

Alliance Theatre

Institute

Study Guide
THE MOUNTAINTOP

Created by: Vallea Woodbury



By playwright:
Katori Hall

Directed by Tinashe Kajese-Bolden
August 30-September 22, 2024
Coca-Cola Stage

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Content Advisory

Best enjoyed by audiences ages 14 and up. Contains occasional explicit language, including derogatory language regarding sexuality; depicts drinking alcohol and smoking a cigarette as well as references to gun violence.

Georgia Standards of Excellence

English Language Arts

- ELAGSE9-10RL2: Determine a theme and/or central idea of text and closely analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- ELAGSE9-10RL3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme
- ELAGSE9-10RL4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone.)
- ELAGSE9-10RL5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise
- ELAGSE11-12RL2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- ELAGSE11-12RL3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- ELAGSE11-12RL4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- ELAGSE11-12RL5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Social Studies

- SSCG7 Demonstrate knowledge of civil liberties and civil rights.
- SSUSH21 Analyze U.S. international and domestic policies including their influences on technological advancements and social changes during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations
 - SSUSH21.b Connect major domestic issues to their social effects including the passage of civil rights legislation and Johnson's Great Society, following the assassination of John F. Kennedy.
 - SSUSH21.c Describe the impact of television on American culture including the presidential debates (Kennedy/Nixon, 1960), news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, the moon landing, and the war in Vietnam.

- SSUSH21.d Investigate the growth, influence, and tactics of civil rights groups, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Letter from Birmingham Jail, the I Have a Dream Speech, and Cesar Chavez.
- SSUSH21.e Describe the social and political turmoil of 1968 including the reactions to assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, the Tet Offensive, and the presidential election.
- SSUSH23 Assess the political, economic, and technological changes during the Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations.

Theater

- TAHS.A.CN.2 Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context
 - Examine and apply theatrical theories, performances, and conventions from a variety of theatrical literature, historical periods, and cultures.
- TAHSFT.RE.1 Engage actively and appropriately as an audience member.
 - a. Articulate why the relationship between the audience and performers is critical to the success of the production and demonstrate appropriate audience behavior. b. State and support aesthetic judgments through experience in diverse styles and genres of theatre.
- TAHSFT.CN.1 Explore how theatre connects to life experiences, careers, and other content.
 - a. Examine how theatre reflects real life
- TAHSFT.CN.2 Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context.
 - a. Identify and analyze plays and dramas from a variety of historical periods and cultures.
 - b. Explore the works of milestone playwrights and plays, and the relevance of historical theatre.
 - c. Recognize historical events that have influenced the role of theatre and how theatrical events have impacted cultural development.
 - d. Interpret cultural and historical research for use in a production.

About the Play

Winner of the Olivier Award, *The Mountaintop* is a gripping reimagining of events the night before the assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Taking place on April 3, 1968, an exhausted Dr. King retires to his room at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis after delivering one of his most memorable speeches. When a mysterious young woman named Camae delivers room service, the two engage in humorous conversation that progresses into a soul-searching discussion about their mutual hopes and fears. When Camae reveals a secret, King is forced to confront his destiny and his legacy to his people.

-Alliancetheatre.org

About the Playwright



Katori Hall is a Pulitzer Prize and Olivier Award-winning playwright and television creator/producer born in Memphis, Tennessee. A two-time Tony Award nominee, she won the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for her play, *The Hot Wing King*, which she directed at the Alliance Theatre in early 2023, her directing debut.

For Broadway, she most recently wrote and produced the hit musical, *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*, based on the life of the iconic performer, receiving two Tony Award nominations for her work as both playwright for 'Best Book of a Musical' and as producer in the 'Best Musical' category.

Her play, *The Mountaintop*, premiered at Theatre503 in London in 2009, then transferred to the West End, where she won the Olivier Award for Best New Play in 2010. It later opened on Broadway in October 2011 to critical acclaim in a production starring Samuel L. Jackson and Angela Bassett.

Katori's other works include the award-winning *Hurt Village*, which is currently in development as a feature film; plus, *Hoodoo Love*, *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning*, *WHADDABLOODCLOT!!!*, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, *Purple is the Colour of Mourning* and *The Blood Quilt*.

She is currently the showrunner and Executive Producer of the Starz drama series, *P-Valley*, which she adapted from one of her stage plays. Katori recently signed an overall deal with Lionsgate Television to continue to develop and produce groundbreaking content across their linear and streaming platforms.

Katori is also the proud recipient of the Susan Smith Blackburn Award, Lark Play Development Center Playwrights of New York (PONY) Fellowship, two Lecompte du Nouy Prizes from Lincoln Center, Fellowship of Southern Writers Bryan Family Award in Drama, NYFA Fellowship, the Columbia University John Jay Award for Distinguished Professional Achievement, National Black Theatre's August Wilson Playwriting Award and the Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award.

