

# Ten Contemporary African American One-Act Dramas

VOLUME ONE

By Mary Satchell

Copyright © MM  
All Rights Reserved

Heuer Publishing LLC, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

**All performances before an audience are subject to royalty. The first performance royalty fee for one or all of the plays in this volume is \$10.00. Repeat performances are \$10.00 each. Royalty fees are due one week prior to production, at which time performance rights are granted. On all programs and advertising this notice must appear: "Produced by special arrangement with Heuer Publishing LLC of Cedar Rapids, Iowa."**

This dramatic work is fully protected by copyright. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the publisher. Copying (by any means) or performing a copyrighted work without permission constitutes an infringement of copyright.

The right of performance is not transferable and is strictly forbidden in cases where scripts are borrowed or purchased second hand from a third party. All rights including, but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, broadcast, recitation, lecturing, tabloid, publication, and reading are reserved.

**COPYING OR REPRODUCING ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS BOOK IN ANY MANNER IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN BY LAW.** One copy for each speaking role must be purchased for production purposes. Single copies of scripts are sold for personal reading or production consideration only.

***PUBLISHED BY***

**HEUER PUBLISHING LLC**

**P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406  
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011**

*TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1*

**INTRODUCTION**

The idea for these volumes of one-act scripts came from my many years of experience as a high school English teacher of minority students and Hispanic students taking English as a second language. While teaching these students, I discovered there were few resources in drama which I felt could provide them with role-playing motivational experiences about people and events of particular interest to them. The plays included here were written to be a solution to my instructional needs to fill a void. These short dramas are based on the lives of African and Hispanic Americans who have made significant contributions to this nation, usually in spite of tremendous odds. In creating these plays, I have kept in mind that young people enjoy reading plays aloud, and the appreciation is increased if the content is meaningful to them. Enjoyment of the dramatic experience is the goal here.

I do not believe African American or Hispanic American young people have to be cast rigidly in roles of their actual ethnic heritage in these plays. I found in teaching drama that having students of one ethnic group read or perform roles from other groups adds a new dimension (sometimes humorous, but always giving a new facet). Drama transcends time, place, and condition to speak directly to the heart. In other words, the true essence of art and theatre rises above nationality, religion, politics and ethnicity, and provides an insight into the true character of people. The plays in these volumes are based on historical research, and the primary objective of each script is to enlighten, motivate, encourage, and inspire young people.

*Mary Satchell*

**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**  
(January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968)

*Martin was born in Atlanta, Georgia. His parents were Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King. He attended public schools in Atlanta. At age fifteen, he enrolled at Morehouse, a predominantly black men's college in Atlanta. In 1953, he married Coretta Scott, and they became the parents of four children. He was ordained a minister at the age of nineteen, graduated from Morehouse College in 1948, Crozer Theological Seminary in 1951, and received his doctorate from Boston University in 1955. Martin was appointed pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he led the successful Montgomery bus boycott during 1955-56. The boycott was considered to be a major victory for the advancement of civil rights for black people in America. After 1956, Martin became foremost leader of the Civil Rights Movement in this country. After moving back to Atlanta to become co-pastor with his father of Ebenezer Baptist Church, he founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Martin was arrested many times for his convictions and participation in the Civil Rights Movement. He was honored with hundreds of awards during his lifetime. The Nobel Peace Prize, which he received in 1964, is perhaps the most important of his awards. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee at the age of thirty-nine.*

**CHARACTERS**

MARTIN	Civil rights leader
YOKI	His six-year-old daughter
DADDY KING	His father
TRUSTY	An elderly Negro
JAILER	A white prison guard

***Freedom Riders, a racially integrated group:***

JOHN	
DIANE	
HENRY	
JAMES	
ALBERT	
PAUL	
EXTRAS	FREEDOM RIDERS—young adults, male and female Other bus PASSENGERS, DRIVER.

**TIME:** April 16, 1963

**SETTING:**

*Cell in Birmingham, Alabama jail. Stage is dimly lit. Cot with bare mattress is down, center. Rest of cell is in deep shadows with silhouettes of bars magnified in size against rear wall, upstage. Old newspapers are wadded in*

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

corner on floor of cell. Exit is right.

**AT RISE:**

Cell is empty, stark and silent for a few moments. Loud jingle of keys can be heard offstage. Sound of creaking metal door as it opens. MARTIN appears in handcuffs, being roughly shoved inside cell; white JAILER appears, removes cuffs, and speaks angrily.

JAILER: Martin Luther King, Jr, you're nothing but a troublemaker! We'll teach you a lesson for coming here to Birmingham with your rabbleroxing and demonstrations. (*Voice rises angrily.*) We'll stop you—we'll stop you and all your kind!

MARTIN: (*Calmly; steely determination.*) No one will ever stop me from fighting for justice for my people.

JAILER moves to hit MARTIN, but restrains himself; scowls with bitter hatred and exits; sound of slamming metal door. MARTIN stands with head bowed. When HE looks up, his face is set; determined. SPOTLIGHT closes around HIM tightly; bars loom larger in shadows. MARTIN sits on cot, elbows on his knees, for some moments. From the darkness comes the sound of a weeping child, MARTIN's daughter YOLANDA, nicknamed YOKI. Her sobs continue as LIGHT appears in corner of cell, up left, to reveal YOKI seated in a chair as she wipes tears from her face. SPOTLIGHT fades to black on MARTIN, down; a moment later, MARTIN enters, up, and kneels beside YOKI.

MARTIN: What's the matter, baby?

YOKI: (*Rubbing eyes with HER fists.*) Daddy, I want to go to Funtown Amusement Park, but Mommy said we can't go there.

MARTIN: (*Sadly.*) That's true, Yoki.

YOKI: Why?

MARTIN: Because Jim Crow laws are used to keep Negroes out of many places like Funtown.

YOKI: Did we do something bad, Daddy? Is that why we can't have fun like other families?

