up the phone to call his daddy. It's time for a visit...

### c) POV – LILA

The year is 2020. The COVID virus has Americans in a panic. Dr. Lila Turner, Wilson's granddaughter, is a well-known sociologist on the tenure track at a prestigious university in New England. Then one late spring day, a Black man named George Floyd is killed in the streets of Minneapolis by the local police. Protests erupt across the country, and Lila takes a look at the rampant racism still facing her people and what she can do about it. She decides to forego her career track and instead dedicate herself to capturing the history of her grandfather's people in Appalachia – how they got there, the life they built there, and why they left. She is determined to make the voices of Black Appalachia heard.



Pictured: Rita Cole

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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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<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://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kings_Mountain)

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

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#### a) POV – JOHN BRODDY'S GHOST

The ghost of John Broddy doesn't haunt his burial site in Saltville, VA; instead, it hangs out at the Kings Mountain National Military Park in Blacksburg, SC waiting for touring school groups and hoping someone will be able to connect with him and hear the truth about his role in the battle of Kings Mountain – for only once the truth is told can he get on with his afterlife. His chance arrives at last in the shape of 11-year-old Daymond, a Black student who is bored by history and terrified of ghosts. This is Broddy's one chance to explain that he wasn't a hero – heroes have a choice and he had none. He tells Daymond that he found it ironic and foolish to take part in a war where men were fighting for liberty while he was enslaved. That his owner's wife, Elizabeth Campbell, was the sister of Patrick Henry who had uttered the words "Give me liberty or give me death!" and yet Elizabeth refused to free him when Campbell died, even though Campbell had stipulated that in his will. He goes on to his explain his actions in the battle, making certain Daymond understands the circumstances fully and completely. Heaven is on the line...

## 7. John Broddy – Smyth Co., VA Revolutionary War soldier 1780 [CONT'D]

### b) POV – MOSE

Mose is a Black gravedigger at the cemetery in Saltville, VA. It is mid-October, 1859. John Broddy has died and William is digging Broddy's grave for the burial. Everyone knows that John Broddy fought in the Revolutionary War. Everyone knows that he was eventually freed. What Mose can't figure out is why Broddy didn't skedaddle and go live up North after he was emancipated. Why stay in a place that has the right to enslave you? Why let this piece of earth be your final resting place when you could be buried in the Promised Land? Mose would get out if he could. In fact, news has just reached the folks in Saltville about John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry and Brown's doomed plan to raise an army for slaves to fight for their own freedom. Mose figures it's only a matter of time until a war begins, a war that will determine the end of slavery. And when it comes, Mose will be ready...

### c) POV – DAYMOND

Daymond is standing before the grave of John Broddy in Saltville. He carries in his hand his honors sash from his college where graduated summa cum laude in History the day before. He lays the sash on Broddy's grave, something he vowed to do after Broddy's ghost scared a young Black boy into loving history and the role of Black Americans in it. He promises to do John Broddy proud.



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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/letter-to-michael-valentine-from-hannah-valentine-january-30-1838/>

<https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/campbell/>

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

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#### a) POV – HANNAH

The year is 1837. When her enslaver David Campbell is elected Governor of Virginia, Hannah and her husband Michael are forced to separate; Michael goes with the Governor and his family to Richmond while Hannah is left behind to run Montcalm, the family residence in Abingdon. Hannah is allowed to dictate letters to both Mrs. Campbell and her husband while they are away. As she says the words and watches another hand transcribe them into a letter, she is fascinated with the shapes and how they translate into sounds and words. Literacy is one way to escape the bondage of the soul, and Hannah is determined to one day possess this gift for herself...

## 8. Hannah Valentine – Abingdon, VA – 1830's [CONT'D]

### b) POV – SANDRA

The year is 2019. Sandra is a grad student pursuing a degree in African American studies. Part of her research has led her to the Hannah Valentine letters. Her reaction to reading them is not what she expected – when she reads how Hannah sends her love to her master and mistress, Sandra is consumed in fury. How could anyone profess to love the people who forcibly separate husband and wife? How could they love the people who keep them enslaved?



Pictured: Rita Cole

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## 9. Berea College – Day Law – 1904

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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.

