FLYNN CENTER PRESENTS

BLACK ANGELS OVER TUSKEGEE

STUDY GUIDE
Welcome to the 2015-2016 Student Matinee Season!

Today’s scholars and researchers say creativity is the top skill our kids will need when they enter the work force of the future, so we salute YOU for valuing the educational and inspirational power of live performance. By using this study guide you are taking an even greater step toward implementing the arts as a vital and inspiring educational tool.

We hope you find this guide useful. If you have any suggestions for content or format of this guide, please contact sms@flynncenter.org.

Enjoy the show!  -Education Staff

The arts are an essential element of education, just like reading, writing, and arithmetic...music, dance, painting, and theater are all keys that unlock profound human understanding and accomplishment.

- William Bennett

It is the supreme art of the teacher to AWAKEN JOY in creative expression and knowledge.

- Albert Einstein

We appreciate and value your feedback.

- Click here to evaluate our study guides.
- Click here for Teacher Feedback Forms for the performance.
- Click here for Student Feedback Forms for the performance.
- Click here for Parent Forms to help parents engage with their children around the show.

This guide was written & compiled by the Education Department at the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts with inspiration from the Black Angels Over Tuskegee website and the web resources listed in this guide.

Permission is granted for teachers, parents, and students who are coming to Flynn shows to copy & distribute this guide for educational purposes only.
The Flynn Center recognizes that field trip resources for schools are extremely limited, thus matinee prices for schools are significantly lower than prices for public performances. As a non-profit organization, the Flynn is deeply grateful to the foundations, corporations, and individuals whose generous financial support keeps matinees affordable for schools.

Special thanks to Lillian and Bruce Venner for sponsoring these matinee performances.


Additional support from the Bruce J. Anderson Foundation, Green Mountain Fund, Walter Cerf Community Fund, the Vermont Arts Council, the Susan Quinn Memorial Fund, and the Ronald McDonald House Charities.
Before you see the show:
- Discuss and research the following questions: What was life like for African Americans in the early 1940s? What were some of the challenges faced by early African American pilots? Even though they were denied equal rights and protections, many African Americans yearned to serve their country in the armed forces during WWII. Why do you think this was?

As you watch the show:
- How did the design team, the director, and the actors create a sense of space and movement, the grandness of flying and the magnitude of war on stage? How were props, scenic design, lighting, actor’s movement and miming used to create the feel of being a WWII pilot?
- Observe how music is used within the production. Does it evoke a certain mood or tone? How was your experience impacted by the music in the show?

After you see the show:
- How did you respond to the narrator character? Was it helpful to have someone guide you through the story?
- What about this show inspired you? What did you find compelling and moving? What was challenging or difficult? Did any questions arise as you watch they performance? What would you like to know more about?
- Write a review of the performance. Include commentary on the performances, the design, the writing, directing, and the content. Include whether you would recommend this show and why or why not.

The Production
The stage is set by our narrator, who declares as the musical begins, “You see, I believe in the principle that all men are created equal.” The narrator provides historical context and helps the audience by defining important terms throughout the performance. What follows is the powerful story of six men struggling collectively to achieve their dreams courageously. Black Angels Over Tuskegee comes to us from St. Luke’s Theatre in NYC, where it’s spent 6 years playing Off-Broadway to rave reviews!

The Creative Force
Black Angels Over Tuskegee is written, produced and directed by Layon Gray. Layon has spent more than two decades writing, directing and developing stage plays and films that reflect a wide array of African-American cultural movements, creating new paradigms for the stage and motion picture industry. Since founding Layon Gray Enterprises, He has guided the company’s growth from a privately held theatre company to one of the entertainment industry’s leading independent companies and a veritable theatre box office force. Focusing on creating conversational dialogue in his works, Layon continues to make his mark in traditional African-American theater.
Who were the Tuskegee Airmen?

In the 1940’s, the United States Military, like so much of the nation, was segregated. The so-called Jim Crow Laws kept blacks from entering public places such as libraries, restaurants and movie theaters. Although African Americans served in the armed forces, they were restricted in the types of jobs and positions they could hold.