MARTIN (*Shaking HIS head; rising.*) No, Yoki. Our people haven't done anything wrong. (*Strongly.*) It's the law that is wrong.

YOKI: Bad laws should be changed. (*Pauses.*) Don't you think so, Daddy?

MARTIN: You're absolutely right, Yoki. (*To HIMSELF.*) Out of the mouths of babes—(*Takes YOKI's hand; she rises.*) We'll have to do everything we can to change those bad laws.

YOKI: What are we going to do, Daddy? I don't like those white people who won't let us go to Funtown.

MARTIN: Listen, Yoki. (*Putting hand on HER shoulder.*) We can't let the bad things that people do to us make us hate them. If we let our hearts become filled with hatred, we're no better than our enemies.

YOKI: (*Nodding.*) Mommy says we have to love everybody.

MARTIN: Your mother's right, Yoki. No matter what happens, we have to keep loving people—regardless of their race, or what they may do to hurt us.

YOKI: All right. (*Pauses.*) But I still think we ought to fight 'cause I want to go to Funtown!

MARTIN (*Chuckling.*) I'm with you all the way, Yoki. We're going to fight those bad laws, but not with fists.

YOKI: How can we fight if we don't use our fists?

MARTIN: There's a better way to fight evil, Yoki. It's called nonviolent protest.

YOKI (*Wide-eyed.*) Nonviolent—protest?

MARTIN: Yes. With nonviolence, you use your heart and head instead of your fists. Love is the best weapon in the world, Yoki. It can change cold, hate-filled hearts. The greatest changes in the world were made in the hearts of people through nonviolent means.

YOKI: (*Smiling.*) Daddy, I think you're the smartest man in the world. And I know that you'll change all those bad laws.

MARTIN: (*Strongly.*) Yoki, I'm going to keep on fighting until every person in this country is treated with fairness and equality under the law. *My mind is made up!*

YOKI: (*Nodding deeply.*) And *my mind is made up, too, Daddy!*

*YOKI hugs MARTIN; LIGHTS fade; SPOTLIGHT appears on cot, down. MARTIN enters SPOTLIGHT; stands beside cot in deep thought. Up right, LIGHT reveals living room of DADDY KING's home in Atlanta, Georgia. Easy chair or small sofa and floor lamp are only portion of room that can be seen. SPOTLIGHT fades on MARTIN and cot, down. DADDY KING enters, up; stands with a worried frown as he reads a newspaper. HE sighs, shakes his head, tosses newspaper aside, and paces nervously. Knock is heard, off, right. DADDY KING stops pacing and moves quickly to exit; returns followed by MARTIN, who carries a traveling bag.*

DADDY KING: (*Relieved.*) Come in, son. You're almost two hours late. I was starting to get worried.

MARTIN: Hello, Daddy. My flight from Nashville was late. (*Sets down bag.*)

DADDY KING: How was your speech at Fisk University?

MARTIN: (*Taking off hat.*) Everything went fine. The students who are leading protest marches in Nashville gave a reception in my honor. They've vowed to commit their lives to get rid of Jim Crow laws in their city. (*Smiles.*) I'm so proud of their courageous spirit.

DADDY KING: Martin, you don't have much time before your next flight leaves for Birmingham.

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

MARTIN: (*Turning.*) Is Coretta ready?

DADDY KING: (*Nodding.*) Yes, she's waiting for you upstairs.

MARTIN: I'll let her know I'm here. (*Starts to exit.*)

DADDY KING: (*Raising HIS hand.*) Martin—wait. (*MARTIN turns.*) Son, we have to talk.

MARTIN: What's on your mind?

DADDY KING: You know well what's on my mind. (*Paces.*) The same thing is on the minds of everybody in this country.

MARTIN: (*Sighing; knowing what's coming.*) Daddy, when I started this battle against prejudice and injustice, you and I knew there would be many difficulties.

DADDY KING: (*Angrily.*) Do you call bombs and billy clubs and police dogs and fire hoses mere difficulties? (*Sits with shoulders sagging.*) Martin—when will all this violence end?

MARTIN: (*Moving to stand beside his father.*) I'm afraid our battle's just beginning.

DADDY KING: (*Groaning.*) I've never been a coward—never could stand any man who'd run from a fight. (*Pauses, looking up at MARTIN in anguish.*) But *you're my son*, Martin. Your mother's sick with worry because of all the turmoil and violence. She's afraid something terrible will happen to you, and I have to admit that I'm worried, too.

MARTIN: Daddy, you taught me that a man must fight for what he believes. A half-hearted fight is no fight at all. (*Smiles.*) You taught me well.

DADDY KING: Martin, I was going to ask you to leave Alabama and come back to Atlanta. Your problems in Montgomery with the bus boycott were bad enough. But now, you've moved on to Birmingham, where the civil rights battle has become an all-out war. (*Rises.*) The battle outside our home has moved into our family, and it's tearing us apart.

MARTIN: (*Gently; sincerely.*) I'm sorry this is happening. There's been no peace for anyone ever since Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a city bus. I knew we were doing the right thing when we began to boycott the buses in Montgomery. No one ever dreamed that resistance to our demands for equal rights would be met with such extreme violence.

DADDY KING: It's a nightmare that just continues to get worse.

MARTIN: Daddy, tonight I began to see how deeply many people believe in me. A few hours ago, I was standing before a crowd of people at Fisk University, and I suddenly understood that this movement is much bigger than I'd ever imagined. It's a divine mission.

DADDY KING: (*Humbly.*) I know that, Martin.

MARTIN: Many people—both black and white—have put their lives on the line to fight for our civil rights.

DADDY KING: And they're looking to you, son, for leadership.

MARTIN: (*Nodding.*) How can I disappoint them?

DADDY KING: *(With a mind made up.)* Martin, you're a man of integrity. I taught you that. *(Smiles sadly.)* And, as you said—I taught you well.

MARTIN: We have to pay a price for this struggle, Daddy. When I entered this battle, I knew it would demand many sacrifices.