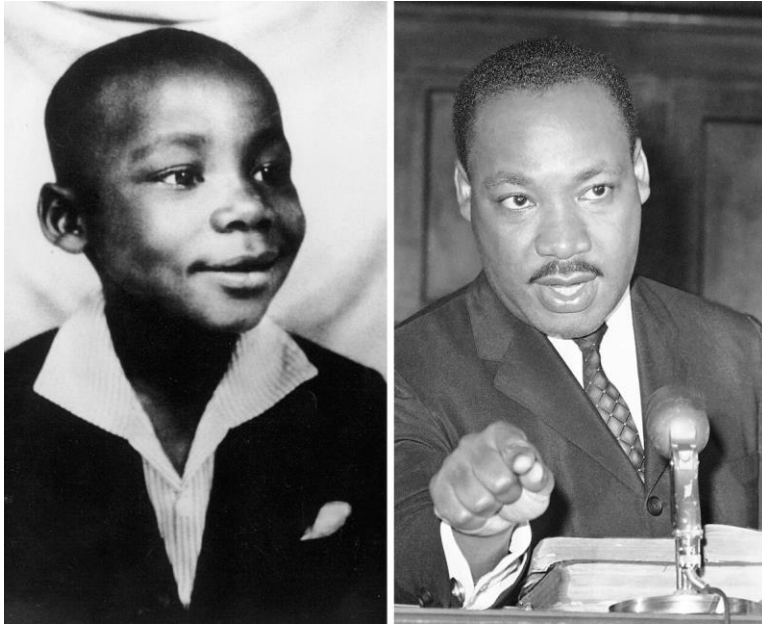
- www.katorihall.com

The Characters



Actors Rob Demery and Jade Payton on the first day of rehearsals for the Alliance Theatre's production of *THE MOUNTAINTOP*.

King, or Martin Luther King Jr.



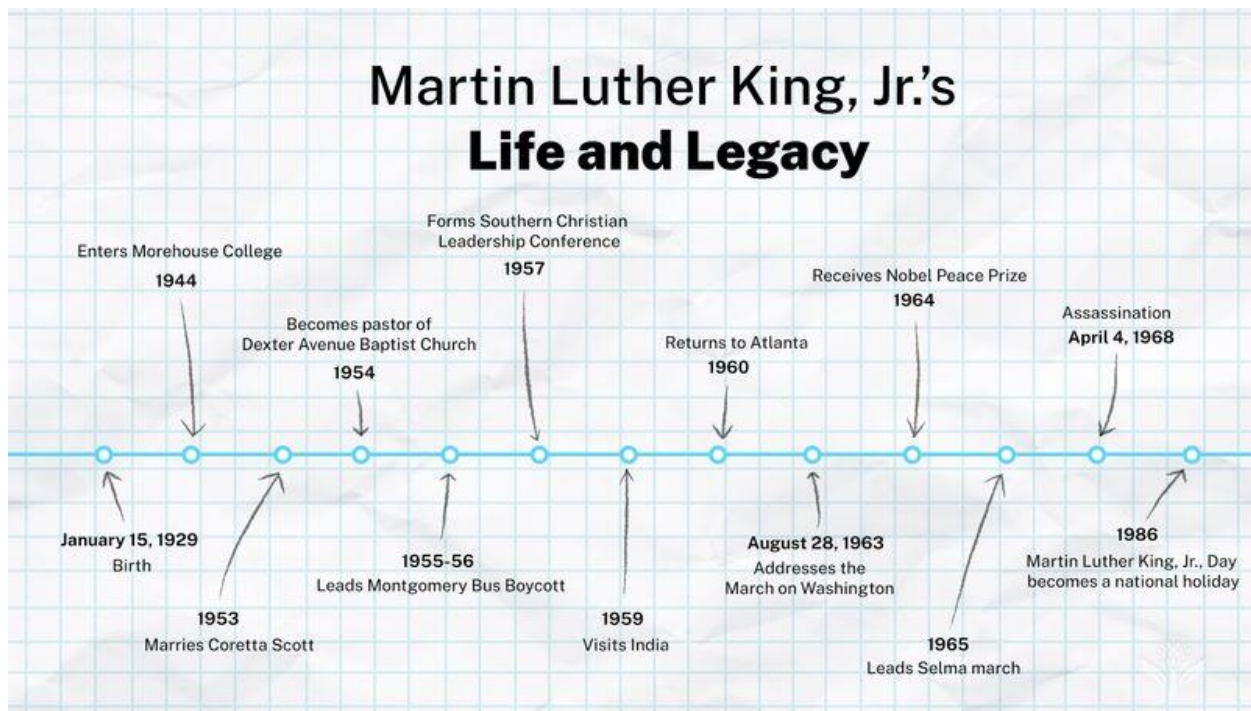
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia and died April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. King was a Baptist minister and social activist who led the civil rights movement in the United States from the mid-1950s until his death by assassination in 1968. His leadership was fundamental to that movement's success in ending the legal segregation of African Americans in the South and other parts of the United States. King rose to national prominence as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which promoted nonviolent tactics, like the massive March on Washington in 1963, to achieve civil rights. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

King grew up with his family on Auburn Avenue, otherwise known as "Sweet Auburn," the "Black Wall Street," home to some of the country's largest and most successful Black businesses and Black churches in the years before the civil rights movement. Both his father and maternal grandfather were Baptist preachers. King's father took over for his father-in-law as pastor of the prestigious Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

In 1944, at age 15, King was admitted to Morehouse College. Before beginning college, King spent the summer on a tobacco farm in Connecticut; it was his first extended stay away from home and his first substantial experience of race relations outside the segregated South. He was shocked by how peacefully the races mixed in the North. "Negroes and whites go [to] the same church," he noted in a letter to his parents. "I never [thought] that a person of my race could eat anywhere."

