I HAVE A Dream

A Readers Theatre Piece

By Robert Mauro

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# I HAVE A DREAM
A Readers Theatre Piece

By ROBERT MAURO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

## MUSEUM GOERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARTHA</td>
<td>old black female; civil rights veteran</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HARRIET</td>
<td>Martha’s friend; old black female; civil rights veteran</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARAH</td>
<td>Martha’s granddaughter; high school age</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACHEL</td>
<td>Sarah’s best friend; young white female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIMOTHY</td>
<td>another friend; young black male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## MUSEUM EXHIBITS

### Civil Rights Activists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.</td>
<td>museum guide; civil rights leader; black male</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTHER</td>
<td>King’s mother</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER</td>
<td>King’s father; preacher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUNG MARTIN</td>
<td>King as a child</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORETTA SCOTT KING</td>
<td>King’s wife</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSA PARKS</td>
<td>black rights activist</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLD BLACK MAN</td>
<td>segregation victim</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT ONE</td>
<td>black college student</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT TWO</td>
<td>another</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT THREE</td>
<td>another</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT FOUR</td>
<td>another</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Civil Rights Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE</td>
<td>white female</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER TWO</td>
<td>white male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER THREE</td>
<td>black male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOTER ONE</td>
<td>black female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOTER TWO</td>
<td>black male</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Segregationists
KKK MEMBER ..................white male 21
SEGREGATIONIST ..............white female 16
BUS DRIVER ....................white male 5
POLICE OFFICER ...............white male 2
COUNTER MAN..................white male 2
WAITRESS .......................white female 2

SETTING

Time: Present.
Place: A Civil Rights Museum.

SET DESCRIPTION
As a readers theatre piece, no specific set is needed although some stools can be useful in setting the scene. If used, ROSA should have a stool UP RIGHT, and four stools should be placed in a diagonal line UP LEFT for the four STUDENTS. A final stool can be used by KING at CENTER. Additional stools can be used, if desired.
I HAVE A DREAM

1 LIGHTS UP on the MUSEUM EXHIBITS posed in tableaus across the stage with KING standing proudly at CENTER STAGE. YOUNG MARTIN, MOTHER and FATHER are posed DOWN LEFT. The STUDENTS sit on stools in an angled line UP LEFT with the WAITRESS and the COUNTER MAN. CORETTA and CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE are standing arm in arm UP CENTER with the SEGREGATIONIST looking on. ROSA sits resolutely on a stool UP RIGHT with the BUS DRIVER threatening her. The VOTERS are blocked by the POLICEMAN at RIGHT. The CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS TWO and THREE run to the aid of the OLD BLACK MAN being beaten by the KKK MEMBER DOWN RIGHT. SOUND EFFECT: “WE SHALL OVERCOME” INSTRUMENTAL plays softly. MARTHA, HARRIET, SARAH, RACHEL and TIMOTHY ENTER DOWN RIGHT and begin to examine the MUSEUM EXHIBITS. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. breaks his pose and moves to greet them as their museum guide.

KING: Welcome to the Civil Rights Museum. I never thought I’d be in a museum, but here I am. That’s me in those black and white photos. “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” it says.

MARTHA: Oh, yes. Sarah, come here, honey chile, look at all these photographs. Harriet, don’t they bring back our memories of the civil rights movement?

HARRIET: They certainly do. I was in some of those demonstrations.

SARAH: You were?

MARTHA: Yes. (Indicating CORETTA and CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE.) Some were joyful… (Indicating the STUDENTS.) …some somber.

KING: (Gazes at CORETTA.) Yes. One of our many marches for freedom. (SOUND EFFECT: MARCHING FEET.)

HARRIET: Everyone wanted to march with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE: Both blacks and whites together.

SEGREGATIONIST: Well, not every white.

KKK MEMBER: Yeah. Not me and my Klan buddies.

SEGREGATIONIST: Not any of us that believed in segregation!

KKK MEMBER: We KKK men wanted King gone!

RACHEL: Look at this. It’s a copy of Abraham Lincoln’s momentous decree, his Emancipation Proclamation.

KING: That document may have freed some of my people. But not all of my people. It did, however, give millions of Negroes hope that they were finally going to be free.

SEGREGATIONIST: Not if we could help it.

MARTHA: It was because of the Klan and other white racists that true freedom for Negroes would not come for some time.
KING: Yes. There was the Klan. They terrorized my people.

OLD BLACK MAN: They lynched us.

KING: And there was old Jim Crow.

TIMOTHY: Who was Jim Crow?

HARRIET: It wasn’t a person. It was a set of unwritten laws.

KING: Old Jim Crow kept my daddy and his daddy’s daddy and my mother and her mother’s mother shackled with the chains of a new form of slavery—segregation.

SEGREGATIONIST: Jim Crow was perfectly fair. We called it separate but equal.

MARTHA: It was separate, but not equal.

HARRIET: Facilities, schools, jobs—opportunities were never equal for our people under Jim Crow.