DADDY KING: These people you're fighting will stop at nothing to hold our race in its second-class prison.

MARTIN: Prison? *(Pauses.)* Yes, that's just what our lives have been in our own country. We're bound in an unrelenting prison. *(Strongly.)* We must break free of these chains that bind us and keep us from reaching our fullest potential as human beings. We must be free to become first-class citizens like any other people in America. *We will break free of this prison!*

*Blackout. SPOTLIGHT down again. MARTIN sits on cot as he listens to his last sentence echoing against the prison walls. HE suddenly rises and looks toward the corner of the cell where the newspapers are lying in a wad. HE moves in SPOTLIGHT to retrieve the papers, and brings them back to his cot. MARTIN stands beside cot, opens newspapers and frowns when he sees headlines; HE slowly paces.*

MARTIN: *(Reading aloud.)* "Local Negroes in Birmingham are urged to withdraw from demonstrations. Dr. King's poorly-timed protests have done all the citizens of Birmingham a disservice by increasing tensions at a time when this city appears to be making definite progress in race relations. Progress in granting Negroes full and equal status may be slow in coming, but city officials believe it is unrealistic to expect long held customs of the South to change overnight. Martin Luther King, Jr. should not expect it either." *(MARTIN stops reading, turns toward audience.)* They still don't understand. *(Drops paper on cot; speaks strongly.)* They still don't understand! *(Pauses.)* How many people believe this argument that we're moving too fast with our protests against segregation? *(Rubs handcuff marks on HIS wrists.)* How many believe that old excuse the South must be given more time to change its laws and customs held for generations? *(Angrily.)* Well, they are wrong! We can't wait any longer! *(Turns quickly.)* I must answer my critics. I have to do it now, even while I'm in solitary confinement in this Birmingham jail. *(Thinks a moment.)* I'll write a letter. Saint Paul wrote letters from prison, and his words changed the world. Yes, I'll write a letter to my critics and to the general public explaining my opinions. *(Paces.)* My people have waited more than four hundred years to be free. Why should we wait any longer? *(Grabs newspapers from cot.)* I'll start writing my letter in the margins of these papers, and when that space runs out—*(Searches clothes futilely; speaks urgently.)* I don't have anything to write with—*(Hears jingle of keys, off; turns toward cell door, which loudly creaks open. MARTIN quickly puts newspapers under mattress. TRUSTY enters carrying tray with bowl, cup and spoon.)*

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

TRUSTY: (*Humbly.*) Dr. King, I brought your lunch. (*Sets tray on cot; glances furtively over HIS shoulder toward door; shakes MARTIN's hand and lowers voice.*) You don't know how proud I am to meet you, Dr. King. At last, I'm getting the chance to thank you on behalf of every black man in this country. I'm an old man, and I've never in my life been treated with respect. I'm still called *boy*—even to this day.

MARTIN: (*Putting HIS hand on TRUSTY's shoulder.*) You have no idea how happy I am to meet you, sir. What's your name?

TRUSTY: Willie Powell. (*Smiles.*) Dr. King, you've given new hope to every Negro in America. Now we have hope that our lives will get better.

MARTIN: (*Eagerly.*) I need to ask a favor of you.

TRUSTY: You just go right ahead and ask, Dr. King. I'll do anything for you.

MARTIN: Do you think you could bring me some writing paper, and a pencil or pen?

TRUSTY: (*Quickly pulling pen from shirt pocket.*) Here's a pen, and I'll bring you half a dozen more if you need them. Your writing paper will be here with the evening meal. (*Pauses.*) If you don't mind my asking—who are you going to write?

MARTIN: A letter to the people of Birmingham *and* the United States. I hope my letter will be published someday in newspapers all across the nation.

TRUSTY: You'll have to smuggle your letter out of here. I'm afraid I can't be of any help with that.

MARTIN: (*Confidently.*) I'll find a way.

TRUSTY: Is there anything else you want, Dr. King?

MARTIN: That's all for now.

TRUSTY: (*Pointing to tray.*) Eat all that soup so you can keep up your strength. You'll need to be ready for all the work ahead.

MARTIN (*Sincerely.*) Thank you, Mr. Powell, for everything.

TRUSTY: My friends call me Will.

MARTIN: Thank you, Will.

TRUSTY: (*Moving to door.*) I'll be back at six with another tray. (*Exits; sound of door clanging shut; keys jingle as lock falls into place. MARTIN stands gazing toward exit for several moments.*)

MARTIN: (*Urgently.*) I have to get started. The trusty's words have made me more determined than ever! (*Whirls into action; gets papers from under mattress; sets food on floor; sits on cot, using tray as a makeshift desk. HE begins to write, slowly speaking his words aloud.*) Letter—from—Birmingham—jail (*Pauses.*) To—my—fellow—citizens—From—Martin—Luther—King, Jr. (*MARTIN leans over tray as he writes rapidly in margins of newspaper. SPOTLIGHT brightens as MARTIN continues writing. HIS RECORDED VOICE comes from darkness, off.*)

MARTIN'S RECORDED VOICE: "Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas, but in response to my many critics, I feel it is right to do so at this time as I sit, a prisoner in a jail cell in Birmingham,



Alabama. I guess it's easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait'. But when you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children...when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait...."

*MARTIN writes on as LIGHTS slowly fade. LIGHTS, up center, reveal sign: Greyhound Bus Terminal—Washington, D.C." An integrated group of travelers enters carrying suitcases. They stand near sign.*

DIANE: (*To FREEDOM RIDERS.*) I was hoping that Dr. King would come down to see us off.

HENRY: (*Glancing around.*) That's exactly what I was thinking, Diane. His encouraging words would help a lot, right now.

JAMES: Dr. King couldn't be here because he was arrested yesterday, Henry. He was thrown in jail for leading a protest demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama. I read about it in the *Washington Post* this morning.