### RELEVANT LINK -

<https://bera.libraryhost.com/?p=collections/findingaid&id=295&q=>

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#### a) POV – MARY

The year is 1903. Integration and inclusion were an integral part of Berea College’s charter. Friendships between Blacks and whites had always been expected and encouraged. It’s one of the things Mary loved about going to school there. She had as many white friends as she did Black. And her classmates all shared her passion for education – Mary couldn’t wait to be a teacher! One day, she was walking back from class with a white boy named Jack, a good friend. As they were about to part ways, they hugged. Just at that moment, Delegate Carl Day, the state representative from Breathitt County, was passing by in his buggy on his way to the state capitol in Frankfort. He saw this friendly embrace and was disgusted. He hastened to Frankfort and began working on legislation prohibiting people of different races from attending school together. That law – known as the Day Law – passed the following year. Although the school fought it, Mary and her Black classmates were forced to leave Berea College. But Mary wasn’t about to give up on her dream...

## 9. Berea College – Day Law – 1904 [CONT'D]

### b) POV – FRANKLIN

April, 1904. Franklin is a janitor at Good Samaritan hospital in Lexington, KY. Two weeks ago, a young delegate was brought from Frankfort to Good Sam with a case of pneumonia. His name is Carl Day. He is 26 years old. He sponsored a bill prohibiting integration at Berea College. Franklin's daughter Jesse was attending Berea College, studying to be a nurse. Now she's cleaning white folks' houses to make ends meet. Franklin was proud of Jesse and her dreams. He'd look around at all the white doctors and nurses and think "One day, my girl will be among you." But not now. Not anymore. All because of Carl Day.

When Carl first arrived at Good Sam he started to improve slowly. Then all of a sudden, he wasn't. Then he died. The doctors blame the pneumonia, but truthfully they're not sure what happened. They never thought to ask Franklin...



Pictured: Vince McGill and James Jiggetts

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## 10. Big John Tate – Knoxville Boxer and Olympic Medalist

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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John Tate was on his way up. In the 1976 Montreal Olympics, the Knoxville boxer was part of a team that included future champions Sugar Ray Leonard and brothers Michael and Leon Spinks. Tate himself won the bronze medal in the heavyweight category. He turned pro shortly after and in 1979 won the WBA title. There was talk of a future fight with Muhammed Ali. But first he defend his title against Mike Weaver. In front of a huge crowd at UT's Stokely Arena in Knoxville. Tate seemed to be doing exactly that, until Weave connected on a punch to the head in the 15th round and knocked him out cold. The fight with Ali never materialized. He won a few more fights in the 80's, but his career was in a spiral, as were his finances. To make matter worse, he developed a cocaine habit and sometimes got in trouble with the law. In 1998, when he was only 43, he had a stroke while driving and died in the wreckage.

### SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4NFSOK1VT8>

<https://www.planetsport.com/boxing/features/1976-montreal-olympic-games-sugar-ray-leonard-leon-spinks-michael-spinks-john-tate>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2h5boZzu54>

<https://archive.knoxnews.com/sports/local/muhammad-ali-vs-john-tate-never-materialized-347996a8-219c-6408-e053-0100007f4c80-381881941.html/#:~:text=Tate%20was%20ahead%20going%20into,in%20his%20hometown%20on%20Sept.>

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## 10. Big John Tate – Knoxville Boxer and Olympic Medalist [CONT'D]

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The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:

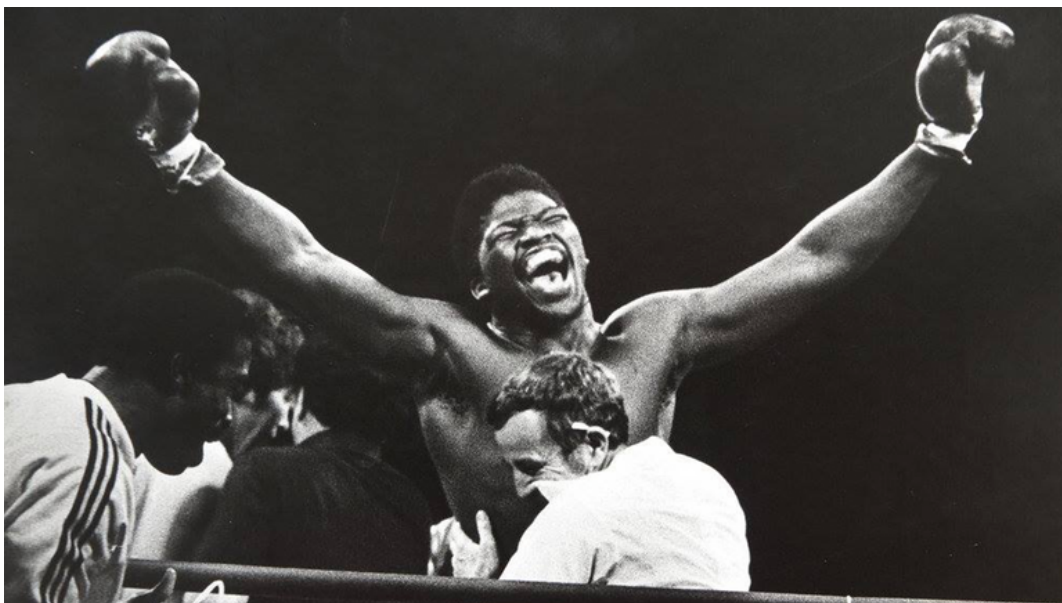
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### a) POV – BIG JOHN

