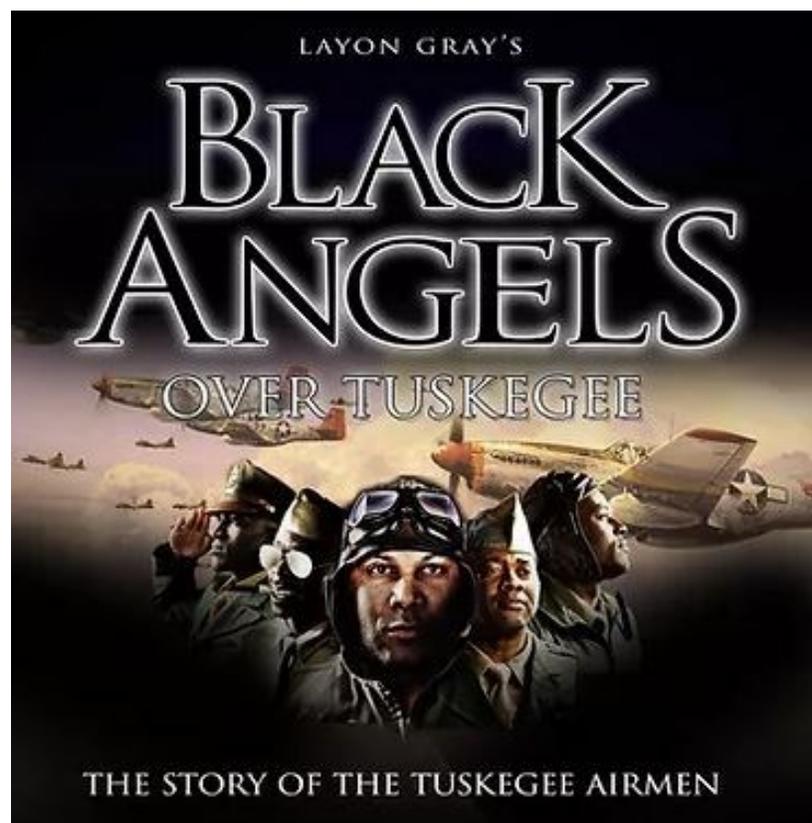




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INSIGHTS

DTC's Teacher Resource



Layon Gray's

BLACK ANGELS OVER TUSKEGEE

Delaware Theatre Company

October 12—30, 2022

From the Playwright/Director...

“This play is about the Tuskegee Airmen, but it’s not. It’s about anyone who wants to succeed, wants to prove yourself to others and to yourself, and works hard to do it. And it’s about those friendships, that brotherhood, that love that lasts—that’s what they remember. That’s what you remember.”

—Layon Gray



Members of the 332nd Fighter Squadron, part of the Tuskegee Airmen, during World War II.

INSIGHTS

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Delaware Theatre Company

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**43rd Season
2022-2023**

BLACK ANGELS OVER TUSKEGEE

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Characters and Summary

A Note to Readers: To assist educators in preparing their students for seeing our shows, the Department of Education and Community Engagement at DTC prepares and shares detailed summaries of the plots of our productions. These summaries disclose important plot points, including the climax and resolution of each play. Furthermore, our study guides are constructed under the premise that the educator has read our summary, and additional articles herein may reference these same plot points. This notice is intended to provide a “spoiler alert.”

Characters

The characters in *Black Angels over Tuskegee* are fictional; however, many of their stories as depicted in the play are inspired by real experiences of actual Tuskegee airmen.

QUINTEN DORSEY – Airman. Early 20’s, high energy, quick wit, likable.

ABRAHAM DORSEY – Airman. Early 20’s, Outgoing, fun, protective, competitive, intense, sensitive.

ELIJAH SAM – Airman. Late 20’s, ex-boxer turned educator, well read, peacekeeper, glue.

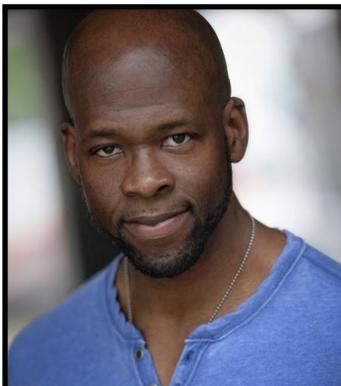
PERCIVAL NASH – Airman. Early 20’s, laid back, smooth, fun loving.

JEREMIAH JONES —Airman. Early 20’s, quiet, loose cannon, speaks his mind, internally pained.

THEODORE FRANKS - Airman. Early 20’s, soft spoken, youngest, steel presence, Southern, mild-mannered.

MAJOR ROBERTS - Commanding officer. Early 50’s, strong, intense, high energy, tyrant, demanding.

YOUNG MAN - Contemporary. Early 40’s, reflective, strong presence, engaging, storyteller.



David Roberts, left, plays Abraham Dorsey, while Thaddeus Daniels, right, plays the Young Man who serves as the Storyteller.