On April 3, 1939, President Roosevelt approved Public Law 18, that provided for an expansion of the Army Air Corps. One section of the law offered hope for those African Americans who wanted to advance their military careers beyond the kitchen or the motor pool. It called for the creation of training programs to be located at black colleges which would prepare blacks for service in a variety of areas in the Air Corps support services.

On January 16th, 1941, the War Department announced the creation of the 99th Pursuit Squadron. This was to be an all black flying unit trained at the Tuskegee Institute founded in Tuskegee, Alabama, by Booker T. Washington in 1881. Charles A. Anderson, a self-taught African American pilot had established a civilian pilot training program at the Institute in 1939. Since there were no black officers, eleven white officers were assigned to train and prepare a total of 429 enlisted men and 47 officers who would become the Tuskegee Airmen, the first black military personnel in the flying school. From 1941 to 1946 over 2,000 African Americans completed training at the Tuskegee Institute, nearly three quarters of them qualified as pilots. The rest went on to become navigators or support personnel. Together they were known as the Tuskegee airmen. During the war the 99th Pursuit Squadron, which was later renamed the 99th Fighter Squadron, flew in the skies over the Mediterranean and Europe. The missions were primarily as bomber escorts.

The 99th Fighter Squadron had the distinguished record of never losing a bomber to enemy fighters. In addition to shooting down enemy attack aircraft, they also shot down the belief that African Americans were not suited to responsible military service. In 1948 President Truman ordered the desegregation of the United States Military.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was very interested in the work at the Tuskegee Institute, particularly in the aeronautical school. During a highly publicized 1941 visit to the Tuskegee Army Air Field, she asked to take a flight with one of the Tuskegee pilots.

Although the Secret Service was anxious about the ride, Chief Civilian Flight Instructor Charles Alfred Anderson, known today as “The Father of Black Aviation,” piloted Mrs. Roosevelt over the skies of Alabama for over an hour. Flying with Anderson demonstrated the depth of Eleanor Roosevelt’s support for black pilots and the Institute’s training program.

Source: [http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/tuskegee.html](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/tuskegee.html)

The Report that Encouraged Segregation: Prior to WWII, an extremely prejudiced and discriminatory report called, *The Use of Negro Manpower in War*, outlined why some white officers believed people of color should not hold high ranking and highly-skilled positions in the military. Below are some of the statements made in the report. (Source: [http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/education/resources/pdfs/tusk_doc_a.pdf](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/education/resources/pdfs/tusk_doc_a.pdf))

- “As judged by white standards, the negro is immoral.”
- “Compared to the white man [the negro] is admittedly of inferior mentality. He is inherently weak in character.”
- “The majority of negroes left at home will be in the southern states where they will be needed for labor and where they can best be handled by competent whites.”
- “In general, the negro is jolly, docile, and tractable, and lively, but with harsh or unkind treatment can become stubborn, sullen, and unruly.”
- “The psychology of the negro, based on heredity derived from mediocre African ancestors, cultivated by several generations of slavery...is one from which we cannot expect to draw leadership material.”

Read these statements with students and look at the report as a whole, available at the source link above. How did the report come up with these “facts?” What might they have ignored (white privilege, societal inequalities, unfair testing, etc.)? How did prejudice and stereotypes impact this report? What did that mean for the role of people of color who wanted to enlist?
**Bandit**—A known hostile aircraft in flight.

**Bogey**—An aircraft in flight that cannot be identified, especially one assumed to be hostile.

**Cadet**—A young man or woman who is training to become a full member of the armed forces or the police force.

**Civil Rights**—The protections and privileges of personal liberty given to all US citizens by the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

**Civilian Pilot Training Program**—The CPTP was a program designed to increase the number of civilian pilots and provide a pool of pilots for the military. The program started early in 1939, with the government paying for ground school and flight instruction at facilities located near colleges and universities.

**Court Martial**—1. (n) A military court that tries members of the military and others for offenses under military law. 2. (v) To put somebody on trial for an offense under military law.

**Discrimination**—Unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice.

**Flak**—Bursting anti-aircraft artillery rounds, set to explode at a specific altitude and shower enemy aircraft with large metal fragments.

**Group**—An air force unit typically made up of three squadrons.

**Jim Crow**—The practice of discriminating against African Americans, especially by operating systems of public segregation. —Jim Crow laws and regulations were established in the South when post-Civil War Reconstruction ended and were used to prevent African Americans from doing things that white people could do.