Big John has just received the news that Ali would be willing to come out of retirement and fight him if he is able to defend his title against Mike Weaver. Big John remembers where he's come from, and what he's done to get to where he is today. Overcoming some hardships (a speech impediment), failing at others (he never learned to read, had to sign his contracts with an X) and yet – here he is. Beating Weave – no problem. Watch out, Ali – here I come.

### b) POV – ARTHUR

Arthur, a boxing fan, has been following Tate's career since Tate came to Knoxville. When Tate beat the South African for a chance at the heavyweight title and was given a heroes parade in Knoxville, Arthur was there, cheering him on. Something about Big John spoke to him – maybe it was the poverty they both endured as children. Maybe it was the fact that they were both illiterate. Whatever it was, Big John gave Arthur something to believe in. Now Big John Tate is lying face first on the mat at Stokely Arena. He has been defeated. And with his defeat, Arthur has lost a part of himself he'll never get back. Arthur has lost his hope.



Pictured: Big John Tate

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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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<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))

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**The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:**

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#### a) POV – JOHN

The Civil War is over. John Henry, a Black Union soldier, is trying to leave Richmond and head back North when he is accused of stealing and thrown into the Virginia State Penitentiary. Prison conditions after the war are unspeakably horrible – especially for Black prisoners – so when John is leased from the prison to work on the railroad, it is a relief. Not that the work isn't hard – it is – but nothing is worse than prison. He dreads the day they're finished cutting tunnels through the mountains of West Virginia and he has to go back.

John is a "hammer man" – strong and tough. He works with a "shaker;" the shaker holds the spike against the rock and the hammer man strikes it, splitting the rock. John is good at his job. He can break more rock than anyone else in the railroad camp. Then they bring a mechanical drill into camp – one the foreman thinks can break rock faster than even John Henry. The men in camp begin to speculate as to whether John could beat the machine in a contest. John hears the talk and decides to challenge the machine to a contest. What folks don't know is John made a personal wager with the foreman – if he beats the machine, he never has to go back to prison. He would rather die than go back to prison. The contest begins...

## 11. John Henry – legendary railroader – Talcott, WV 1870's [CONT'D]

### b) POV – TOBY (#1)

Like John Henry, Toby is on work release from the penitentiary. Toby is also a “shaker,” the man holding the spike that John Henry drives. A firsthand witness to the most famous “Man vs. Machine” competition in history. Toby doesn't believe for a second that John Henry can beat that machine, but as the competition heats up and John Henry shows no sign of slowing down, Toby begins to rethink his prediction, wondering if maybe this man will be a man of legend...

### b) POV – TOBY (#2)

Like John Henry, Toby is on work release from the penitentiary. Toby is also a “shaker,” the man holding the spike that John Henry drives. A dangerous job – if John Henry misses the spike and hits Toby's hand, Toby will be crippled for life. Toby is excited for the contest of Man vs. Machine – he knows that he and John make a great team. Toby knows exactly where to place the spike to get the best result, and John knows exactly how hard to hit it. Between the two of them, they can absolutely win. And they do. John Henry dies in the effort, but they win. But the thing is, everybody talks about John Henry: John Henry this, John Henry that. Nobody talks about the guy holding the spike. Nobody talks about Toby...