Characters and Summary (continued)

Summary

This summary is of the student matinee version of *Black Angels over Tuskegee*.

The play opens as a group of pilots sings a fight song and prepares for aerial combat during World War II. The scene shifts as a young Black man begins retelling a story precious to him, recounting the segregated world of America in the 1940s, and calling to mind the men who rose above to become the first Black pilots in the United States Air Force.

The lights come up on a military training classroom where several Black airmen are studying to become pilots. Quinten and Abraham, brothers, are having a playful discussion about their favorite jazz singers. They approach the studious Theodore and another trainee, Percival, to bring them into their conversation. Another airman in training, Elijah, arrives, and Quinten recognizes him as a prize boxer who has left the boxing ring to train to be a pilot. The men are interrupted by Jeremiah, who snaps at the group for disturbing his studies. The other men return to their conversation, discussing their dreams and fears of flying, and Elijah shares with them the story of Bessie Coleman, an African American woman pilot, to be inspiration for their journey.



Members of the Tuskegee Airmen during classroom training . Airplane mechanics, geography, meteorology, and other sciences were part of the training program for pilots.

Jeremiah once again rebukes the group for not being on task, telling them that although he is already a licensed pilot, he is spending his time studying, and he reminds them of the challenges ahead of them if they want to become pilots. The other men respond that they, too, are taking their work seriously. Jeremiah begins throwing complicated questions at Theodore to test his knowledge. Theodore is solid in his responses. The others chime in, showing that they, too, have a strong understanding of the mechanics of flight, demonstrating that they have indeed worked hard to become airmen.

The conversation shifts to be of a more personal nature as each man shares his story about his family, upbringing, and goals. Some of them speak of the colleges they attended, and each has a particular reason for wanting to be a Tuskegee airman. Quinten wants to make his wife and unborn child proud. Filled with unbridled joy, he begins dancing as he thinks of his wife. A sudden change of mood in the room occurs as Quinten falls and has a seizure. The men are deeply concerned. Abraham explains that these episodes happen periodically to his brother, and tries to calm the situation. Jeremiah is stunned, lashing out that someone with Quinten's condition could jeopardize lives on military missions. As Quinten slowly regains consciousness, a voice on the loudspeaker tells the men to ready for their pilot's examination. Abraham helps his brother get back on his feet and prepare for the test.

(continued)

Characters and Summary *(continued)*

Summary *(continued)*

A transition in time and space occurs. The young man telling the story returns and recounts the discrimination the men faced as they traveled across America to various bases, and the successes they met with as they furthered their training, culminating in each man's receiving his wings.

The action moves back to the airmen as they receive their orders to go to a base in Northern Africa. They are energized and ready for their missions. Quinten is thrilled to receive a letter sharing the news that his wife gave birth to his baby, a son named Samuel. His joy is short-lived, and the room becomes somber, as he learns that his wife died during childbirth. Abraham consoles his brother. The commanding officer arrives and sends the group on their mission: to serve as fighter escorts for bombers. The men must push their feelings aside as they head into battle.

The men fly in formation, engaging with enemy aircraft. Quinten suddenly breaks formation with a risky move. After the skirmish, the men return to the base, where Jeremiah begins fighting with the distraught Quinten. Elijah breaks up the fight, and Quinten's tears begin to flow as he grieves the loss of his wife.

The young man speaks from Abraham's point of view, and we learn that he is recounting the words of Abraham, who has been sharing his brother Quinten's story. The young man continues sharing Abraham's memories of Quinten as he talks of another combat mission in the air.

The scene shifts to depict that battle. Quinten's plane has been hit, and he is injured and stuck in the cockpit, unable to eject. Abraham talks to him over the radio, urging him to eject and parachute out of the burning plane, but Quinten's injury prevents him from doing so. The brothers say an emotional goodbye to one another, and the rest of the squadron joins in over the radio, saying goodbye to Quinten. Quinten tells Abraham to take care of baby Samuel and to share with him the story of Quinten's becoming a Tuskegee airman. Abraham promises to do so. Quinten's plane crashes.

The young man, speaking from Abraham's point of view, recounts stories of the next battles, sharing that the Tuskegee airmen, who had been segregated from their white counterparts in the military, were now in demand by white pilots as fighter escorts because of their excellence in air combat. The young man tells of what happens to each of the six men from the original group that first met in training in Texas.

The young man finishes his story. He is the son of Samuel, the baby boy that Quinten never met. We learn that Abraham raised Samuel, who grew up and had a child of his own—this young man who is telling the story of his grandfather Quinten, his great-uncle Abraham, and other Tuskegee airmen. The young man shows the journal he has been reading from. It is Abraham's journal but also contains the words of the young man's grandfather, Quinten. The young man pledges to pass the journal on to his own children so that the story will never die, and the lessons of the work, the sacrifices, and the loving brotherhood of and among the Tuskegee airmen will live on in future generations. The play ends as the six airmen are seen together again, preparing for flight, and getting into formation as a squadron.