DIANE: James, we already know what Dr. King would tell us if he were here. He's shown great courage every step of the way, and we have to do the same.

JAMES: We've got a long bus trip ahead, and it's sure going to get rough when people find out that we're Freedom Riders.

ALBERT: (*Determined.*) Our training in nonviolent resistance *and* our commitment to integrate the interstate buses will bring us through, no matter how rough it gets. (*Turns.*) John, what do you think?

JOHN: You're right on target, Albert. I'm just glad the newspaper reporters haven't heard about our first trip through the Deep South. They'd be swarming like bees all over this bus station by now.

DIANE: And that could only make matters worse. Tension is going to get high when people see black and white passengers sitting together on a Greyhound bus.

HENRY: Reporters and the whole world will hear about us soon enough.

JOHN: Okay, everybody, let's review our strategy. (*Points to two white FREEDOM RIDERS.*) James, you and Albert will take seats in the rear of the bus. (*Points to two black FREEDOM RIDERS.*) Diane and Henry, you sit near the front. Paul—(*A white FREEDOM RIDER looks up.*) we'll sit next to each other to test the integrated seating law.

PAUL: All right, but I want to sit in the aisle seat.

JOHN: The rest of you just scatter throughout the bus. (*Pauses.*) Any questions? (*Silence.*) Anyone who wants to pull out can do it now, and there'll be no hard feelings. We know how much danger we're putting ourselves in. There's bound to be violence, and we'll probably go to jail. (*Pauses.*) Speak up.

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

PAUL (*Quipping.*) Or forever hold your peace.

JOHN (*Squaring HIS shoulders.*) Okay, Freedom Riders, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is in prison right this minute, but I know he's got us on his mind. *Let's make him proud!*

*FREEDOM RIDERS cheer. White DRIVER in uniform enters; FREEDOM RIDERS form a single line; other TRAVELERS enter and get in line. DRIVER faces PASSENGERS, prepares to punch tickets; LIGHTS fade. SPOTLIGHT on jail cot again. MARTIN lies on cot with his back to audience. When loud jingle of keys is heard at door, off, MARTIN rises quickly; stands beside cot. Door opens and TRUSTY enters, carrying tray with bowl and cup.*

MARTIN: (*Smiling.*) Good evening, Will.

TRUSTY: 'Evening, Dr. King. Here's your supper, right on time.

MARTIN: Thank you very much, Will. (*TRUSTY moves to give MARTIN the tray, but before he can, JAILER appears at door unexpectedly. MARTIN and TRUSTY turn.*)

JAILER: (*Sarcastically.*) Well, now. You two look to be right friendly, it seems to me. (*Moves nearer, menacingly.*) I hope you're not trying to get any smart ideas. (*Turns to TRUSTY.*) You could get into lots of trouble if you get too friendly with our prisoner here. (*Puts HIS face up close to TRUSTY's.*) Do you understand what I am saying—boy?

TRUSTY: (*Soft monotone.*) I understand.

JAILER: (*Angrily.*) You understand *what?*

TRUSTY: (*Head bowed.*) I understand, sir.

JAILER: That's better. (*Points to door.*) Now, you get out of here, and watch your step because I'll be watching you. (*TRUSTY puts tray on cot, collects used tray and utensils from floor; exits. JAILER turns to MARTIN and frowns.*) Don't you think you can outsmart me, Martin Luther King, Jr. Old Will is too scary to get out of line. He's been in here so long, he'd be afraid to be set free. (*Scoffing tone.*) Wouldn't know what to do with any freedom. He knows better than to stick his neck out for the likes of *you.* (*Exits; jingle of keys; slamming door; then, silence. MARTIN sits thoughtfully on cot with his back to door for a few moments; gets pen and folded newspapers from under mattress; vainly searches newspapers.*)

MARTIN: I've run out of space. Every inch of these papers is filled with the contents of my letter...and I have so much more to say! (*Folds papers carefully and pushes them under mattress again; sighs and puts tray on HIS lap; stops; frowns in puzzlement as he lifts tray and runs his hand underneath it; laughs softly; quickly puts utensils on floor and rises.*) Will, you've broken through to real freedom—there are no chains on your mind and heart. (*Puts hand on HIS chest.*) The freedom that's inside here. (*Turns tray upside down and pulls taped writing paper from tray's bottom; sits again on cot; turns tray over again to use as a desk and eagerly begins*

*to write while speaking aloud.)* When people—break through—their fears—to become free—in their spirits—no power—on earth—can stop them.  
*(Continues to write as HIS RECORDED VOICE takes over. VOICE fills the entire cell.)*

MARTIN'S RECORDED VOICE: We shall overcome in our battle for justice because we have touched the hearts, minds, and spirits of many people. These people are not afraid anymore. They are determined to make the United States of America a great nation that is truly—**one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all!**

*MARTIN continues to write as LIGHT fades. Curtain. THE END.*

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

**WILMA RUDOLPH**  
(June 23, 1940 – November 12, 1994)

*Wilma was born in St. Bethlehem, Tennessee. She was a very sickly child, suffering from the effects of pneumonia, scarlet fever, and polio. Wilma wore a heavy leg brace until she was eleven years old. Instead of giving up when her doctors said that she would never be able to walk, Wilma, with her parents' help, proved them wrong. She went on to walk normally, and to participate in basketball and track. Wilma's determination to excel as a champion would not be denied. At the age of sixteen, Wilma won a bronze medal in the 1956 summer Olympics, held in Melbourne, Australia. In 1960, she accomplished the incredible feat of winning three Olympic gold medals in track and field. Wilma became the first American woman to win that many gold medals in the same Olympics. Wilma's autobiography and a TV movie based on her life highlighted many of her achievements. She received numerous honors and awards during her lifetime.*

**CHARACTERS**

WILMA, Athlete, disabled by polio, becomes Olympics track star

MRS. RUDOLPH, HER mother

MR. RUDOLPH, HER father

NATALIE, HER friend

COACH TEMPLE

REPORTER

DOCTOR

ANNOUNCER

Track teammates:

LUCINDA

MARTHA

EXTRAS:               Several girls as CHEERLEADERS  
                              Two boys at the park  
                              Olympics OFFICIAL  
                              YOUNGSTER with flowers.