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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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<https://www.wunc.org/arts-culture/2020-03-09/storyteller-ronnie-pepper-flips-the-script-on-whitewashed-history>

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

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

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

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Pictured: Ronnie Pepper

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## 12. The Kingdom of the Happy Land 1860's-early 1900's [CONT'D]

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The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:

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### a) POV – TYBEE

My people come from Georgia. Well, first we was from Africa. Then my great granddaddy was brought on a boat from Africa all the way to Tybee Island. That's how I got my name. Tybee. My daddy told me once that my great granddaddy was an African king. I used to imagine what that would be like, wearing robes and a crown and having folks bring you food while you was still laying in the bed... When my granddaddy was a young man, he was sold to a slaver heading west – that's how my daddy and me ended up in Mississippi, working the cotton. Every day I be out there, sweating and hurting, I be dreamin about the day I would be king. And how I would live. No more hot sun. No more lash. No more cotton. Mr. Montgomery, the owner here, had a white preacher come talk to us one Sunday. Taught us a song what starts "There is a happy land, far, far away..." Song goes on to talk about kingdoms and crowns... I heard that preacher tell Mr. Montgomery that his people come from western North Carolina. He called it the most beautiful place on earth, with trees and rivers and mountains that reach to the sky. I reckon that's the Happy Land he's talking about... Now the War's over and me and my people are free, I'm going to that place. No matter how long it takes, I'm going to that Happy Land and I'm going to build me a Kingdom there. Any of my people who want to come with me can come. I will lead them to the Happy Land. And I will be King.

### b) POV – ADRIAN

The year is 2007. Adrian Montgomery is a Black college student living in Asheville, KY. An article comes out in the local paper about the Kingdom of the Happy Land, an enclave settled by freed Blacks near the town of Tuxedo, NC back in the 1860's. The "kingdom" was said to have lasted for 40 years. The paper mentions that the Kingdom was ruled by King Robert Montgomery and his sister-in-law Queen Louella. Roberts parents died when he was a teenager, too young to express interest in his family's roots. He has felt alone and adrift ever since their passing. Is it possible that he might find connection in this place, a hint of who he was and where he might have come from? Adrian is determined to find out...

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## 13. Opioid Epidemic in Black Appalachian Communities - Present

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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

### SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

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

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

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

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Pictured: Patrice Foster

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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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[https://www.cvillepedia.org/Vinegar\\_Hill](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>

[https://www.c-ville.com/The\\_echo\\_of\\_Vinegar\\_Hill/](https://www.c-ville.com/The_echo_of_Vinegar_Hill/)

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**The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:**

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#### **a) POV – PASTOR TILLMAN**

Tomorrow's the day. The day Pastor Tillman will preach his last sermon at Zion Union Baptist Church in Vinegar Hill. The next day, the building will be torn, razed like the rest of the Black neighborhood to make way for "urban renewal," which every Black person knows means making more room for the white folks. How is Pastor Tillman supposed to preach on the love of God when God is allowing this to happen? How is he supposed to preach on loving your neighbor when your neighbor voted to tear down your home, your workplace, your church?? How many times does the Black community have to turn the other cheek? And to what end? This is Pastor Tillman's last shot at helping his people through this devastating crisis – for some, he is their only hope. How can he help them when he's in crisis himself? When he's so mad he wants to shoot someone? Tillman knows that he and God are in for a long night...