Teachable Themes and Topics

Serving Others and Serving the Country

The Tuskegee Airmen, though stuff of legend, are and were ordinary people who did extraordinary things in support of the war effort more than 75 years ago. How did this group become so successful, especially when, historically, Black men—and women—were excluded from so many aspects of service in the United States military? A combination of the need to respond to escalating conflict in Europe, partnerships with colleges and universities across the U.S., and the persistence of certain leaders opened the door for Black Americans to learn and train, to work, and to serve during and beyond World War II.



Members of the Tuskegee Airmen, circa 1943

Historically, there were thousands of Black Americans who were part of what eventually would be considered the United States military. During the Revolutionary War, the British advertised that any enslaved Black man who fought for the Loyalist cause would be granted his freedom, and over 20,000 Blacks indeed fought for the Crown. However, there were still thousands of Blacks—free and enslaved men—who joined their efforts with the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, hoping that freedom from British rule would promote freedom for all. The fight for independence from British rule was won; the Constitution written; yet slavery continued and grew, particularly in the South, and Black men and women were denied full rights of citizenship that were given to white men and women. During the Civil War, which erupted in response to the nation's growing internal struggle against slavery, Black men—at first excluded—were eventually allowed to serve in the Union Army. Frederick Douglass, by this time a prominent civic leader, encouraged the recruitment of Black men by saying, "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship." Two of Douglass' sons served in the Union Army during the war; in fact, by war's end, nearly 10% of the Union forces—close to 200,000 soldiers and sailors—were African American men, who served well and honorably. In the 54th Massachusetts Infantry alone, 16 Black soldiers earned the Medal of Honor.

Despite the contributions of Black servicemen to these war efforts, by the time of the United States' entry into World War I, the segregation of and discrimination against Black Americans in many parts of our nation also permeated the armed forces. "Jim Crow" laws and practices—mostly in the South, but also in some communities in the North—led to the reality of separate schools, segregated communal areas in public spaces, and distinctly unequal treatment of Black Americans in the workplace, including in the military. Blacks were

(continued)

Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

Serving Others and Serving the Country (continued)

barred from the Marines, and though they served in the Army, they had separate officer training camps, and were not allowed to be aviators. However, many African Americans saw this "Great War" as an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and patriotism, seeking to change some of the negative perceptions that pervaded the country.

Though World War I officially ended on November 11, 1918, the political and social struggles in Europe continued through the next two decades, bringing about the onset of World War II in 1939. Germany's superiority in its air force (the Luftwaffe) and its strikes against Great Britain and France led the United States to recognize the need to augment its own air force. In 1939, the U.S. Army—which at the time included both ground and air combat units—had only around 4500 trained pilots. President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP), which set up a partnership between the U.S. Army Air Forces and colleges and universities across the country to operate aviation schools to train pilots. At first, these partnerships were intended for white men to train as pilots. However, influential community members such as the leaders of the NAACP and the Urban League, along with writings such as editorials in *The Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*—prominent Black newspapers—pressed for the inclusion of Blacks in the program. And two African American men—pilot Dale White and navigator Chauncey Spencer—took off on a "Goodwill Flight" from Chicago to Washington, D.C. to make the case for inclusion of men of color in the CPTP. Reportedly, they impressed then-Senator Harry Truman, who pledged to support the initiative (and, later as President, signed an executive order mandating the integration of all branches of the United States military).



Six historically black colleges and universities were chosen to be part of the CPTP, including Delaware State College in Dover, Delaware, and Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. These locations were viewed by many as a test for whether Blacks could pass the training program. Most of the men who took part in the Tuskegee training program were college-educated. The Tuskegee Institute program was led by Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the son of Benjamin O. Davis, Senior. The two, at the time, were the only Black officers in the Army who were not chaplains. The younger Davis taught tactics at Tuskegee, and eventually served as commanding officer of several aviation units during the war, including the famous "Red Tails" of the 332nd Fighter Group.

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Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., who commanded several units during World War II

Teachable Themes and Topics *(continued)*

Serving Others and Serving the Country *(continued)*

Though many of the Tuskegee Airmen did fly bombing missions in Europe and Northern Africa, the 332nd was given the role of fighter escorts to protect larger bomber aircraft on their missions in Italy. As escorts, though, these aviators still engaged with military aircraft or ground-based enemy troops. They painted the tails of their aircraft red to identify themselves and earned the respect of their white counterparts for their skill and courage. Their success in the war led to the 332nd earning a multitude of Distinguished Unit Citations and Flying Crosses.