**SCENE 1**

**TIME:** 1946.

**SETTING:**

*A public park in Clarksville, Tennessee on a sunny afternoon. Picnic table and benches are at center. Table is covered with pompoms. Basketball court with hoop and net is stage left.*

**AT RISE:**

*Six-year-old WILMA sits facing audience at table. SHE holds colorful*

*pompoms in each hand and remains seated as she goes through cheerleading exercises, gesturing enthusiastically.*

WILMA (*Chanting.*) Go, team, go! Go, team, go! (*NATALIE enters, jumping rope; she stops when she sees WILMA sitting and shouting to herself.*)

NATALIE (*Puzzled.*) What are you doing?

WILMA (*Defensively.*) What does it look like I'm doing? (*Shakes HER pompoms.*) I'm practicing my cheers for today's game.

NATALIE (*Surprised.*) You're a cheerleader?

WILMA (*Proudly.*) I'm the captain of our park's cheerleading squad.

NATALIE (*Putting jump rope on table.*) I guess that's why you've got so many pompoms. (*Points.*) You're almost drowning in them.

WILMA: The captain's job is to keep up with the pompoms. I always pass them out to the other cheerleaders whenever there's a game.

NATALIE (*Sitting on table.*) I used to want to be a cheerleader, but I never got picked to be on the squad.

WILMA: You don't get picked for our squad. If somebody wants to be a cheerleader—(*Shrugs.*) she just gets on the team. We don't worry about tryouts.

NATALIE (*Eagerly.*) Oh, I want to be a cheerleader!

WILMA: Okay. You can tell Coach Nelson when he shows up for today's game. (*Gives NATALIE pompoms.*) What's your name?

NATALIE: Natalie Jackson.

WILMA: I haven't seen you at the park before. Did you just move to Clarksville?

NATALIE: Yes. Our family's been here about a week. (*Points.*) We live over on Adams Street.

WILMA: My name's Wilma—Wilma Rudolph.

NATALIE: Glad to meet you, Wilma. (*Rises; gets rope.*) Do you want to jump rope with me?

WILMA: I can't.

NATALIE: Why? (*WILMA rises with effort and shows NATALIE the heavy metal brace on her leg. NATALIE speaks sadly.*) I'm so sorry.

WILMA: Don't feel sorry for me, Natalie. I used to be sick all the time because I had polio when I was a baby. Now, my leg is getting stronger. My mama takes me to the doctors in Nashville twice a week.

NATALIE (*Frowning.*) I wouldn't want to go to the doctor *that* much.

WILMA: My doctors are nice. I have to exercise everyday to build up the muscles.

NATALIE: Do your exercises make your leg hurt, Wilma?

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

WILMA: Yes, but that's all right. I'm not going to sit and be a cheerleader all my life. When my leg gets well, people will be cheering for me when I show them how fast I can run. (*Two BOYS enter running fast; they race each other across the stage; ad lib before exiting, running: "You can't win this race!"; "Oh, yeah? Just watch my smoke!" WILMA points.*) Someday I'll run faster than that.

NATALIE: Wilma, you're just wishing with your heart.

WILMA (*Strongly.*) Today I may be wishing, but one day I'll be running *for real* with my own legs and feet! (*NATALIE jumps rope; GIRLS enter wearing cheerleading outfits like WILMA's. THEY ad lib, greeting WILMA, who distributes pompoms. Curtain. End of SCENE 1.*)

**SCENE 2**

**TIME:** 1952.

**SETTING:**

*A room in RUDOLPH family's home. Table with brown wrapping paper, tape, scissors, and string is at center. Exit is left.*

**AT RISE:**

*MRS. RUDOLPH stands beside table.*

MRS. RUDOLPH (*Calling.*) Wilma! Bring me that box! (*WILMA, twelve-years-old, hurriedly enters carrying large box.*)

WILMA: Here it is, Mama.

MRS. RUDOLPH (*Pointing.*) Put it on the table. I want to get this box to the post office before it closes.

WILMA: What time does the post office close?

MRS. RUDOLPH: Twelve o'clock on Saturdays.

WILMA (*Looking inside box.*) I'm glad to be getting rid of this old thing. (*Takes leg brace from box.*)

MRS. RUDOLPH: Child, you worked very hard for six years, and now you can walk without a limp. I told those doctors in Nashville I'd mail this leg brace back to them when you didn't need it anymore.

WILMA: Daddy says I used to be the sickest child in Clarksville. (*Places brace back inside box.*)

MRS. RUDOLPH (*Wrapping box in brown paper.*) Folks thought we were crazy when we said you'd walk just fine one day. (*Smiles.*) They don't think we're crazy anymore.

WILMA: Mama, I feel brand new—(*Happily.*) as if the best part of my life is beginning today. That's because I'm getting that leg brace out of my life forever.

MRS. RUDOLPH (*Taping the box.*) Sure is the best day of *my* life. Coach Nelson told your daddy you're working those poor cheerleaders 'til their tongues are hanging out. Are you going to be captain of the squad again next year?

WILMA: No, ma'am. I'm tired of being a cheerleader. I'm going to try out for the basketball team!

MRS. RUDOLPH (*Pausing.*) Wilma, don't you think it's a little early to be jumping and running about? We're just glad to see you with legs strong enough to let you walk.

WILMA: Walking's not good enough for me, Mama. (*Holds arms out like a bird.*) I want to run fast enough to catch an eagle. (*Pretends to fly around table.*)

MRS. RUDOLPH (*Laughing.*) Wilma, it wouldn't surprise me in the least if you run and jump your way right into somebody's hall of fame! (*WILMA swoops once more around table. Curtain. End SCENE 2.*)

### SCENE 3

TIME: 1956.