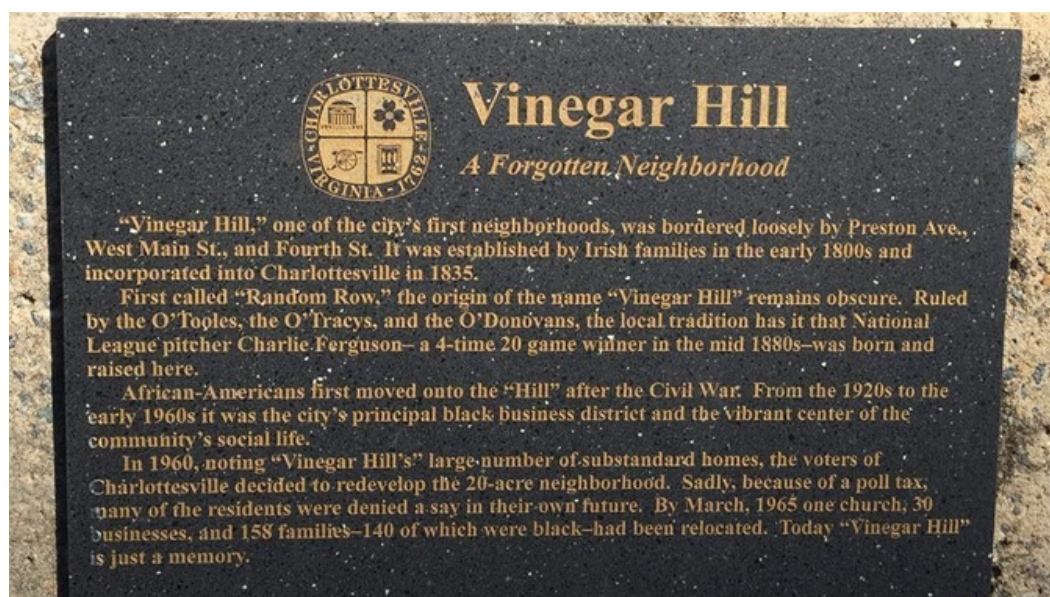
## 14. The Destruction of Vinegar Hill – Charlottesville, VA 1960's [CONT'D]

### b) POV – KITTY

This thing – tearing down Vinegar Hill – that ain't the first time it happened. Bought my house in 1833. First free Black woman in Charlottesville to own a home. Made my living doing laundry for the white students going to school at the University of Virginia. I worked hard. Those folks had clean clothes, no doubt about it. Word got out, more students come to see me. Business grew. Never got rich, but I made do. And I owned my home.

Soon more free Black folks moved in the area – then more. And more. Got to be so many free Black folks in the neighborhood that the white folks took to calling it Canada. It was a good neighborhood. None of us rich, but we took care of each other. But thing is, white folks up at the college, they don't like looking at us. Oh, they like their clothes clean. They like their horses groomed and their ditches dug. They just don't like the look of the folks doing that work. Don't like looking at the houses we live in neither. Built a big building – Cabell Hall they call it – on the south edge of campus so they won't have to see us no more. But that weren't enough. That college kept growing – more and more white folks coming – and after a few years they creeping into our neighborhood, buying up our property, making it impossible for other Black folks to buy there...

'Course, I was long dead by then. I died in 1863, two years before Freedom come to all my people. But from where I now sit, I could see it all happen. And I ain't surprised. Canada. McKee Row. Vinegar Hill. Gospel Hill. On and on and on. No, I ain't surprised. White folks – that's how they do.



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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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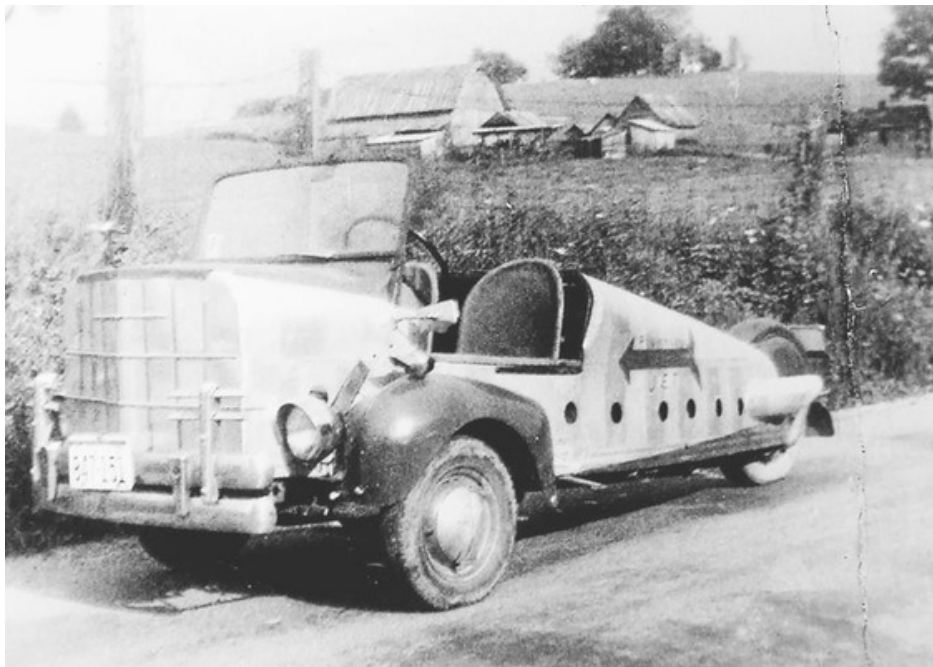
Like his father (Bill Plummer, #4) Harry Plummer was a born machinist who invented the Plummer Comet, a three-wheeled automobile. Another interesting take on this story is Black archivist Diane Hayes's recent excursion to see the Plummer Comet. She traveled to the warehouse where it is currently stored, 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:

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[https://swvatoday.com/smyth\\_county/news/article\\_7e0e6b6e-b8e9-11e6-8e5f-47cf49edc9b0.html](https://swvatoday.com/smyth_county/news/article_7e0e6b6e-b8e9-11e6-8e5f-47cf49edc9b0.html)

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Pictured: The Plummer Comet

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## 16. Harry Plummer – The Plummer Comet – Chilhowie, VA 1950's [CONT'D]

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The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:

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### a) POV – HARRY

Here's the thing. Growing up in Chilhowie, VA with Bill Plummer as your daddy meant you was a child of legend. Wasn't nothing Bill Plummer couldn't build using his own two hands and his brilliant mind. Folks – both Black and white – called my daddy a 'mechanical genius' – and they was right. So, two things come of that: a) I learned a lot at my daddy's knee. He taught me everything he knew and b) it was hard finding my way to being my own man, not just Bill Plummer's son. Hard to determine my legacy.

Then I got to thinking – my daddy spent a lot of time working on automobiles at his job in the auto garage in Chilhowie. (Did you all know Henry Ford offered him a job once and he turned it down?? Typical Daddy.) But in all that time, Daddy never built a car of his own. Maybe this was my chance – my chance to do something never done. To make a name for myself. So here I go – and when I'm done, it will run faster than a comet...

### b) POV – CAROLINE

Mama takes me to town every year for the Chilhowie Apple Festival. I hate going. First of all, I hate apples. Second of all, I hate Chilhowie. Third of all, I hate people, especially people at the Apple Festival. They all look so happy, like they ain't got a care in the world. I guess that makes sense for the white folks, but them Black folks all smiling like everything's all right with the world... well, they ain't paying attention if you ask me. World's got a lot wrong with it. I try to talk to Mama about it, tell her how much I hate it here, how much I want to get away, but how I never will cuz we don't got the money to leave. And Mama says "if there's a will there's a way." And I say "you can have all the will in the world but if you don't got the money you're out of luck." And Mama say "You just ain't thinking about this right. You got to think outside the box, Caroline." Think outside the box. Who in all of Chilhowie, Virginia has ever thought outside the box? You show me one person who's done that and I promise I will find a way for my mama and me to never pick apples for Mr. Duncan again. That's what I'm thinking while Mama makes me watch that stupid Chilhowie Apple Festival Parade. That's what I'm thinking when all of a sudden I see this car coming up the parade route – except it ain't a car, exactly. It's got 2 wheels in front, but only one wheel in back.

## 16. Harry Plummer – The Plummer Comet – Chilhowie, VA 1950's [CONT'D]

The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:

### b) POV – CAROLINE [CONT'D]

A Black man is behind the wheel of this contraption, waving and smiling... “Who’s that, Mama?” I ask. “That’s Mr. Harry Plummer” she say. “And that thing he’s driving is called the “Plummer Comet. He made it himself” “I never seen anything like that before. How’d he do it?” And my mama turns to me and she say “He thought outside the box, Caroline. He thought outside the box.” And I knew why Mama dragged me to this parade. And I knew from that day on my life was gonna be different.



Pictured: Aleah Vassell



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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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When Wilhelmina 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, Wilhelmina 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.

### SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

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

[https://swvatoday.com/news/article\\_75f362d1-a85a-5596-837f-1afd8cc3acad.html](https://swvatoday.com/news/article_75f362d1-a85a-5596-837f-1afd8cc3acad.html)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mcb709tOW-g>

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**The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:**

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#### a) POV – WILHELMINA

Right across the street from where I live here in Bristol, Virginia is Thomas Jefferson Elementary School. I'd like to go there, it being so close and all, but only the white children can go there. So I go to Douglass School instead. I like school. I like my friends. I like my classes. I especially like history – learning about people and the things they did and why they did them. Except in our schoolbooks, all I see is pictures of white folks. It's like Black folks don't have a history. Like we're invisible or something. I talked to Mama about it. She said we have a history, all right – you just won't ever see it in a white man's museum. I asked Mama what a museum was, and when she told me I promised her one day that I would have a museum, too, someday – but that my museum would be for the Black folks. Mama didn't laugh at me – she didn't even smile. She just looked deep in my eyes and said "Do it, Willy – do it."