At the outset of World War II, there was still a myth prevalent—perpetuated by a negative Army War College report written in 1925—that Blacks were not intelligent or skilled enough to handle leadership roles or complicated tasks in the military. These myths and outright untruths provided the rationale for segregation of the military and for the relegation of Blacks to menial jobs. The "Tuskegee Experiment"—and the other CPTP programs at HBCUs—proved these myths and lies incorrect. The Tuskegee Airmen's legacy is one of positive change worldwide as it contributed to the "Double Victory" effort of promoting "Victory at Home, and Victory Abroad;" that is, securing freedom from tyranny overseas, and overthrowing the tyranny of segregation and discrimination that Black Americans were subjected to in the United States. The men—and women—who left homes, families, college, and jobs to serve with the Tuskegee Airmen became the force that established freedoms worldwide for millions of people.



Above, 1944 photo of a combat aircraft painted with the iconic red tail of the Tuskegee Airmen.

Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

The Tuskegee Airmen—Beyond the Pilots

Black Angels over Tuskegee focuses its story on the training and combat of pilots who served in combat during World War II as part of the famed Tuskegee Airmen. As a dramatic play, it allows the audience to get to know the pilots as individual men with their own personalities, hopes and dreams, and storylines, and accomplishes that through a focus that shares that information in the course of one performance. Playwright Layton Gray keeps the action tight so that the audience gets to know these six characters, who are inspired by real people. Yet in real life, the roster of Tuskegee Airmen also includes those who were part of the program but in support positions: men and women who made the aircraft, tested the planes, sewed the parachutes, taught classes, and provided medical care for the airmen. Here are a few stories of some of the real people who served in the Tuskegee Airmen in the air and on the ground.

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. was the first Black officer to achieve the rank of brigadier general in the United States Air Force. His father, Benjamin O. Davis Sr., was the first Black officer to be named brigadier general in the U.S. Army. Davis, Jr., graduated from West Point in 1936, yet he was denied the opportunity to become a pilot with the U.S. Army Air Forces strictly because of his race, and was instead stationed at Fort Benning with an all-Black infantry unit. He graduated from infantry school there and then moved to Tuskegee Institute to become professor of military studies. While there, he enrolled in the Advanced Flying School at the Tuskegee Air Base, where he was part of the first graduating class and earned his pilot's wings. Davis, Jr. was given command of the 99th Fighter Squadron and, later, the 332nd Fighter Group. His squadrons were highly skilled and disciplined, and earned a host of medals and commendations. He was promoted through the ranks during and beyond the war as he continued his military service, yet it wasn't until after his retirement that the Tuskegee Airmen enlisted the support of Arizona Senator John McCain to award him the rank of four-star general, which finally occurred in 1998 as President Bill Clinton awarded him the rank. In 2019, the United States Air Force Academy further recognized Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.'s service by naming their airfield after him. Davis died on July 4, 2002, and is buried at Arlington Cemetery.



Charles Alfred Anderson was a self-trained pilot who served as chief flight instructor in Tuskegee. The first African American man to earn a commercial pilot's license, Anderson learned to fly by saving his own money to buy a plane, taxiing faster and faster until he was aloft, and landing the craft safely. He earned a private pilot's license in 1929, and during the 1930s, flew multiple long-distance flights across the country and even internationally. With flying partner Dr. Albert Forsythe, Anderson flew from the United States to several islands in the Caribbean and to South America. Anderson taught aviation at Howard University and then transferred to Tuskegee where he was known as "Chief" for being the chief flight

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Teachable Themes and Topics *(continued)*

The Tuskegee Airmen—Beyond the Pilots *(continued)*

Charles Alfred Anderson *(continued)*

instructor. Perhaps Anderson is best known for a well-publicized flight in 1941, when First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt came to the base, saw the pilots in action in the skies as part of their training, and asked to ride aloft with Chief Anderson. After this flight, she became a vocal proponent for allowing those pilots who graduated from the Tuskegee program to fly in combat rather than remaining on hold stateside for no other reason than racial discrimination. For his own skill as a pilot, and his training of hundreds of Black airmen during the Tuskegee Experiment, Anderson is known as the “Father of Black Aviation.”



Anderson in the cockpit with passenger Eleanor Roosevelt.

Mildred Hemons Carter was a student at Tuskegee Institute who received her Bachelor’s Degree in business at the age of 19. Wanting to fly, she trained in the Civilian Pilots Training Program, learning from Chief Anderson, and graduating with the first class of pilots in the CPTP at Tuskegee. The military refused to accept women in combat service at the time, so she then applied to be part of the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), who flew aircraft stateside, often ferrying planes from factories to bases. The WASPs rejected her, though, solely on the basis of race. She continued to fly her own plane, and served in the Tuskegee Experiment in other support roles, including operating a bulldozer to clear and build airstrips, and rigging parachutes. She met her husband—also a pilot—at the base,. Shortly before her death in 2011, the WASPs retroactively inducted her into their organization. Many airmen who saw her in action as a pilot commented that “there wasn’t a plane she couldn’t fly.”