After negative experiences with racism and segregation at home in the south, this experience made him dislike segregation even more.

After graduating from Morehouse in 1948, King went to Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania to study to be a preacher. At Crozer, he learned about Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. From there, King went to Boston University and met his wife Coretta Scott in Boston while studying there for his doctorate. They were married in 1953 and had four children. 2 years later in 1955, King had been pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, when the city's small group of civil rights advocates decided to contest racial segregation on that city's public bus system. Following the incident in which Rosa Parks, a black woman, refused to surrender her bus seat to a white passenger and was arrested for violating the city's segregation law, activists formed the Montgomery Improvement Association to boycott the transit system and chose King as their leader. This was the start of his rise and service as a leader of the civil rights movement until his death.



Timeline: Martin Luther King Jr., and the civil rights movement

Camae, a maid on her first day of work at the Lorainne Hotel. Short for Carrie Mae, Camae is named after Katori Hall's mother, Carrie Mar Golden. Carrie Mae lived down the street from the Lorraine Hotel and wanted to go see Dr. King's speech on April 3, 1968. Her mother said no. Through the play, Katori gives her mother a chance to meet Dr. King after all.

**Camae is a fictional character created for this play.



Costume Designs for the Alliance Theatre's production of THE MOUNTAINTOP. Costume Design by Kara Harmon.

The Mountaintop – what does it mean?

The Mountaintop is a biblical reference to Moses. Moses led his people, the Israelites, out of enslavement in Egypt. This is called the Exodus. He led them to Mount Sinai and the borders of Canaan. His people then went on into Canaan without him. While on the journey, Moses sinned by not obeying God's will and was punished by being barred from the Promised Land. He was allowed to see the Promised Land from the top of a mountain (Mount Nebo) but was not allowed to enter it.

Canaan / The Promised Land – In the bible, the Land of Canaan is the territory that God gave Abraham and his descendants in the Book of Genesis. It is also known as the 'Land of Israel', the 'Holy Land' and the 'Promised Land.' Now, we think of something promised as any place or situation believed to hold ultimate happiness.

The Speech – In Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I've been to the Mountaintop" speech, he is using Moses and The Promised Land as metaphors for equal civil and human rights for all. He says:

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.



Think of an idea or cause that you believe in, and think is important enough to convince others to join you. How can you persuade others to join your cause? Think about the arguments you want to make and styles of speech you can use to win over the crowd. Write a speech to share with your audience.

Events Surrounding “I’ve been to the Mountaintop”

The Events Surrounding “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”
By Morgan Yhap, Kenny Leon Intern
Design by Felicity Massa

THE MOUNTAINTOP takes place during the last night of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life, imagining what the Civil Rights leader might have been contemplating and who he might have spoken with in his room at The Lorraine hotel in Memphis, TN.

While Katon Hall fictionalizes what happens on April 3rd, 1968, many of the events leading up to and following that night are well-documented. King's journey to the mountaintop demonstrates not only the commitment of a national leader, but also the uncertainty of a man carrying the weight of a legacy larger than himself.

FEB 1st
Two Memphis sanitation workers are crushed by a malfunctioning garbage truck, casting a light on their poor working conditions and low wages, this leads to a strike.

MAR 18th
King arrives in Memphis to rally the workers and organize a protest in support of the sanitation strike alongside the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

MAR 22nd
The original protest is rescheduled due to a snowstorm.

MAR 26th
King returns to Memphis to lead the march supporting the strike of sanitation workers, which quickly turns violent. King is rushed away from the scene.

MAR 30th
SCLC staff, concerned for King's safety, deliberate if he should return to Memphis. King decides to lead another march in an effort to refocus the strike's trajectory towards working conditions reform.

APR 3rd
King's flight to Memphis is delayed due to a bomb threat, but he arrives in time to attend the rally at Mason Temple, where he delivers his final speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop."

APR 4th
From media coverage surrounding the rally, James Earl Ray learns that King is staying at the Lorraine Hotel.
3:30 PM
Ray reserves a room in Beessie Brewer's Rooming House under the name "John Willard" and asks for room 5B, which has a direct line of sight to King's room at the Lorraine.
4 PM
Ray purchases a pair of binoculars and returns back to his room at Beessie Brewer's.
5:55 PM
King and Reverend Abernathy emerge from their hotel rooms to leave for a dinner at the home of a local minister. King stands on the balcony to talk to his driver in the courtyard below.
6:01 PM
King is shot.
6:02 PM
Ray leaves his hotel, abandoning a bundle including his rifle, binoculars, and clothing in the doorway of a nearby building.

6:08 PM
A local business owner informs the police that a man had run through the alley and dropped a bundle.
6:09 PM
King is rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital.
6:10 PM
The first police dispatch includes a description of the possible shooter as a "young white male, well dressed, believed in late-model white Mustang, going north on Main from scene of shooting."
6:16 PM
King arrives at St. Joseph's Hospital, unconscious but still alive.
6:30 PM
Police find Ray's abandoned bundle, identifying him as "John Willard" in room 5B who drives a white Ford Mustang. By this time, Ray has crossed state lines. (After a worldwide manhunt, Ray is arrested two months later in London.)
7:05 PM
Dr. King is pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Hospital.