KING: State laws were drawn up by white racist politicians to perpetuate the disenfranchisement of men and women of color.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE: This troubled many of us Northern whites. And many decent Southern whites.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER TWO: So some of us white folk became civil rights workers to fight racist laws, like Jim Crow.

KING: Those laws kept the black man and the black woman from experiencing true freedom.

HARRIET: They kept all Negroes from the American dream.

KING: I wanted freedom for my children and for my people. Not segregation. When you see tears well up in the eyes of your little girl because she can’t go to a beach or amusement park she just saw on TV, what do you say to her?

RACHEL: What did you say?

KING: It was hard to say anything. I wanted my children, and all God’s children—all men and women—to be free and enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness!

RACHEL: Segregation is wrong. This museum makes that perfectly clear.

SARAH: It certainly does. It truly shows how terrible segregation was.

KKK MEMBER: (Steps forward.) Not to the Klan it wasn’t!

KING: People lived without opportunity or hope under segregation.

MARTHA: One cannot live without hope.

KING: (Crosses DOWN LEFT.) I remember my Mama and Daddy. Two black parents looking down into the eyes of their newborn babe. Me.

MOTHER/FATHER: (To KING.) Hello, son.
KING: When I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, things were not as they are today for my people.

HARRIET: Back then we were called Negroes, at least by the good people.

KKK MEMBER: We called ya nigras on a good day. (Laughs.)

KING: This hurt my mama. I was born on January 15th, 1929.

MOTHER: Hello, Martin. Hello, child. Say hello to your mother and father. You’re such a strong boy. You’ll need to be in such a world.

KKK MEMBER: Yer darn tootin’! A world of whites only. And we enforced that with the rope and the whip!

KING: It was a world where no Negroes or Jews need apply.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER TWO: No Jews or dogs or coloreds allowed.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE: It hurt me to see anyone treated that way, so I became a civil rights worker.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER TWO: We saw what discrimination did. It was an especially cold, cruel world for a little black child or an adult of color.

KING: My father was a minister as was his father before him. And they all knew the pain of discrimination.

FATHER: (To MOTHER.) He’s quite a fellow. We’ll call him Martin Luther King, Jr. Hello, Son.

MOTHER: As he grew, he became such a quiet child.

KING: In response to the pain of racism and the utter destruction of pride that segregation caused, Mama always taught me to be strong and believe in myself.

MOTHER: (YOUNG MARTIN runs past MOTHER to DOWN CENTER.) Martin! Slow down, son. How was school? What did you learn?

KING: I was silent. Mama knew I was hurting. She put her arm gently on my shoulder.

MOTHER: (Places her hand on YOUNG MARTIN’S shoulder.) Martin? What’s the matter, son? How was your day?

YOUNG MARTIN: Those boys made fun of me again.

KKK MEMBER: I was one of those white boys before I joined the Klan. We KKK good ole boys, and our youngins, gave those nigras what for.

MOTHER: You pay them no mind, son.

YOUNG MARTIN: I try not to, Mama.

MOTHER: I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say. Are you listening to me, Martin?

YOUNG MARTIN/KING: Yes, Mama.
MOTHER: You must always remember this. You are as good as anyone else.

SEGREGATIONIST: Ha! That’s a laugh!

MOTHER: Don’t you listen to those white racists! You are as good as anyone else. You always remember that, Martin. (YOUNG MARTIN nods and returns to his position DOWN LEFT.)

KING: I never forgot it.

MOTHER: (To AUDIENCE, watching YOUNG MARTIN,) I wanted Martin to be proud of his heritage, of his humanity.

FATHER: Yes, sir. Black or white, it is all the same to God.

MOTHER: In the Lord’s eyes, we are all equal. (MOTHER and FATHER return to their poses DOWN LEFT.)

KING: My parents taught me well. I looked up from my book and told my mother—

YOUNG MARTIN: You know, when I get to be a man, Mama, I’m gonna make things better for you and me and Daddy and everyone.

KING: So I studied hard and eventually went to Morehouse College and Crozer Theological Seminary to study theology.

HARRIET: Great all-black colleges.

KING: I can picture the library in Crozer now. I was sitting in a chair behind a table. Piles of thick books sat to my left and right.

SEGREGATIONIST: I didn’t know nigras read books.

KKK MEMBER: We Klan boys don’t read books! No, sir. I read comics myself.

SEGREGATIONIST: Me and my hubbie, Bubba—who’s in the Klan—we love Li’l Abner.


SARAH: (To KING,) So, you wanted to be a preacher like your daddy?

KING: I was not primarily interested in being a preacher, no. Threatening fire and brimstone was not in my blood.

TIMOTHY: (To SARAH,) Dr. King wanted to find a way to help our people. This museum sure makes that clear.

KING: I had always had a place in my heart that told me to speak out, to try as best as I could to make our world a better place for all God’s children. So, after much thought, I realized that the pulpit would be a fine platform to talk about the kind of change I imagined.

MARTHA: Therefore, Dr. King studied theology.

KING: I would be like my father, Daddy King, and his father before him. I would be a preacher, and I’d speak out for social and economic change.
HARRIET: Trying to find a way, he did a lot of extra reading in the school library.