#### SETTING:

WILMA's bedroom at home in Clarksville, TN. Twin bed with open suitcase is at center. Suitcase is half-filled with folded clothes. Bed is covered with other items for packing. Exit is left.

#### AT RISE:

WILMA packs her suitcase; folds one or two items; impatiently looks at bed, and grabs a handful of things, throwing them into suitcase. MRS. RUDOLPH enters.

MRS. RUDOLPH: No, Wilma, that's not the way to pack. Take those things out, and fold them the way I showed you.

WILMA (*Sighing in frustration.*) Mama, I don't see why it's necessary to fold every little thing I'm taking on this trip to Tuskegee. (*Takes things from suitcase.*)

MRS. RUDOLPH: You're too impatient, Wilma. You want everything to happen right now. There's a right way *and* a wrong way to pack, and I want you to do things the right way. It may take longer, but when you get to that track meet in Alabama, you won't have to worry about wearing wrinkled, bad-looking clothes.

WILMA (*Gleefully.*) My mind's going to be set on *winning*, not on the way I look.

MRS. RUDOLPH: Well, I want you to look nice while you're doing all that winning.

*TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1*

- WILMA (*Eagerly.*) Mama, this weekend trip to Tuskegee will be the most important event of my life. I've never been that far away from home. There'll be high school track teams from all over the South. (*MR. RUDOLPH enters carrying evening dress in cleaner's bag.*)
- MR. RUDOLPH: I heard those kids from Atlanta, Georgia are very strong runners. They have year 'round track programs that may give them a big advantage over you kids from Tennessee. (*Puts dress on bed.*)
- WILMA (*Cockily.*) I'm not worried about any girls from Georgia or anywhere else, Daddy. Have I ever lost a race? (*Answers HER own question without giving HIM a chance to speak.*) No, siree, I've never lost one race.
- MRS. RUDOLPH: Don't be so big-headed, young lady. There's always a first time. (*Exits.*)
- MR. RUDOLPH (*Smiling.*) Skeeter, you've never lost a track race because you always have the same competition. These kids around here are no match for you. But now, you're heading into deeper waters where the fish are much smarter and faster swimmers.
- WILMA: Big fish or little fish—they don't scare me. (*Frowns at things on bed.*) How am I going to get all this stuff in my suitcase? Coach said we can only bring one bag on this trip.
- MR. RUDOLPH: Your mama told me to pick up that dress from the cleaners. (*Scratches HIS head.*) Why do you need a party dress for a track meet anyway?
- WILMA: It's for the farewell dance after the track meet. Miss Allison, our chaperone, said we'd need a party dress. (*Shrugs.*) As far as I'm concerned, it'll be a victory dance for me.
- MR. RUDOLPH: Don't count your chickens before they hatch, Skeeter.
- WILMA: Don't worry, Daddy. I'm going to wipe out all the competition. Those girls from Georgia had better *look out!* (*Curtain. End SCENE 3.*)

**SCENE 4**

**TIME:**

Sunday evening, a few days later; Tuskegee weekend track meet is over.

**SETTING:**

*RUDOLPH family's living room. Two chairs with small table and lamp face audience at center. Exit is right.*

**AT RISE:**

*MR. RUDOLPH sits reading a newspaper. HE looks up when WILMA enters carrying suitcase.*

MR. RUDOLPH: Well, now, Skeeter. How was the weekend?

WILMA (*Wearily.*) Terrible. I just lived through the worst time of my life.



- MR. RUDOLPH (*Putting newspaper aside.*) Come on. Sit down and let's talk about it.
- WILMA (*Shaking HER head.*) No, Daddy. I just want to go straight to bed. (*Starts to turn away.*) The worst mistake I ever made was to go to that track meet this weekend.
- MR. RUDOLPH (*Rising; moving to take suitcase.*) You can always talk to your old dad. (*Guides WILMA to a chair; sets suitcase on floor.*) Things couldn't have been all *that* bad.
- WILMA (*Sitting; head bowed.*) Yes, they were, Daddy. You were right. Those girls from Georgia were such strong runners. I just couldn't keep up with them. (*In defeat.*) They were true champs.
- MR. RUDOLPH: They were better trained than you; that's all. (*Sits on arm of HIS chair.*) Skeeter, you have a natural ability for running. That's how you won all those track meets before this weekend.
- WILMA: My ability wasn't much help in Tuskegee.
- MR. RUDOLPH: It takes more than natural ability to be a champ. Look at those Olympic champions like Jesse Owens. They had to learn special techniques and skills to get the best results from their muscles. The girls at Tuskegee were more powerful than you because they've been taught how to use their heads as well as their feet.
- WILMA (*Looking up.*) Daddy, how am I going to face my friends at school? I lost every race—didn't get *one* medal.
- MR. RUDOLPH: The mark of a true champion is to be able to have a crushing defeat, then pick yourself up and go on to try again.
- WILMA: That's a hard thing to do. Especially after you've finished in last place.
- MR. RUDOLPH (*Putting HIS hand on WILMA's shoulder.*) Nobody can be a winner all the time. The secret is learning how to lose.
- WILMA: I don't think anybody would want to see me in a race again.
- MR. RUDOLPH (*Chuckling; rising to get slip of paper from pocket.*) You're wrong there, Skeeter. (*Gives paper to WILMA.*)
- WILMA: What's this? (*Looks at paper.*) Who's Ed Temple?
- MR. RUDOLPH: Ed Temple's the coach of the women's track team at Tennessee State University. He called yesterday.
- WILMA (*Rising excitedly.*) The coach of the famous Tiger belles? Those girls run track all over the world—even at the Olympics!
- MR. RUDOLPH (*Nodding.*) A while ago, Coach Temple was a referee for one of your high school basketball games. He thinks you have potential to become a great track star, and he's invited you to spend this summer on campus to train with the Tiger belles.
- WILMA (*Jumping up and down happily.*) Train with the Tiger belles? (*Incredulously.*) Me? Daddy, the Tiger belles are college students. (*Stops short.*) I wonder if Coach Temple knows about my defeat at Tuskegee this weekend. (*Shoulders sag.*) He'd probably change his mind.