APR 9th
King is buried in Atlanta in a funeral attended by a crowd of over 300,000.

Expand the image and read further: <https://www.alliancetheatre.org/content/the-events-surrounding-ive-been-the-mountaintop>

Allusions

Phrases and Vocabulary

Allusion – an implied or indirect reference, especially in literature; mentions, quotes, and citations.

All a’ God’s children got wings – a phrase from a “Negro Spiritual”*; it’s used to state that all people are equal and deserving of love and the same access to heaven; it also refers to a classic folktale centered around the idea that the enslaved African people in America have the gift of flight and would fly back home to freedom one day.

*African American Spiritual

Blasphemy – insulting or showing contempt, disrespect, or lack of reverence for God.

Bougie – derived from “bourgeois”; a person who is concerned with wealth, possessions, and respectability or status in a higher class; usually a negative or derogatory term.

Bunions and corns – swellings and callousness or hardened skin on a person’s toes; these can be caused by walking, especially in shoes that don’t fit well or are hard and rub against the toes repeatedly.

Catchin’ flies – a person is catching flies when their mouth hangs open like one is surprised, confused, asleep, or drunk. It refers to how frogs and Venus fly trap plants catch flies to eat. Flies go into the open mouth and then the frog or plant snaps their mouth shut.

Children of the Nile – African Americans were sometimes referred to as children of the Nile as in children or descendants of the people of Africa. The Nile River runs through northern to middle Africa going through over half the continent.

Commie – short for communist; a communist is someone who believes in or advocates for the communist party or movement; it’s also used to describe someone engaged in left-wing, subversive, or revolutionary activities.

Diatribes – a bitter verbal attack or criticism.

Divinity School – a professional school with a religious curriculum especially for people studying to be ministers or priests.

Forsook – past tense of forsake: to renounce or turn away from entirely; to give up on.

Fruit – a derogatory term for a homosexual man.

Greyhound – A bus company that has local and national trips across the country.

Hippie pills – recreational drugs; hippies were known as people who frequently took drugs.

Hoarse – a person’s voice sounding rough and harsh, often because of shouting or having a sore throat.

Incognegro – a derogatory term referring to an African American who tries to hide their African heritage.

Injunction – a legal order commanding a person or group of persons to do or not do a particular action.

Jurisdiction – the power or right to interpret the law and exercise authority and/or control the limits of territory within which a person has that authority. Jurisdiction only extends through certain regions, like a town.

Kool's – a brand of cigarette made with menthol, there is evidence that menthol cigarettes are worse for you because they are more addictive and cause people to smoke more.

Living wage – a wage, salary, or pay rate that is enough to provide the necessities essential to an acceptable standard of living; making a living wage means you're being paid enough to pay your standard bills (rent and utilities) and buy food for your household.

Martyr – a person who suffers or is killed while defending a principle, belief, cause, or idea.

Mule of the World – based on a quote from Zora Neale Hurston's book, "Their Eyes Were Watching God" written in 1937. Referring to black women as mules describes the idea that they are considered the lowest of creatures, used for work and to bear or carry heavy loads without any power over themselves or the world around them.

Oratorical – a characteristic of someone with eloquent and superior public speaking ability.

Pall Malls – a brand of cigarettes.

Panic Attack – a short episode of intense fear that causes related physical symptoms including shortness of breath, a racing heart, and dizziness when there is no real danger. Panic attacks come quite suddenly and unexpectedly and often not because of any real threat or danger.

Panther – a member of the Black Panther Party, an African American militant political group active from 1966 until 1982.

Preponderance – carrying superior weight, power, or importance.

Press 'n Curl – a hairstyle common with people with African textured hair in which the hair is straightened by a metal comb, pressing comb, or a flat iron, and then curled with a curling iron. Because there is no chemical treatment, moisture like sweat or rain will ruin the style.

Prevailed – to triumph, win; gave ascendancy through strength or superiority.

Privy – private, aware of a secret.

Ruffle feathers – to upset or offend people; to have your feather ruffled is to be offended or upset. It is a reference to the fact that sometimes birds ruffle and puff their feathers out when they are upset.

Siddity – someone who is pretentious or conceited.

Spook – a spy; also, a derogatory term for an African American.

Square – another word for a cigarette.

Vigilance – to be vigilant is to be constantly alert and watchful especially to avoid danger.

Woolworth's – The F. W. Woolworth Co. was a chain of general-merchandise retail stores based on the concept of the five-and-ten (i.e., a store that sells all items in stock for 10 cents or less). Many stores had a lunch counter where only whites were allowed to eat. In the 1960s activist groups led sit ins during which African American people went in and sat at the counters even though they weren't allowed as a form of protest.



Places

The Lorraine Hotel – Built in 1925, the Lorraine Hotel was a typical Southern hotel accessible only to whites in its early history; it was renamed the Lorraine Motel after the second floor was added. However, by the end of World War II, the Lorraine had become one of the few black establishments, and one of the only hotels providing accommodations to African Americans. Early guests to the Lorraine included Cab Calloway, Count Basie, and other prominent jazz musicians, in addition to later celebrities such as Roy Campanella, Nat King Cole, and Aretha Franklin. Partly because of its historical importance to the black community of Memphis, Martin Luther King Jr. chose to stay at the Lorraine during the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike. It is now the centerpiece of the 3-building National Civil Rights Museum complex in Memphis.