## 17. Wilhelmina Banks and the Nyumba Ya Tausi-Peacock Museum – Bristol, VA [CONT'D]

### b) POV – SONNY

Sonny is Wilhelmina's son, and he's worried. She's getting on up in years and she called him last night to talk about her museum. The Nyumba Ya Tausi Peacock Museum has a vast collection of artifacts both African and African-American – it is his mother's passion. Her Life's Purpose. It occupies almost every inch of her house. And she wants to pass it on to him. Wants him to take care of it for "future posterity." But if Sonny is honest, he doesn't want anything to do with that museum of even the town of Bristol, VA. He's moved on from all that, His life in the city is good. History is the past. He wants to live in the Present... But how is he going to tell his mama that?



Pictured: James Jiggetts

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## 18. Going Home - Bristol, TN

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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.

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Pictured: Donovan Price

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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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.

### SOURCES/RELEVANT LINKS:

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

[https://swvatoday.com/smyth\\_county/news/article\\_fbalf9cc-7659-11e8-a05b-ffe76cf4384d.html](https://swvatoday.com/smyth_county/news/article_fbalf9cc-7659-11e8-a05b-ffe76cf4384d.html)

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

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Pictured: Jimmy Plummer

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

### PLOT OVERVIEW:

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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:

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

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

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## 20. The Appalachian African American Cultural Center – Pennington Gap, VA - Present [CONT'D]

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The following are sample points-of-view (POVs) that you can use, be inspired by, or simply ignore. They are all FICTIONAL, examples of using the prompts as jumping off points for our imagination:

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### a) POV – JILL

Love. That's what I felt the minute I saw him. Tall. Handsome. Black. Black as the coal they dug from the mountains he grew up in. Love. That's what he felt for me. It's what he also felt for the mountains he grew up in. Couldn't live without those mountains. They had a pull on him he couldn't resist. And I couldn't resist him. So I left the New England city where I was born and raised and I moved with this man to Pennington Gap, Virginia – population 2000. Population of Black people – less than 100. What have I gotten myself into?

Love. I began to understand the pull of these mountains. The pull of these people. Still, there were issues. I was a Yankee. I was an outsider. I was Black. But my husband helped me. He had grown up here. And they loved him. So they learned to love me. Love. That's what my husband felt for a building – an old one room schoolhouse built in the 1930's for the Black children. My husband's mother had gone to school there as did my husband, until desegregation forced it to be closed in 1965. "Why do you want that old building?" I asked him. "It served our people once," he said. "I think it can serve them again." And that's how the idea for the AAAC Center was born. A place for the story of my husband's people – now my people as well – to be documented. We are small in number, but we are mighty and we matter. An idea born of Love.

### b) POV – GRAY

I hang out these days in the Appalachian African American Cultural Center – to the left, when you come in the door. Some of you might think that's strange. Just so you know, I didn't always hang out here. Used to, a long time ago now, I used to hang out, live and in person, at the ballfield. I love baseball. Sleep, eat, breathe that game. Mind you, this was before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. This was when the Negro Baseball League was in full swing, and I was one of its superstars, playing for the Homestead Grays. We didn't think of the historical aspect back in those days. We was just doing what we loved best – playing ball. But it was important, wasn't it? Showing white folks that the game belonged to all of us. Showing them we was every bit as good, if not better, than them. That despite the low pay and less-than-great conditions, we persevered. So yeah, I guess I deserved it – deserved to have my picture painted. Deserved to have it hanging in that Cultural Center. I only hope one day, some young Black child sees it and asks "Who's that?" And you can bet I'll be watching as my story continues to be told...



# MONOLOGUE COMPETITION

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



**BARTER**  
THEATRE



**2023**

# 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](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: [tjackson@bartertheatre.com](mailto:tjackson@bartertheatre.com)

2024 Submission Deadline: October 1, 2023

4-6 monologues will be selected to be performed during Barter's Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights (Jan./Feb. 2024 – date TBD)



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**2023**



# MONOLOGUE PROMPTS



Pictured: Terrance Jackson



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