RACHEL: That doesn’t sound fun.

KING: Actually, it was motivating. I read all the great thinkers such as Plato, Socrates and Aristotle.

HARRIET: Dr. King even came across a wonderful essay by Mr. Henry David Thoreau. It was called “Civil Disobedience.”

MARTHA: And it was at Crozer that Dr. King found Gandhi.

KING: You see, after hearing a speech back in 1948 by D. A. J. Muste and Dr. Mordecai W. Johnson, I learned that Gandhi was making social and political change through nonviolent confrontation.

HARRIET: (Thinks.) As a man of God, Dr. King knew our rights to equal employment, equal education, equal housing and equal access to the voting booth were being denied.

OLD BLACK MAN: And that had to be changed!

KKK MEMBER: Not if we could help it! (Prepares to hit the OLD BLACK MAN, who cowers.)

KING: Stop! (The OLD BLACK MAN and KKK MEMBER stop in their starting tableau positions.) All around me my black brothers and sisters were being beaten—or worse. Nevertheless, I could not lash out at others. For unlike some, I was not a man of violence.

MARTHA: Dr. King had no hate in his heart.

HARRIET: But there was much sadness for the plight of our people.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE: His love of all humanity moved me as a white woman to join his movement.

KING: I would remain like Gandhi—a nonviolent man. I chose to endorse only nonviolent demonstration.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER TWO: Dr. King held many sit-ins and kneel-ins. I was there.

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER ONE: I was even at Dr. King’s pray-ins.

KING: I was fighting the good fight for freedom. And I knew that it would be a reality for my people one day.

KKK MEMBER: Not if we help it!

KING: Regardless of the actions of others, there would be no violence on my part or the part of my people. We may have to endure jail and many other hardships, but not forever.

SARAH: Wow. I had no idea how much you went through, Grandma.

MARTHA: It’s true. All of us, every black man, woman and child, had to strive for justice by enduring much.

KING: Yes. My dear wife, Coretta, experienced much of the sufferings of our people. (CORETTA moves forward to join KING at CENTER.)
HARRIET: In fact, Dr. King gave the movement all the prize money.

CORETTA: Martin would never admit it, but he brought human dignity to millions of black people.

KING: I did what I felt was right. No more, no less. (Crosses to CENTER. Preaches.) I have a dream! (SOUND EFFECT: RIFLE SHOT. KING turns and faces UPSTAGE.)

CORETTA: Martin!

ROSA: On April 4, 1968, Dr. King’s life was cut short at the age of 39.

CORETTA: Martin’s life may have been cut short, but it was he who said, the quality not the longevity of one’s life is what’s important.

SARAH: That is why Dr. King’s dream of freedom and equality must live on.

MARTHA: It must now be our dream—your dream.

ACTIVISTS/MUSEUM GOERS: (Sing.) The truth will make us free,

The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free someday.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome someday.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

END OF PLAY

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES ONSTAGE

Stools.

SOUND EFFECTS

“We Shall Overcome” instrumental, marching feet, riots, gunfire and marching feet, vicious barking dogs, explosions, loud gunshot, gunfire and shouting, rifle shot.

FLEXIBLE CASTING NOTE

Though most probably feel that race-specific casting is required, you might consider a more flexible approach, particularly since this is a readers theatre style show. Some smaller black roles may be played by white speakers if some white roles are also performed by black speakers. This can be accomplished through careful attention to the voice and movement. In some instances, the black characters may
have their own distinct speech patterns just as white members of the KKK may have their own unique accents. It is for the director to decide if distinctive speech patterns or accents should be used to separate a “black” voice from a “white” one. Consider your audience and the strengths of your cast to determine whether this type of casting is appropriate for your production.

Likewise, gender-specific casting is not required. Many of the characters, like the various students, workers, etc., could be either male or female. Additionally, many of the parts could be combined for smaller casts. For example, FATHER could also be a STUDENT and the VOTER ONE. MOTHER could be VOTER TWO and a STUDENT. The COUNTER MAN could be the BUS DRIVER, etc.

Additionally, the character of YOUNG MARTIN could be completely omitted and his lines said by KING as though he were remembering what it was like to be a child.

**DISCUSSION STARTERS**

1. Has Martin Luther King, Jr.’s dream been achieved? How was it done or why has it not been done?
2. What is affirmative action? What are its effects?
3. Was Malcolm X trying to achieve the same goals as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? What were the differences between their two methods?
4. How have the following people affected the civil rights movement in recent years?
   - Al Sharpton
   - President Barack Obama
   - Maya Angelou
   - Rev. Jesse Jackson
5. Are integration/segregation issues limited to race? What other discriminations exist?
6. Can integration/segregation issues sometimes be hypocritical? How?
7. How has the civil rights movement affected your life directly?
8. How would your life be different if the events discussed in “I Have a Dream” had not occurred?
9. What role did the media play in the civil rights movement? What role does it play today?
10. What can the current generation do to continue the civil rights movement and ensure equal rights for all?
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