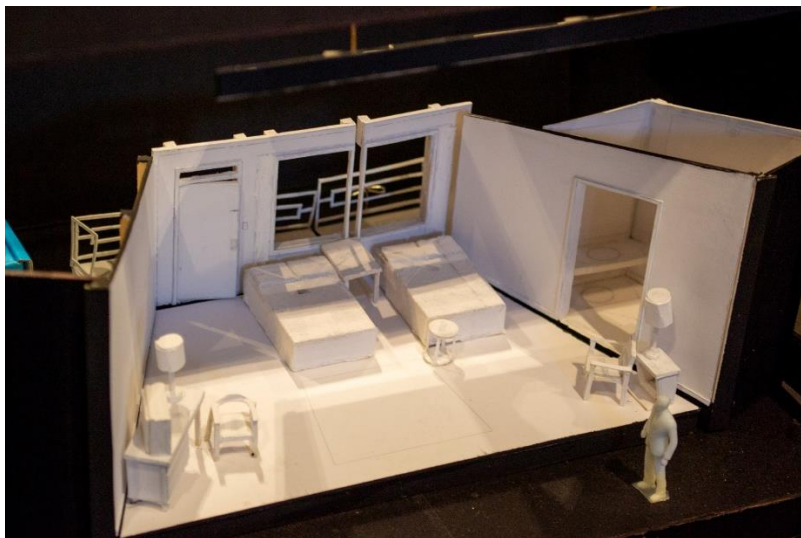


<https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/national-civil-rights-museum/>



Lorraine Hotel

By DavGreg, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18715627>



A model of the set on the first day of rehearsals for the Alliance Theatre's production of THE MOUNTAINTOP. Set Design by Tony Cisek.

Mason Temple – Pentecostal church in Memphis, Tennessee where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his last speech the day before his death. Mason Temple served as a focal point of civil rights activities in Memphis during the 1950s and 1960s. It was built between 1940 and 1945 as the administrative and spiritual center of the Church of God in Christ, the second largest black denomination. The temple is the centerpiece of a group of six buildings that form the church's world headquarters.



Tom Lee Park – a park in Memphis; in the play, Camae says her mother used to take her to see fireworks in Tom Lee Park.

LEARN MORE: Who was [Tom Lee?](#)

People and Movements

Ralph David Abernathy was a leader of the civil rights movement and one of MLK's closest friends. Ralph Abernathy became a central figure in the civil rights struggle during the Montgomery bus boycott. He met King while he was a graduate student at Atlanta University after hearing him preach at Ebenezer Baptist Church. In his autobiography, Abernathy recalled "burning with envy" at King's "learning and confidence," and he immediately saw King as a "man with a special gift from God" (Abernathy, 89). Abernathy introduced himself to King that day and their friendship began.

In 1952 Abernathy became pastor of Montgomery's First Baptist Church. He was active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and in 1957, shortly after Abernathy's home and church were bombed, Abernathy joined with King and other African American leaders to create the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The organization was designed to support the movement to peacefully implement the Supreme Court's decision outlawing bus segregation by coordinating the action of local protest groups

throughout the South. King was elected president of SCLC, and Abernathy became financial secretary-treasurer.

King and Abernathy provided a great deal of support to one another. The two were jailed together 17 times. After King's assassination in 1968, Abernathy became SCLC's president. He followed through with the march that King had planned to lead in support of the Memphis sanitation workers. He also continued efforts to organize the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C., the last major movement of SCLC. In 1989, he wrote a book about his life and times with MLK titled "And the Walls Came Tumbling Down."

Coretta Scott King (Mrs. King) – Martin's Luther King Jr.'s wife and widow was a native Alabamian with a B.A. in music and education from Antioch as well as a Bachelor of Music in Music Education from Boston's New England Conservatory, which is where she was studying when she and King met. They married in 1953 and had four children. She was a partner in the civil rights movement and following Dr. King's death, Mrs. King founded the King Center to fulfil her vision to preserve the places, writings, speeches and sermons, as well as the works associated with Dr. King. She took her own place as a lifelong advocate for human rights and peace, and became an author, writer, and speaker. When she died in January 2006, four presidents attended her funeral as well as future president Barack Obama.



Martin Luther King, Jr., and Coretta Scott King

Icarus – In Greek mythology, Icarus is the son of Daedalus, a mythical inventor. Daedalus created wings made of feathers and wax to escape from Crete where he and his son, Icarus, were held captive by King Minos. Icarus ignored his father's warnings and flew too close to the sun. His wings melted and he fell into the sea where he met his end.

Jesse Jackson – Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. was a leader of the civil rights movement and continues to be a figure and symbol of that movement. He ran for president twice, served as a shadow U.S. senator for the District of Columbia, and later founded the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. Rainbow/PUSH is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization formed from two other organizations combined: Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) and the National Rainbow Coalition. The organizations pursue social justice, civil rights, and political activism.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s Children – King and his wife had four children: Yolanda King, Martin Luther King III, Dexter Scott King, and Bernice King who was only 5 years old when he died.

Bernice King, the youngest of Martin and Coretta’s four children, nicknamed Bunny. Today has been a lawyer and minister and is the current CEO of the King Center as well as of First Kingdom Management, a Christian consulting firm based in Atlanta, Georgia.