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

MR. RUDOLPH (*Firmly.*) Are you going to take advantage of this opportunity, or are you going to spend the rest of your life feeling sorry for yourself?

WILMA (*Glancing at paper again; smiling.*) If I'm going to be a champion track star, I can't let losing a few races discourage me. (*Strongly.*) Daddy, you can tell Coach Temple to sign me up for the summer!

MR. RUDOLPH (*Tongue-in-cheek.*) That won't be necessary, Skeeter. (*Happily slaps HIS knee.*) I already did! (*HE and WILMA laugh together. Curtain. End SCENE 4.*)

**SCENE 5**

**TIME:** The following summer.

**SETTING:**

*Seattle, Washington; summer Olympics tryouts. Stage is bare; SPOTLIGHT, stage right.*

**AT RISE:**

*WILMA and COACH TEMPLE are standing in SPOTLIGHT. COACH laughs while WILMA jumps up and down with joy and excitement.*

COACH TEMPLE: I knew you could do it, Wilma! (*Shakes WILMA's hand.*) Congratulations! You made the U.S. Women's Relay Team, and now you're headed for the summer Olympics in Australia!

WILMA: (*Overwhelmed.*) Oh, Coach, this is a dream come true! Here I am, sixteen years old—a junior in high school—and I'm going to be in the summer Olympics! What an honor!

COACH TEMPLE: This is no fluke. You've got the attitude of a champion, Wilma. You don't mind working hard and making sacrifices to reach your goal.

WILMA: I promise to do my best, Coach.

COACH TEMPLE: You'll be the youngest member of the team. That's a lot of pressure.

WILMA (*Sobering.*) I won't make the mistake of being cocky this time, but I'm not afraid to try. That's what matters most to me, Coach—having the courage to try. (*LIGHT fades to black; SPOTLIGHT returns, stage left. REPORTER with "Press" card in his hat interviews WILMA, who is just returning from the 1956 summer Olympics in Australia. MR. & MRS. RUDOLPH stand nearby, watching proudly. WILMA wears her bronze medal on a red, white, and blue ribbon around her neck.*)

REPORTER: Here you are, only sixteen, and you're already an Olympics champ. The U.S. Women's Relay Team won third place. What's your next goal, Wilma? Where do you plan to go from here?

WILMA (*Holding up HER bronze medal.*) I'm proud of this medal. (*Pauses and smiles.*) But I want to try again for the gold.

REPORTER: That's aiming very high, Wilma.

MRS. RUDOLPH: Our daughter always aims high. When Wilma was a little girl, not many people in our hometown expected her to walk, let alone *run*, in her lifetime.

MR. RUDOLPH (*Proudly.*) My little girl is going to run in the summer Olympics of 1960.

REPORTER: You've got a lot of confidence in your daughter, Mr. Rudolph.

MR. RUDOLPH: If you knew Wilma as well as we do, you'd have confidence, too. Win or lose, I know she'll be running her heart out, and giving her very best! (*LIGHTS fade; Curtain. End SCENE 5.*)

## SCENE 6

### TIME:

1960; a few days before summer Olympics in Rome, Italy.

### SETTING:

*Early morning; an open field used for jogging. Stage is bare.*

### AT RISE:

*WILMA and MARTHA enter wearing jogging outfits with U.S. flag emblem on sleeves. THEY do warm-up stretches and bends to prepare for jog across field.*

MARTHA: Can you believe it, Wilma? (*Stretches HER arms wide.*) Here we are in Rome, Italy!

WILMA: Martha, the Tiger belles of Tennessee State University have come a long way. Coach Temple was right when he said that if we listened to him, we'd make it to the 1960 summer Olympics. (*Looks around with satisfaction.*) This was a good idea to come a few days early so we can get in some extra training.

MARTHA: Yeah. Olympic trials begin in a couple of days, and we've got to look sharp out there on that track.

WILMA (*Kneeling to adjust HER shoestrings.*) That's enough warming up. Let's jog across this field. By the time we get back, they'll be serving breakfast at the track athletes' dorm. (*THEY begin jogging across stage.*)

MARTHA: I like getting up early to enjoy this fresh air. We have one advantage that some of the other runners don't have. It's really hot here in Rome, the same as in Tennessee.

WILMA: Feels just like home. A quick jog every morning helps relax my nerves. (*WILMA jogs a little ahead; suddenly stumbles; her left foot goes to one side.*) Ow!

MARTHA (*Quickly catching up.*) Wilma! What's the matter?

TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1

WILMA (*Frowning in pain.*) I think I stepped in a hole. (*Points toward ground.*) I didn't even see it. Must have twisted my left ankle. (*Bends over to touch HER ankle.*) Oh, it *really* hurts! I can't put any weight on this foot. (*SHE hops on right foot.*)

MARTHA (*Alarmed.*) We need to get you to a doctor fast. You can't have a weak ankle for the Olympic trials. What awful luck! (*Puts WILMA's arm around HER shoulders.*) Do you think you can limp back to the dorm?

WILMA (*Grimacing in pain; clinching HER teeth.*) Sure, Martha. I'll make it. (*Limps as MARTHA supports HER.*) Limping on a bad left foot is nothing new to me. It's the only way I got around until I was almost twelve years old.

MARTHA (*Moving with WILMA toward exit.*) Coach Temple's going to hate this. Wilma, you're our fastest runner, and our hope to win a gold medal mainly depends on *you*. (*THEY exit, with WILMA limping. Curtain. End SCENE 6.*)

**SCENE 7**

**TIME:** A short while later.

**SETTING:**

*A locker room in athlete's dorm. Row of lockers is upstage; folding screen is located at center. Chair and stool, with gym bag on floor nearby, are downstage. Exit is right.*

**AT RISE:**

*WILMA sits in chair with bandaged ankle supported on stool. DOCTOR puts stethoscope in medical bag while COACH TEMPLE looks on, frowning with concern.*

DOCTOR (*Closing bag.*) That's a very bad sprain you've got there, Wilma. (*Turns.*) Coach, she'll have to stay off that ankle until the swelling and pain are gone.