Willa Brown was the first African American woman to receive a pilot’s license in the United States. A former high school teacher, Brown moved to Chicago to study at Northwestern University, where she earned her MBA. She was inspired by Bessie Coleman, the first African American woman to earn her pilot’s license (which she did in France), and Brown became intrigued with airplanes. She studied aeronautics at Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University, and earned certification as a master mechanic. She then earned her pilot’s license in 1938. After meeting her husband in her training, the two founded the Coffey School of Aeronautics in Chicago, which offered training to pilots regardless of race or gender. The

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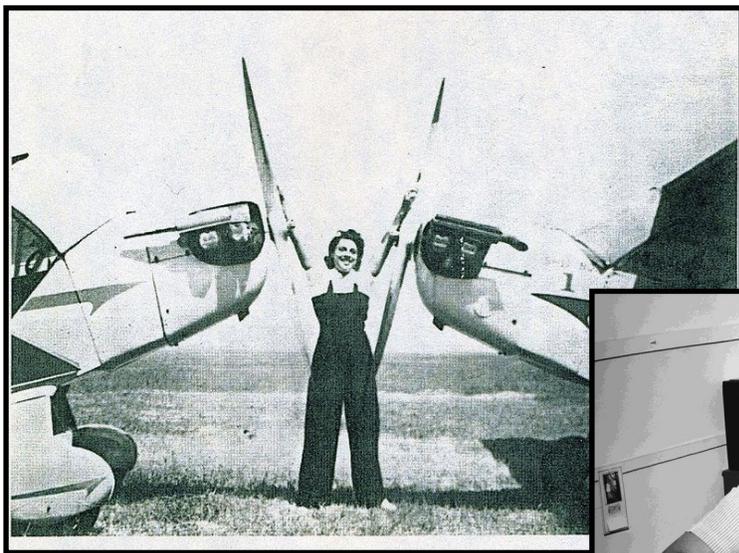
Teachable Themes and Topics *(continued)*

The Tuskegee Airmen—Beyond the Pilots *(continued)*

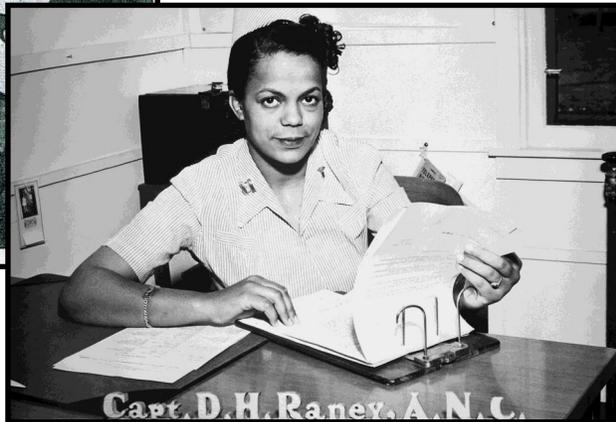
Willa Brown *(continued)*

Coffey School was originally part of the CPTP, and Brown's student pilots were then selected to train at Tuskegee Institute. Later, Brown became part of the Civil Air Patrol, a state-side defense program, where she was given the rank of lieutenant. Later in her life, she served on the Women's Advisory Committee for the FAA. Brown is buried at Lincoln Cemetery in Chicago, near where Bessie Coleman is buried.

Della Raney Jackson was the principal chief nurse stationed at the Tuskegee Army Air Field during World War II. Affectionately known by her peers as "Ma Raney," she held the rank of First Lieutenant and supervised a large staff of nurses who attended to the airmen and women at the base. She was the first African American selected to the Army Nurse Corps. She was initially rejected by the Corps based on her race (though the reason given was that she was not a member of the American Red Cross). Raney wrote directly to Mary Beard, the head of the Red Cross, explaining her credentials (her nursing degree and professional experience) and her desire to serve her country as a nurse in the Army Air Corps. Beard wrote back, sending Raney her membership card and certificate. Raney reapplied to the Army Air Corps and was accepted. Throughout the war she served in military hospitals and trained and supervised other nurses, and was promoted to captain when she was transferred to a base in Arizona. She continued a career as a military nurse well beyond the war, and is buried in Arlington Cemetery.



*Above, a young Willa Brown on an airfield.
Right, Captain Della Raney of the Army Nurse Corps.*



Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

An Interview with Writer/Director Layon Gray

Layon Gray, the playwright and director of *Black Angels over Tuskegee*, sat down with DTC's Director of Education & Community Engagement, Johanna Schloss, to talk about the writing process behind the play.

JS: What attracted you to write a play about the Tuskegee Airmen?

LG: In 2007, I was in Los Angeles and saw on TV that this group of older men was receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush, and I wanted to know more. They had so much spunk and energy. I saw they were the Tuskegee Airmen, and I told a friend that I wanted to write a story about them. He said, "You should talk to my next-door-neighbor; he was a Tuskegee Airman." So I did. His name was Jerry Hodges. He told me a lot of stories, but what he really talked about was the friendships, the sense of brotherhood. It was not about the medals or recognitions; it was about this brotherhood, and that by coming together, you could achieve something that you didn't think you could, or that others didn't think you could.