Bernice and King; Flip Schulke / Corbis / Getty

Larry Payne – a 16-year-old boy who was shot by Memphis police during a March in support of the sanitation workers’ strike.

Malcolm X – a human rights activist and Muslim minister in the Nation of Islam; he was assassinated in February 1965. The Nation of Islam was a religious group pushing for black self-reliance, and in the 1960s they wanted a return of black Americans to Africa.

Malcolm had a break with the religion in 1964 after he went on a pilgrimage, or religious holy trip, to the city of Mecca.

LEARN MORE: Read more about Malcolm X [here](#).



Martin Luther King, Jr., left, and Malcolm X, right.

Saint Augustine – was a Bishop from the years 396-430, a writer and theologian considered a father of the Catholic Church. According to Augustine, God designed all humans to live together in the “bond of peace.”

Vietnam War – a decades long conflict from 1954-1975 between the communist government of North Vietnam and its allies in South Vietnam against the government of South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. At the heart of the conflict was the desire of North Vietnam to unify the entire country under a single communist regime modeled after those of the Soviet Union and China. The South Vietnamese government, on the other hand, fought to preserve a Vietnam more closely aligned with the West. -Brittanica.com

King spoke out against the war in Vietnam for several reasons –

- it went against his philosophy of non-violence; he felt they should have truce or cease fire to enter peace talks.
- he saw the government as using the lives of poor people and especially black enlisted people to fight in a war benefitting big money and corporations.
- he felt the money and resources used in the war would be better used helping poor people at home in the United States.

He delivered his Beyond Vietnam address at the Riverside church in New York City exactly one year before he was killed in Memphis: April 4, 1967.

What's in a Name?

Martin Luther King Jr.'s birth name was Michael. It's the original name on his birth certificate. He was named after his father, the Rev. Michael King, who everyone called "Daddy King." He was senior pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

In 1934, the church sent "Daddy King" to Europe for a Baptist World Alliance meeting. King traveled to several places in Europe before arriving in Berlin for meeting, including many with religious significance, like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Rome. He also toured many places within Germany, the birthplace of Martin Luther and the reformation of the Protestant church.

When he returned to Atlanta from Germany, Daddy King decided to change his name and his son's from Michael to Martin Luther, after the German Protestant leader, according to the Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford. Michael King Jr. was 5 years old when he became Martin.

King Jr.'s birth certificate wasn't changed until he was 28. In 1957 "Michael" is crossed out, and "Martin Luther Jr." is printed next to it.



Who was [Martin Luther](#)? After you read about him, why do you think Martin Luther King Sr. chose to name himself – and his son – after the man?

Other Themes, Concepts, and Ideas

Passing the Baton – a baton an object passed off between team members in a relay race. The quest for civil and human rights is considered a long race in which every person fighting to progress carries the baton for a distance before passing it on to another to continue the effort.

Separate but equal – In 1896, the Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson established the legal principle of "separate but equal." The ruling stated that laws requiring racial segregation in public accommodations, such as inns and trains, were constitutional if the separate facilities for each race were equal. For example, railroads could provide separate cars for white and Black passengers, but the accommodations in each car had to be the same.

LEARN MORE: W. E. B. Dubois was a major figure in history who had a controversial belief about segregation. [Research his views and actions.](#)

Why America is going to hell... - King in the play is working on his last speech or sermon that starts with this line, repeated multiple time throughout the night as he goes to back to it. In real life, Dr. King called his mother the night before he was killed to tell her the name of his next sermon, “Why America May go to Hell.”



The playwright changes the title slightly from “may go to hell” to “is going to hell.” Why do you think she made this change?

“My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” – A hymn written in 1831 by a Baptist seminary student, Samuel Francis Smith. Smith composed the lyrics after being inspired by a German Lutheran hymn he was translating and set the melody to the tune of "God Save the King. "

King is using this song’s lyrics and changing them to suit his message in his sermon. Many poets, speakers, and musicians have done this. Here are the original lyrics for the first verse.

My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty
Of thee I sing.
Land where my fathers died
Land of the Pilgrims pride
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring.

The FBI and MLK

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began monitoring Martin Luther King Jr., in December 1955, during his involvement with the Montgomery bus boycott, and engaged in covert operations against him throughout the 1960s. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was personally hostile toward King, believing that the civil rights leader was influenced by Communists. This animosity increased after April 1964, when King called the FBI “completely ineffectual in resolving the

continued mayhem and brutality inflicted upon the Negro in the deep South” Under the FBI’s domestic counterintelligence program, King was subjected to various kinds of FBI surveillance that produced alleged evidence of extramarital affairs, and used it to attempt to discredit him, though they showed no evidence of Communist influence. - <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu>

Poor People’s Campaign – a campaign organized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to address the issues of economic justice and housing for America’s poor.



Actors Rob Demery and Jade Payton on the first day of rehearsals for the Alliance Theatre’s production of THE MOUNTAINTOP.

Themes

These themes are at the end of the guide because there are many “spoilers” enclosed. Consider exploring this section with your class after seeing the play for more in depth discussion and debrief of the experience.