WILMA (*Anxiously.*) Will I be okay in time for the qualifying races?

DOCTOR (*Shaking head.*) I honestly don't know. (*Firmly.*) Remember, now. As long as you feel any pain, there can be absolutely *no* running.

COACH: Wilma, you've got to follow the doctor's orders. If you don't—you could ruin your ankle. (*Pauses; points finger at WILMA.*) Understood? (*WILMA nods and MEN exit. WILMA rises; picks up gym bag and limps behind screen. MARTHA and LUCINDA enter carrying gym bags. THEY move to lockers, but stay in audience's view. GIRLS never see WILMA behind screen.*)

MARTHA (*Opening locker.*) That was a great practice session we just had, Lucinda. It's too bad what happened to Wilma. (*Puts HER bag inside locker.*) Her chances to be in the Olympics this year may be very slim now that she's sprained her ankle.

LUCINDA (*Nodding.*) That's really the pits, Martha. I feel sorry for Wilma. She's worked so hard. (*Opens locker; puts in HER bag and pauses.*) Did you know that Wilma had polio in the same foot she hurt this morning? (*MARTHA nods.*) If she tries to run on a bad ankle—(*Shrugs.*) who knows what could happen? Wilma may never run track again. (*GIRLS close locker doors; exit. WILMA appears from behind screen; looks toward exit.*)

WILMA (*Determined.*) I didn't come halfway around the world to sit on the sidelines. (*Studies HER bandaged foot.*) I'm going to run with my teammates in the races—I'll run with my mind and my heart *and* these legs. (*Strongly.*) **I will run!** (*LIGHTS fade to black; SPOTLIGHT comes up on ANNOUNCER, who is dressed in suit and holds paper and a microphone.*)

ANNOUNCER (*Speaking into mike.*) Ladies and Gentlemen, history was made in Rome, Italy during the summer Olympics of 1960. Wilma Rudolph, a member of the United States track team, accomplished an incredible feat. She was just twenty years old when she became the first American woman to win—(*Pauses dramatically; holds up three fingers.*) *three gold medals at the same Olympics!* Wilma won the gold in the 100-yard dash, the 200-yard dash, and the 400-yard relay. (*Pauses as LIGHTS, upstage, reveal a platform with U.S. flag.*) On the day she won her third gold medal, Wilma heard thousands of people chanting her name over and over. (*WILMA enters, dressed in Olympics togs; stands on platform beside flag. Loud chants from a crowd, offstage: "Wilma!" "Wilma!" "Wilma!" amid tremendous applause, off. "The Star-Spangled Banner" plays in background, offstage. WILMA holds up her hands in triumph. YOUNGSTER runs in and gives HER a bouquet of flowers. Olympics OFFICIAL enters to place gold medal on ribbon around WILMA's neck. Applause subsides as ANNOUNCER continues.*) When Wilma returned to the United States, President Kennedy invited her to the White House as an honor for winning three gold medals. However, Wilma didn't stop with her achievements at the 1960 summer Olympics. (*ANNOUNCER begins reading from a paper.*)

- That same year, she was named Woman Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press.
- In 1962 Wilma Rudolph received the Babe Zaharias Award as most outstanding female athlete in the world. (*MRS. RUDOLPH enters; hugs WILMA and beams with pride.*)
- In 1963 Wilma graduated from Tennessee State University with a degree in elementary education. (*MR. RUDOLPH enters; puts arm around WILMA and waves to audience; applause, offstage.*)
- In 1977 Wilma published her autobiography. That same year, a TV movie was made about Wilma's life.

*TEN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ONE-ACT DRAMAS, VOLUME 1*

- In 1981 Wilma was named one of America's five greatest women athletes of all time. (*COACH TEMPLE enters; holds up WILMA's hand in triumph; more applause, off. ANNOUNCER makes final statement in a voice ringing with victory.*) Wilma Rudolph—once called the sickest child in her hometown—became the *fastest woman in the world!* (*Explosive applause for WILMA, who bows; Curtain.*)

**THE END**

BY MARY SATCHELL

**ALEX PALMER HALEY**

*(August 11, 1921 – February 10, 1992)*

*Alex P. Haley, son of Simon Alexander Haley and Bertha Palmer Haley, was born in Ithaca, New York. At age fifteen, Alex graduated from high school and attended a teacher's college in North Carolina before dropping out of college because of disinterest. In 1939, he enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard as a cook's helper, intending to stay for only a few years. However, Alex stayed for twenty years, advancing from a lowly "mess boy" to become Chief Journalist, an official position created especially for him. During his years with the Coast Guard, Alex' writing talent led him into ghostwriting letters for his shipmates. It was during this time that he discovered his lifelong passion. Alex Haley became a fulltime freelance writer after retiring from the Coast Guard. in 1959. His first successful work was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, published in 1965. Soon after, he began researching a historical work that was to be based on his family. The result of his extensive research was the book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, published in 1976, which became an international bestseller that was eventually translated into many languages. A televised mini-series on *Roots*, viewed by millions of people, is still ranked as one of the highest-rated television programs in the nation's history. Alex Haley was awarded a special Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for *Roots*. He continued his research and writing career, and also was a popular public speaker before his death from a heart attack at the age of seventy.*

***Thanks for reading this free excerpt from *Ten Contemporary African American One-Act Dramas, Vol. 1*. For a complete copy of the script and/or performance rights, please contact us at:***

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC

P.O. BOX 248

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406

TOLL FREE 1-800-950-7529 ● WWW.HITPLAYS.COM