JS: Are your individual characters based on specific real people? What can you tell me about them?

LG: They are all fictional. But I based them, individually, on members of my family. One of them is based on my uncle. Another, my grandfather. I pulled from their energy to create the characters.

JS: Writing about something as big as "the Tuskegee Airmen" seems like it would provide way more than a play could handle. What elements did you really want to feature in the play?

LG: I tell people this is a "love story." It's a story of men who became brothers, though they were all different and from different places. I added facts, but it's a story that everybody can identify with—it's a story about wanting to succeed. Everybody wants to achieve something, and can relate to an underdog who wants to be successful. We want to prove something to others, and to ourselves.

JS: What was some of your source material?

LG: Talking to Jerry Hodges, learning a lot of facts. There was an HBO movie that came out in the 1990s, but I learned that a lot of Airmen did not like it. It was "too Hollywood." The play has developed a lot over the years. I wrote it in 2009, but there have been many versions and drafts that came out of workshopping it and performing it over the years. In one of the early reads, my friends said, "Act One is perfect. But Act Two needs something." So I made changes, new drafts. Some of my friends who've been with me along the way say, "Which draft is this? 143?" And we have performed it all over, and I have met a lot of Airmen—and

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

An Interview with Writer/Director Layon Gray (continued)

(Gray): Airwomen—and talked with them about it, heard their stories. There were women, too—mechanics, ground support. I met one Airwoman who tested planes. She flew them before the pilots did!

We did the play in 2009 in Las Vegas at a Convention for The Tuskegee Airmen. When it was over, it was total silence. Then there was that single clap, and then a roar, and we realized many were crying. One of them said to me afterward, “Out of all the stories of the Tuskegee Airmen I’ve seen, *Black Angels over Tuskegee* is the best representation of what it was like.” That meant a lot to me.

JS: How did you handle “keeping it real” versus utilizing imagination to tell the story the way you tell it?

LG: I want to tell the story of these characters, their friendship and brotherhood, but keep educational facts. So keep the facts, but tell the story. Also, in the characters. I want people to relate to them, identify with them. It’s not about seeing color; it’s about identifying with the characters. After one show, this woman who was Jewish came up to me and hugged me because she “saw her son” in me. At another show, while we were miming the flight controls as though we were in the cockpit, I saw this one Airman miming along, doing the moves himself with us. It’s a simple story, but when you make it real and honest, people relate to it.

JS: How would you describe “setting” for the play?

LG: It’s a journey. It was set in Utah in one draft, because they had a testing facility there, but then I went to the hot waiting room in Texas. We use costumes, chairs, and a few flats. We use mime and choreography for flying.

JS: How did you decide what to keep in the abbreviated version and what to eliminate?

LG: Sometimes it depends on what schools wanted. There is a 15-minute version of the play; a 30-minute version; a one-hour version. I have actors that have been with the show for many years, and they might say, “Which version is this one?” But in them all, I want to keep educational facts, but still tell the story. This one (the 50-minute version) tells a complete story. We will often have kids who come back to the full version with their parents. Teachers, too. But the shorter shows still have to tell a complete story. Sometimes, as a playwright, it’s hard to cut something because you like it so much! But the side of me that is also a director knows what can be cut and still keep what’s important.

JS: You write, direct, and act in this play. How does that work to the benefit of the show? Are there times when “one hat” disagrees with “another hat”? How do you handle that?

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Teachable Themes and Topics (continued)

An Interview with Writer/Director Layon Gray (continued)

LG: I can separate these sides of myself, and I trust the other actors to tell me what isn't working, or what does work. Sometimes I listen to them. Sometimes I don't. But I take what's good, and let the rest go.

JS: What advice do you have for playwrights who are writing about real events or real people?

LG: Make it true, real, and honest. Biographies are tricky—you get into what about this person's life do you put in, or not put in. What you keep, what you don't. I use facts, but then create the story around the facts. "Historical fiction"—there is truth. But then you tell the story of the characters in this world.

JS: Is there anything else you'd like to share about the play?

LG: It is a rollercoaster of emotions. We have been invited to perform for NFL teams—the New York Jets, the Buffalo Bills, the L.A. Chargers—as part of teambuilding. How you come together, despite your different backgrounds, and become brothers, working hard to be successful. After these shows, we see this big football player crying.... "I don't usually like plays, but you got me, man."

And you think about [the Airmen's] journey. They were ready after four weeks. Other pilot training, after four, five weeks, they get out there. But there were all these people who said they couldn't do it, or sent them on somewhere else to wait. There was a lot of "holding," sometimes for a year or more. But they didn't just sit there while they waited; they kept learning and training. So when they did get out there, that's why they were so good. That's one of the things we like to talk about in talkbacks with students; even if you are "on hold," you keep learning and training. The Tuskegee Airmen still hold many records. One was the original "Top Gun." Because they kept learning, preparing.