Faith and Religion

King was raised in a family of strong faith and was a Baptist Preacher delivering sermons at his church and other churches, in addition to motivational and protest speeches through his adult life. His gift for speaking to a crowd is what drew many to him in his early career and remains one of the best-known traits of his legacy with his speeches now part of literature and legend. Baptists

are Protestant Christians who share many of the basic beliefs of most Protestants. Among these beliefs is that all people are equally worth love and respect, and if they express faith in God and ask forgiveness for sin, all are welcomed into heaven. This belief along with influences from other religions and religious figures (such as Ghandi's views on nonviolence) shaped King's philosophy. In the play, we see Camae challenge King's approach of love and nonviolence toward all. We see King's ideas about God challenged: God is a "she;" God liked Malcom X (a non-Christian and proponent of taking rights by force); God likes dirty jokes; God is Black. All these revelations highlight presumptions King and we, as the audience, might make about the entity of God. These ideas urge us to examine our understanding of God and open our minds to how it affects the ways we judge ourselves and others.



The character of Camae presents a challenge to many religious groups' ideas about God and religion. How? What surprised you about her while watching the play?

Image vs. Reality and Saints vs. Sinners

There has been controversy over reports about Martin Luther King Jr.'s day-to-day life and the image of him as a Civil Rights Icon that many of us know. He smoked, in the play he curses and flirts with Camae and she says he cheats on his wife. There are conflicting reports including recordings from the FBI that claim to prove King was unfaithful to his wife. In the 1960s, it was believed that revealing this key fact about his life would discredit his work and take down the movements he led. Even when rumors spread, however, they had no such effect. One report says he had a long-term relationship with a top aide at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference who he visited at her home in Atlanta every time he returned from a trip out of town before going home to his family. Coretta Scott King, however, is quoted as saying she believed he was faithful.

In the play, in addition to smoking, flirting, possibly cheating, and cursing, King expresses doubts in his mission and the people around him, he even has smelly feet! These are all things that we would expect of any person and yet it is offensive to some to consider that King could be fallible and say and do all the public good that he did.

"I thought you was gone be perfect. Well, you aren't, but then you are." – Camae says this to King in the play.



- **Do you agree that a person can be both great and flawed?**
- Consider an important contemporary figure in the nation or someone who fights for a cause you believe in.
 - What are some of their imperfections?
 - Do they make the person any less of a leader?

Fear

In addition to all the ways the playwright shows us King as a man rather than a symbol high on a pedestal, fear is one of the most humanizing of them. King is afraid of spies and surveillance, checking his room in the first minutes of the play. He brings them up more than once while talking to Camae; He's afraid for his friend Abernathy, he's afraid of failure, and he's afraid of death. His underlying fear spills over into a panic attack. It is natural to be afraid given the regular threats King experienced. Yet, many do not think of him as susceptible to fear. This is one of the things that make his character relatable because we all feel fear. It makes him just like us. More importantly it makes it possible that any one of us could be just as great and have as much influence as him. It also makes King greater because he continues to do the work and fight for his cause despite that fear.



Thinking back over the play and the character, what other emotions and beliefs do the characters talk about that you can relate to? In reality, King did have panic attacks as well as struggles with depression. Does this make him more or less relatable to you?

Assassination

James Earl Ray, who was a fugitive from Missouri State Penitentiary at the time of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death, was arrested June 8, 1968, in London. Ray plead guilty to shooting King and was sentenced to 99 years in the Tennessee State Penitentiary. He maintained his innocence until he died in Prison on April 23, 1998. Although Ray was convicted of the crime, the King family and others believe that the assassination was carried out by a conspiracy involving the U.S. government and that Ray was a scapegoat. Lloyd Jowers was one of the people accused of this conspiracy and a jury concluded that Jowers and "others were part of a conspiracy to kill King," these findings were rejected by the US Department of Justice.

“Live by love, die by hate” Camae says in the play. King’s death was not the first time someone attempted to kill him. On 20 September 1958, Izola Ware Curry, a 42-year-old mentally disturbed woman, stabbed Martin Luther King Jr. at a book signing in Harlem, New York. Curry approached King, said she’d been looking for him for 5 years, and then stabbed him with a seven-inch steel letter opener in the upper left side of his chest right next to his heart. Doctors who operated on him said: “Had Dr. King sneezed or coughed, the weapon would have penetrated the aorta... He was just a sneeze away from death” He received countless threats over the years at churches, his home, and protests. On his last trip to Memphis his plane was temporarily grounded because someone called in a bomb threat.

Love vs. Hate

Camae repeatedly says “live by love you will die by hate.” King offers love to every individual and encourages others to do the same. In response, many of the people he’s pleading with hate him. All his work for peace results in his being killed. Camae on the other hand, says that she hates and had hate in her heart. Rather than show peace, she would fight, and she is still killed, but receives a reward in death.



These varying views are at odds in the United States and the world at large today. Which argument do you think wins in the play? Which would you choose and why?

Further Exploration and writing prompts (post-show)

1. King gets to have a phone conversation with God. If you could talk to any person, alive or dead, who would you choose? Write the scene of this conversation! What would you ask them? What do you imagine they would say back to you?