**Mason-Dixon Line**—The symbolic boundary line that separated Pennsylvania from Maryland and Virginia, regarded as the dividing line between free and slave states before the Civil War.

**Mission**—A particular task given to a person or unit to carry out.

**Prejudice**—A negative or hostile attitude toward a person or group formed without just or sufficient knowledge and based on negative stereotypes. Prejudice is the result of "prejudgment" and can lead to discrimination.

**Racism**—Prejudice or animosity against people who belong to other races.

**Segregation**—Enforced separation of racial groups, especially by enforcing the use of separate schools, transportation, housing and other facilities. Segregation usually discriminates against a minority group.

**Sortie**—A mission flown by a combat aircraft.

**Squadron**—The basic unit in both the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II and today’s United States Air Force.

Tanya Lee Stone is best known for telling little-known or unknown stories of women and people of color. She writes MG/YA narrative nonfiction such as Almost Astronauts and Courage Has No Color, and nonfiction picture books such as Who Says Women Can’t Be Doctors? and The House that Jane Built. Her work has been recognized by the NAACP Image Award, Robert F. Sibert Medal, Golden Kite Award, Bank Street Flora Straus Steiglitz Award, Jane Addams Honor, YALSA Nonfiction Finalist, Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor, NPR Best Books, and NCTE Orbis Pictus Honors. She teaches writing at Champlain College in Vermont.

Tanya recently wrote the article below for the Flynn Center’s Marquee publication. She also shared her expertise and writing advice with local middle school students.

Our collective idea of American history is incomplete. There are countless little-known or unknown histories waiting to be told; countless gaps in our history books. As you might imagine, most of these untold stories feature women and people of color. The more gaps we can fill, the more rounded and complete our American story becomes.

World War II is a time period for which an enormous number of stories about black soldiers were left out of official records. Heroes went unrecognized, accomplishments forgotten. Even photographic archives of black soldiers were not properly kept and are horribly limited—in comparison to the millions of catalogued photographs of white soldiers, there are minimal images used over and over again to depict the plight of the black soldier during World War II. This unbalanced record-keeping was a way of deflating the contributions of black soldiers to the war effort. I know this, in part, due to my own research and writing of the previously untold story of the first black paratroopers in World War II—the 555th Infantry, or the Triple Nickles. While writing their story in my book Courage Has No Color, I gained an extensive education on the achievements of black military efforts in World War II.

Thankfully, the story of the Tuskegee Airmen has gotten well-deserved attention from writers and filmmakers in the past decade, and because of this, these pioneering pilots are no longer completely unknown to us. This fact alone supplies enough evidence to support just how influential it can be for storytellers to share these important American stories.

Playwright Layon Gray tackles the topic of these brave African-American men in a fresh new way with his historical docudrama “Black Angels over Tuskegee,” coming to the Flynn on Friday, January 29 from its off-Broadway run in New York. Gray took on the challenge of working with the historical record and felt a great responsibility to get the story right. Inspired by true events, the play follows six of these brave airmen on their path to becoming the first African American aviators in the segregated US Army Air Force during World War II. These men had to perform exceedingly well—enough to not only succeed for themselves, but to convince the powers-that-be that other black soldiers could follow in their footsteps.

Just like the Triple Nickles, the Tuskegee Airmen were expected to fail, and faced obstacles again and again related to prejudice and racism. And yet the achievements of both groups surpassed expectations, paving the way for the integration of the Army. Exploring the journey of the Tuskegee Airmen with actors that step into the characters’ shoes is a tremendous way to bring their story to life.

Telling True Stories with Tanya: advice from an author

- Tanya likes to call her writing “telling true stories” instead of “non-fiction.” Why should we define something by what it’s not, instead of what it is?
- Pick a topic that excites you. It’s all about your passion. If you have authentic interest in your topic, your writing will be interesting.
- It’s all about the characters of the story. Who are they really? What do they want and how do they go about getting what they want?
- Think of yourself as a detective. What’s missing? What stories aren’t being told? Find the missing pieces, put the puzzles together.
- When writing your first draft, just keep writing. Get out what’s in your head and your heart. Then, go back and revise, but get it out first.
Create a Visual Timeline
Using this guide and independent student research, have each student create a timeline of important dates and events related to the Tuskegee Airmen. For each event have students choose an image or symbol that represents what happened, or it’s significance. Additionally, under each date, students can write a short paragraph about why this moment was important and what impact it had on the Tuskegee Airmen and/or American society as a whole.