This play is about the Tuskegee Airmen, but it's not. It's about anyone who wants to succeed, wants to prove yourself to others and to yourself, and works hard to do it. And it's about those friendships, that brotherhood, that love, that lasts—that's what they remember. That's what you remember.

Layon Gray is the writer and director of Black Angels over Tuskegee, and also plays the role of Quinten in the production at Delaware Theatre Company.



Questions for Classroom Discussion

Knowledge and Comprehension

1. How do Quinten and Abraham know each other?
2. What are the six men in this office trying to accomplish?
3. Who was Bessie Coleman? Why does Elijah bring her up to the other men?
4. Why does Jeremiah get angry with the other five men?
5. Why would Jeremiah, Percival, Theodore, and Elijah be so concerned about Quinten's medical condition?
6. According to the young man's story, what are some examples of discrimination that the airmen faced?
7. Who is the young man? Why is he telling this story?

Application and Analysis

1. How are the six airmen-in-training similar to one another? How are they different from one another?
2. What types of skills would a Tuskegee airman have to develop to be successful in their missions? Give examples from the play that show that one or more of the characters builds upon or possesses these skills.
3. From the information shared in the play, what are some differences in the way the Tuskegee airmen were treated compared to the way white airmen were treated?

Synthesis and Evaluation

1. How might you make the case that a person serving in the military during World War II was someone who made great sacrifices to do the job they did? What information in the play supports your case? What knowledge or inference of your own supports your case?
2. What important lessons can people of today learn from the Tuskegee airmen? Explain your answer.

Classroom Activities

1. Research pilot training programs in your area (in Delaware, perhaps Delaware State University), or look online through the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum exhibits about what it takes to be a pilot. Alternatively, interview a member of the United States Air Force or Air National Guard and learn of the type of training that goes into becoming a pilot. Compare and contrast that training with what the Tuskegee Airmen and other military pilots who served in the armed forces before 1960. What subjects are part of classroom training? How do novice pilots take "driver's ed"? What technologies are in place now that weren't during the 1940s to make flying safer or easier for pilots today compared to during World War II? Share your findings with your class.
2. The names on the roster of the original Tuskegee Airmen are men and women from across the country who served as pilots and support personnel. Research one facet of the jobs performed by support personnel. What types of skills did these men and women learn, develop, or possess in order to do their work? What coursework or training might be needed for someone doing this job? What obstacles made doing the job more difficult? What did "success" look like to someone who performed that job or to those in command? If possible, examine the story of one or more of the real Tuskegee Airmen who were in this position (you may even choose one of the people briefly described in this study guide), and share through a visual or dramatic presentation what you have learned.
3. Using a map of the United States, chart out the places in the United States that an African American at a partner college/university who entered the Civilian Pilot Training Program in 1941 or 1942 might have gone in order to begin flight school, to train at Tuskegee Institute, and to move through other bases or military locations before going into combat. Then, using a world map that would have been accurate for 1941-1945, while the U.S. was at war, identify several locations of air combat campaigns where the Tuskegee Airmen would have served. Finally, choose one or more of the locales you have identified and conduct further research on what major events occurred in this place during the war. Create a larger map or other visual representation of where a person who began the decade as an "everyday citizen" would have traveled and what he or she might have encountered in just a few short years after being involved in the Tuskegee Experiment. Or, create an imagined diary from the point of view of a man or woman who served, sharing their daily routines, challenges, and successes through wartime.
4. Explore the struggle for racial integration and equality of treatment that led the United States Armed Forces from an institution that propagated the racial discrimination of Jim Crow through President Truman's mandating integration and into the Civil Rights

(continued)

Classroom Activities (continued)

4. (continued) Movement of the 1960s. Did the struggle for equality end with Truman's actions? If so, what was improved? If not, what was still contributing to inequality for Black men and women in the Armed Forces? Compare primary source documents from 100 years ago with those of today with regard to policy in each branch of the U.S. military. Who or what were the agents of change? What steps were taken to insure full rights and opportunities for all? What other changes in policies and procedures helped bring about more equal treatment and opportunity for women? Present your findings to your class.

5. One of the strongest themes that comes through in *Black Angels over Tuskegee* is that of unity of purpose, a coming together of different individuals for a common cause. The characters all want to prove to others and to themselves that they can be successful in aerial combat, and they do so. Besides a military unit or squadron, what other examples can you think of of teams or groups that must work together to achieve a goal? Sports teams, of course, but in what other arenas is the joining of intention and effort necessary to accomplish something important? Brainstorm a list, and from there, scaffold ideas about why group effort is better than individuals' working separately. As a class, create an important goal that the group is willing to work together to achieve. How does your group process work? How are roles or tasks divided up? How are the different ideas heard and evaluated? How will success be measured? Consider your process and compare it with what a group like the Tuskegee airmen might have experienced, as well as the experiences of other types of teams. Finally, create a list of recommendations for making a group effort successful.