Watch:

- ❖ Watch the Full “I’ve been to the Mountaintop” speech:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgVrlx68v-0>

**After the speech, this video also contains photos of the aftermath of her assassination.*

- ❖ Interview with playwright, Katori Hall and the actors to start in the original Broadway production (Angela Bassett and Samuel L Jackson): <https://charlierose.com/videos/14492>
- ❖ “The Ballot of the Bullet” speech by Malcom X: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zLQLUpNGsc>



Listen

- ❖ “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee,” traditional song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKj7FLg3WVA>
As sung by Dolly Parton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ds7jonfjXCg>
- ❖ “God save the King:” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4ac6feD1hE>
- ❖ Beyond Vietnam speech by Dr. King: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJhgXKGldUk>
- ❖ “I’m Black and I’m proud” by James Brown: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0A_N-wmiMo
- ❖ “Redemption song” by Bob Marley: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZpxaelCYyg>
- ❖ “Walk the Way” by Run DMC featuring Aerosmith: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4B_UYYPb-Gk



Read!

- ❖ “I’ve been to the Mountaintop” full speech: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>
- ❖ “The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.” by Martin Luther King Jr.
- ❖ “My life with Martin Luther King, Jr.” by Coretta Scott King
- ❖ “Coretta: The Autobiography of Mrs. Coretta Scott King” by Coretta Scott King
- ❖ “And the Walls Came Tumbling Down,” by Ralph David Abernathy
- ❖ “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” by Alex Haley and Malcolm X
- ❖ “Katori Hall Plays 1”, by Katori Hall edited by Contemporary Dramatists.
- ❖ The Eulogy given at MLK’s funeral: <https://time.com/5224875/martin-luther-king-jr-eulogy/>

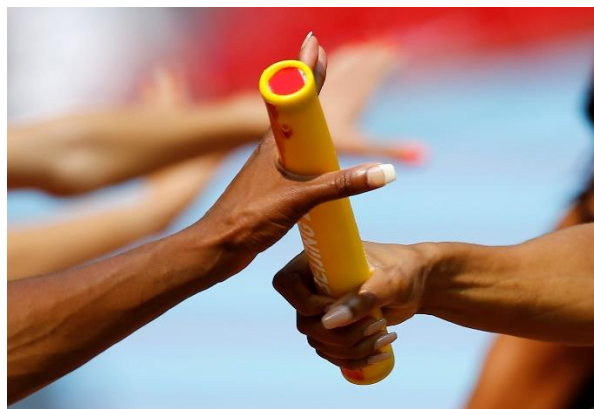


Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking at a press conference, 1964.

Who else has carried the baton?

In the final scene of the play, Camae shows King many moments and people of significance the years after his death. The play was written over 15 years ago. Read through her speech below. Who do you recognize? Are there names and events you don't know about?

1. Pick 3-5 people or things you're not familiar with and look them up. Why do you think they were important enough to include in the vision shown to King?
2. If you could add 3-5 more events or people, which ones would they be? Why?



A member of the U.S. team passes the baton to her teammate during their women's 4 x 400 metres relay heat at the 15th IAAF Championships in Beijing, China

CAMAE: You ready? Let's take you to the mountaintop.

The Prince of Peace. Shot.
His blood stains the concrete
outside Room 306
A worker wipes away the
blood but not before
Jesse baptizes his hands on
the balcony
The baton passes on
Memphis burning
D.C. burning
Cities burning
Vietnam burning
Coffins coming home
Another Kennedy killed
The baton passes on
Bayard Rustin
Stonewall riots
Andrew Young
Julian Bond
Bob Marley
Redemption songs
Angela Davis
Assatta Shakur
Afro picks
Black raised fists
Olympics
The baton passes on
White children
Black children
Crayola-color children
Together in a cafeteria
Roots
The Jeffersons
Sidney Poitier
Superfly
Isaac Hayes
James Brown
I'm black and I'm PROUD!
Jesse for President
I am somebody!
Crips
Bloods

Blue
Red
White
Crack
Smack
Marion Barry
Tracks
AIDS
Reagan wins again
Berlin walls
Apartheid falls
Robben Island sets Mandela
free
Rodney King screams:
"Can't we all just get along?"
The baton passes on
No peace in the Middle East
Ruby Dee
"You sho'll is ugly!"
Spike Lee
Rwanda bleeds
Bill Clinton
Niggah, please
Skinheads
The Cosby Show
Baby mamas
Soul Train
Montel
Don't Ask Don't Tell
Run-DMC
BET
MTV
"Walk This Way"
The baton passes on
And on and on
'Til the break of dawn
For the American song
We shall overcome
A white Bronco flees into the
night
"If it doesn't fit, you must
acquit"

James Byrd
Columbine
Ron Brown
Colin Powell
Clarence Thomas
Tupac
Oprah
Biggie
Crack corners
From Crenshaw
To MLK Boulevard
Saddam Hussein
Osama bin Laden
George Bush
Condi Rice
The towers sigh
The world turns gray
September 11th
One bright morning day
Katrina, Katrina
American as apple pie
Drove the Chevy to the levee
But the Levee was drowned
The Superdome
Drive-bys
McDonald's
Diabetes
Iraq
NBA
High-paid slaves
The children of the Nile rise
A nuclear 8-Mile
Black picket fences
And Jena 6
American flags
And black presidents!
The baton passes on
The baton passes on
The baton passes on
The baton passes on



Funeral procession for Martin Luther King, Jr., April 9, 1968, Atlanta.

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