To extend this, have students choose one of the important moments on the visual timeline and create a news report about the event. This could take the form of a newspaper article, a video news bulletin, a news blog; students can get creative with their format. Whatever format they choose, they should include important facts, images/pictures, quotes if available, and statements about the impact of the event on that time in history.

Reflecting on Discrimination
Divide the class into small discussion groups. Provide groups with the following questions. Ask one member of the group to record the main ideas discussed.

- Does discrimination still exist in contemporary society?
- What is the basis for this discrimination? (Race, gender, age, etc.) Can you think of examples of this discrimination?
- What progress have we made as a society since the time of the Tuskegee Airmen? What more needs to be done?
- Are there times when it is acceptable or appropriate to discriminate? What if it serves the greater good? (Example: age limit and ability tests for firefighters)
  - Can you think of other examples where exclusionary practices seem appropriate and needed for the greater good?
  - How do we define the greater good? Who gets to decide this?
  - If we do allow for these rules of exclusion to be in place, what criteria or processes should be in place to make sure everything remains on the up and up?
- Come together after groups have explored each question. Have groups share some of the most meaningful pieces of their conversation. Are there themes or similarities between the groups’ discussions?

Journaling as an Airman
This activity could be done either before your class comes to the show, or after as reflection. If doing this before, have students research some of the real Airmen, and read about what life was like as a person of color at that time, what training was like, what serving in the Army was like, and other historical anecdotes. If doing this after, have students choose one of the characters they saw portrayed onstage. Have students write 3-5 journal entries from the perspective of their chosen person. These entries should come from different moments in this person’s experience: enlisting, training, leaving family, dealing with prejudice, flying, etc. When the entries are complete, come together as a class and reflect on what discoveries students made about their chosen person.
The Art Form: Musical Theater

What is theater? Webster’s dictionary says, “a dramatic performance.” But what is dramatic? What is drama? Drama is any kind of performance that tells a story through character, action, and dialogue (talking). Some say that theatre portrays life—either as it is or as it might be. But one of the things that makes theatre different from real life is that things can happen in theatre that cannot happen in real life—in other words, things that appear to be magical.

It is believed that people have been acting out stories forever. But what about musical theater? Although it is likely that people have been singing and dancing and making music to accompany their stories for as long as they’ve been acting them out—all over the world—American musical theater, like theater itself, has more recent roots. The defining characteristic of musical theater may be that the music—and often dance—and the drama are inextricably linked. The story depends upon the songs as much as the songs depend on the story; without either one, the drama as a whole—the musical theater—would not exist.

READ & EXPLORE: Click [here](#) for a more in-depth description of musical theater and more theater phrases and terminology.

**WORDS COME ALIVE: Arts Integration Activities**

Providing the opportunity to actively explore the world of the show helps students become more engaged and connected audience members, thinking about artists’ choices and approaching the performance with enhanced curiosity. For more information about our arts integration activities, click [here](#), call 652-4548, or email schoolprograms@flynncenter.org.

### Activity: Interviews

**Learning goals:** Make connections; ask questions; draw inferences; deepen understanding of characters.

**Performing goals:** Interpret characters verbally; communicate motivation.

Put students into pairs, one person being A and one B. Person A will be the interviewer/advocate and person B will be President Roosevelt. Person A is trying to convince the President to fully integrate the military. What arguments can Person A present to compel the President? Explore the following questions and then move beyond in character:

- Why is this important at this moment in time? How will the American people respond to this change? What impact will this have on the military and on society?
- If students need some prompting, the teacher can play the role of the President and have students interview the teacher in role.