6. The term "band of brothers" has been used often to describe the close relationships that those who serve together in war experience, and was even used as a title for a book and an HBO miniseries about a company of soldiers during World War II. The phrase actually comes from a Shakespearean play, *Henry V*. Playwright Layon Gray spoke of the Tuskegee Airmen's memories of the brotherhood they felt with those with whom they served, and Gray wanted that brotherhood to come through in the play *Black Angels over Tuskegee*. Read the "St. Crispian's Day" speech from William Shakespeare's play *Henry V*, starting at Act IV, Scene 3, line 43, with the words "This day is called the feast of Crispian," and ending with line 69. How might a World War II-era airman or soldier connect with this piece? Or a person currently serving in the U.S. armed forces? Write a "contemporary translation" of the piece that could be a monologue spoken by a Tuskegee Airman or by someone in another combat circumstance about the bond they feel with those who serve with them. Present your new monologue to the class in a dramatic performance.



World War II-era poster featuring Tuskegee Airmen

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Why Go to the Theatre?

State and National Education Standards Addressed Through Taking Your Students to a Live Theatre Production

When your students view live theatre, they are taking part in a learning experience that engages their minds on many levels. From simple recall and comprehension of the plot of a play or musical to analysis and evaluation of the production elements of a show, students receive and interpret messages communicated through words, movement, music, and other artistic devices. Beyond “I liked it; it was good,” students learn to communicate about the content and performance of an artistic piece and to reflect on their own and others’ emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual points-of-view and responses. And the immediacy of live theatre--the shared moments between actors and audience members in the here-and-now--raises students’ awareness of the power and scope of human connection.

The following educational standards are addressed in a visit to a performance at Delaware Theatre Company along with a pre-show DTC classroom presentation and post-show talkback session at the theatre. *(Additional standards addressed through the use of the study guide or through further classroom study are not included here.)*

Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

Reading: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, 6

Language: 9-10 and 11-12, Strands 3, 4, and 5

National Core Arts Standards—Theatre:

Responding: Anchor Standards 7, 8, and 9

Connecting: Anchor Standard 11

Delaware Standards for English Language Arts (DOE):

Standard 2: 2.2a, 2.4b1, 2.5b, 2.5g, 2.6a

Standard 3: 3.1b, 3.3b1, 3.3b2

Standard 4: 4.1a, 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.2f, 4.3a, 4.4b

*Compiled by Johanna Schloss, Associate Director of Education &
Community Engagement, Delaware Theatre Company, 2016*

Teamwork in Theatre = Artists + Audience

Going to the theatre is a wonderful way to experience **TEAMWORK**.

The **ARTISTS** who put on the show—that includes people like actors, musicians, sound designers, costumers, painters, carpenters, and even electricians—are not only involved in the performance, but have often spent weeks or months getting the show ready. That’s a lot of work! And there would be no show without the efforts of these artists. They are very important!

The **AUDIENCE** who comes to see the show is also important. There is no show if there is no audience! The actors, musicians, and technicians can practice all they want to, but it takes an audience to turn all that work into a theatre performance!

THEATRE is not the same as a movie or a TV show. Theatre is LIVE in front of you. The actors onstage? They are real people in the room with you! The lights shining onstage? They are controlled by real people in the room with you! The sound of applause during the bows? That comes from real people in the room with you! **Everything anyone does in the room, whether that person is an ARTIST or an AUDIENCE member, affects everyone else.** If an actor decides not to wear his costume, it disrupts the performance, surprises the other actors, and confuses the audience. If an audience member decides to play a video game during the show, it disrupts the performance, creates strange lights and sounds that don’t fit in the show, and distracts other audience members and the artists involved with the performance. When you are in the theatre, your words and actions are observed by everyone in the room, and these words and actions can make the theatre experience a good one for everyone else or a bad one for everyone else. This is why **TEAMWORK** is so important in theatre. Everyone in the room needs everyone else to **DO THEIR PART** for the experience to be successful.

What must the ARTISTS do during the theatre performance?

Do the show as rehearsed, and not suddenly change something or surprise other actors or technicians.

Give full attention to your job, whether that is acting or moving scenery or opening a curtain on time.

Give full energy to the performance, showing that you care about what the audience sees and hears.

What must the AUDIENCE do during the theatre performance?

Give full attention to the activity onstage, with no talking during the show, no sleeping, and no playing with or using things like phones, toys, or papers.

Practice courteous behaviors towards other audience members, not making noises during the show, keeping hands and feet to yourself, and staying in your seat rather than distracting others by getting up and down.

Show respect for the place and the people in it by doing things like arriving on time; waiting until after the curtain call to leave; not eating, drinking, or chewing gum in the theatre; and responding to the show in a way that recognizes the efforts of the ARTISTS and the AUDIENCE in making the experience positive.

When ARTISTS and AUDIENCE members all do their part, they show respect for each other and for the work involved in creating theatre. **That mutual respect and the efforts to make the experience a positive one for all add up to make TEAMWORK in the theatre!**