

SHINE PROMPTS

2026

Hello Playwrights! As you may have read on our website, it is our hope that by connecting Black playwrights (wherever they are located) with stories from Black Appalachian communities, we can:

- Create monologues or scenes that can be developed into full-length plays
- Create 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

Our theme for our 2026 Shine event is: **Black Joy**

Definition: (N) Joy – a feeling of great pleasure and happiness

Black Joy: A concept and practice for Black people to find, express, and celebrate positive experiences, emotion, and aspects of their identity and culture.

Below are prompts based around Appalachia for those who may be unfamiliar with the area. We encourage you to use them to build a world around or as inspiration. Feel free to use one or more POV's per story if you so chose to use one of our prompts. If you have a story that is calling to you already that is based in Appalachia please go forth with your heart.

We look forward to what you all create!

Thank you for your work.

1- George - The return to his roots

George, a native Californian, receives a letter informing him that a distant relative in Appalachia has left him “the family estate.” George decides to see this inheritance for himself, but soon discovers the “estate” is nothing more than a small, ramshackle house containing only one item... a banjo. Little does he know that banjo holds the power to restore George to the family and community for which secretly yearns.

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a) POV – George

Head of his law firm. A divorce lawyer who has never married. A workaholic who finds himself increasingly disconnected from the world around him. With no family, no friends, and no community, his loneliness abounds. Then he receives an unexpected letter from the small town of Harlan, Kentucky...

b) POV – Banjo

A family heirloom passed down from generation to generation. It holds the family's secrets, history, love, pain, and wisdom - and desires nothing more than to pass on that knowledge, but its lessons can only be learned when its strings are plucked...

b) POV – Mamaw

The town wise woman. Grounded in reality yet in touch with the ancestors. She holds the history of the town's Black community, and more specifically, George's family. She remembers a time when the banjo music rang from that house, and is desperate for it to return.

2- Jamesha - The Beauty Shop

Jamesha is new to rural Appalachia and unsure where she fits in. Another unexpected challenge: none of the white hair salons know how to tend a Black woman's hair. Then Jamesha discovers a Black beauty shop that not only caters to her needs but provides a sacred space, a safe haven, and the community she so desires.

a) POV – Jamesha

Recently relocated from Chicago to Bristol, Virginia to teach chemistry at a local college, she's having difficulty creating her own personal chemistry with the folks already living in the region. And what kind of place doesn't have a beauty shop that can tend to her hair? Then she meets Tina...

b) POV – Tina

Tina owns a beauty shop catering to the Black community that also serves as a gathering place. Tina's curious about her new client, a woman from Chicago who has opinions about the people who live in these mountains. Perhaps the professor needs to learn a few lessons herself about pride of place and small town Appalachian community...

3- Christian– Soul food

After years of disappointment in the culinary field, Christian finds himself back home in southwest Virginia where he is finally able to reconnect to his soul and the food that feeds it.

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POV – Christian

Christian was born and raised in the southwest Virginia mountains, and grew up attending his community's fish fries, where his father was in charge of preparing the fish. Christian had dreams of culinary success on a much larger scale, but after years of training and working in failed restaurants in the City, he decided to forgo his dream and return home. Then tonight he attends his father's fish fry for the first time in years... and something unexpected happens.

POV – Okra

This plant is a descendant of seeds smuggled on a ship when Christian's ancestors were brought to this country from Africa. Since then, both the plant and the land in which it grows have thrived. Its flavor has inspired Christian's family for generations. Now Christian needs that inspiration more than ever... how can the Okra and all its power save Christian from giving up his dreams forever?

POV – Marcus

Christian's father is a leader in the Black community and the man in charge of the fish fries. He doesn't own any fancy restaurants – just the shack where he provides good soul food for the people he loves. Now Marcus is dying, and his son, unaware of his father's health issues, has returned home disappointed and despairing. Can Marcus help his son understand the connection between his dream and this community before it's too late?

4 - Marissa – The Jug

Marissa's grandmother has passed, and instead of receiving a monetary inheritance, which would help pay the bills, Marissa is left instead with an old piece of pottery known as a face jug.

POV – Marissa

Marissa is the black sheep of her family, struggling to find her way past the bad luck she seems to attract. Now the only relative she speaks to - her grandmother - has died, and she can't help but feel unlucky again when she receives her inheritance - a face jug. Then that night, after bringing the face jug into her small house, she discovers a magic that just might change her luck forever...

POV – Face Jug

Made with the loving hands of one of Marissa's ancestors, this jug has been passed down through generations of Marissa's family. Its purpose is to ward off bad luck for anyone who cherishes it and keeps it safe. Its eyes have witnessed many things through the years, and it is

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ready to share its story - and its luck - with the person who values it - and family - more than anything else.

POV – Grandma

When she was alive, Grandma was the only one in the family who never gave up on Marissa. Now that she's gone, her only hope of moving Marissa into a better future is connecting with her through the face jug. Will the gift she gave be enough to convince Marissa that luck relies mostly on making good choices, and choosing family might be the best choice she could ever make...?

5 - Tony – Regeneration

Tony, in spite of having his faith challenged by his father's death, feels called to fix up a dilapidated shack church, unaware that it has roots to the town and to himself.

POV – Tony

A young pastor whose dreams of leaving his small Appalachian town (Damascus, VA) and opening a megachurch in a large city have been shattered by the recent death of his father. Tony, his faith shaken, takes a walk and stumbles upon a little house he'd never seen before - no more than a shack, really. Why can't he walk away? Why does he feel this shack is calling to him? What could it possibly want? What about his dreams of the city and all it holds?

POV – The Shack

A sanctuary to many yet - currently - a home to none. Empty. Abandoned. Yet Shack remembers his glory days, and the spiritual home he provided for the community. Then today a young man walks by, and Shack realizes he has seen that same face many, many years ago. This young man - he is the one...

POV – Mary

Tony's mother is struggling with her loss of faith after the death of her husband, fearing that joy and hope are gone forever. Then her son stumbles on the old shack that served as the community's church back when her husband was a young boy. The same church where that young boy made one of the bravest decisions of his life. Could this be the sign she was hoping for...?

POV – The Mountains

They have protected the shack for years in hopes that someone would come and bring it back to life, because the Shack gave the mountains something nothing else ever had - or could...