Once they have explored this line of questioning, have Person B become the interviewer, and have Person A become one of the Tuskegee Airmen. The interviewer wants to uncover what it meant to be an Airmen. Explore the following questions and move beyond in character:

- What was one of your most significant and meaningful moments? Did you experience any resistance from others when you decided to be part of the Airmen? Or while you were serving in the military? Can you share what those experiences were like? What would you say to a young person who had a dream but felt it was impossible to achieve?

### Web Resources

- [http://tuskegeeairmen.org/](http://tuskegeeairmen.org/)
- [http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/tuskegee-airmen](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/tuskegee-airmen)
- [http://www.tuskegeemuseum.org/who-were-they/](http://www.tuskegeemuseum.org/who-were-they/)
- [http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/tuskegee.html](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/tuskegee.html)
The Flynn Center

The Flynn has been at the center of Vermont's cultural landscape for over 80 years—from its earliest days as a vaudeville house through five decades as a movie theater to its present life as the region’s leading performance center and arts education organization. Today, the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts is recognized internationally for its significant artistic, educational, and community outreach activities; superb technical capacity; beautiful historic setting; and world-class presentations. At the Flynn, we celebrate a rich legacy of connecting our community with the arts. The Flynn is recognized for its stellar artistic programming in theater, dance, and music; and for educational programs that reach far into the community to advance teaching and learning. For more about the Flynn, click here.

Etiquette for Live Performances

The Essentials

- Listen, experience, imagine, discover, learn!
- Give your energy and attention to the performers.
- At the end of the show, clap for the performers’ time and energy.
- Eating, drinking, and chewing gum are not okay.
- Talk only before and after the performance.
- Turn off wireless devices. No photos, videos, texting, or listening to music.

Why is Etiquette Important?

A good live performance is a powerful communication between audience and performer. The more the audience gives to the performer, the more the performer can give back to the audience. The performer hears the audience laughing, senses its sympathy, and delights in the enthusiasm of its applause. Furthermore, each audience member affects those sitting near him or her, in addition to the performers onstage. Technological devices (cameras, phones, etc.) have become so prevalent in our daily lives, but using these devices is distracting to the performers onstage and other audience members trying to watch the show. Even the light from checking the time, or the buzz of a phone on vibrate can pull the people around you out of the experience. Cell phone frequencies can even interfere with the microphones in the production, and taking photos can be unsafe for performers. Additionally, an artist has the right to decide what photos and videos go out into the world. Phones keep you from being present and fully engaged with the show. Thank you for turning devices completely off!

DISCUSS BEING A MINDFUL AUDIENCE MEMBER:

How is going to see a live theatre performance different from seeing a movie, going to a concert, or watching TV?

In small groups, come up with a list of positive audience behaviors, and behaviors that would be disruptive to performers and other audience members. Come together and create a master list.
We can’t wait to see you at the theater!

Teachers, a few reminders:

- Fill out the Seating and Travel Survey, so we can best accommodate your group’s needs in regards to dismissal, bussing, students with different needs, etc.
- Share your experience with us! Use the feedback links, or share your students’ artwork, writing, responses. We love to hear how experiences at the Flynn impact our audiences.
- Explore other student matinees at the Flynn this season. We’ve still got seats in some shows and we’d love to help you or other teachers at your school enliven learning with an engaging arts experience!

We have some new initiatives to deepen student connection and experience!

**Pre or Post-Show Video Chats:**

Help students build enthusiasm or process their experience with a free, 5-10 minute video chat before or after the show! We can set up Skype/Facetime/Google Hangouts with your class to answer questions about the content, art form, and experience. Contact Kat, kredniss@flynncenter.org to set up your chat!

** Autism and Sensory-Friendly Accommodations:**

The Flynn Center has been working diligently to break down barriers for audience members with disabilities, with a particular focus on those with sensory-sensitivities. Social stories, break spaces, sensory friendly materials, and more are available for all student matinees. Feel free to let us know ahead of time if any of these would be useful, or ask an usher at the show!

**Make your field trip the most meaningful learning experience it can be with a preparatory Companion Workshop in your classroom!**

An engaging Flynn Teaching Artist can come to your school to deepen students’ understanding of both content and form with an interactive workshop, enriching kids’ matinee experiences. Funding support is often available. To learn more, check out this link. To book a workshop, click here. Questions? Contact Sasha: schoolprograms@flynncenter.org or (802)652-4508