

Exploring Black Womanhood through the Dramatic Lens

PROJECT OVERVIEW

With the help of the Miller Arts Scholars Program, I am requesting \$3000 to aid in my research for my undergraduate thesis project: writing a one-act play surrounding Black womanhood and how aspects of it transcend time, then staging and producing it. The Distinguished Majors Program in the African American and African Studies Department is the primary sponsor for this project. Professor Theresa M. Davis has agreed to be my thesis advisor and faculty mentor for Miller Arts, having an extensive background in devising work and the overall field of Black Theatre. The plan is to write a 60 to 90-minute play surrounding two generations of Black women, a mother and daughter, and how they experience life as Black women independently and together. This will be accompanied by a dramaturgical packet: a packet detailing the research and methodology that went into writing the script. My script and dramaturgical packet will be informed by research in areas such as Black feminist theory, queer theory, and social science, in addition to autobiographical perspectives as I pull from lived experiences.

In conducting my research, I plan to travel up and down the East Coast over the summer for immersive experiences in Black Theatre. As a playwright, it is essential to have access to see culturally specific productions, interact with other playwrights, and workshop the piece. I plan to begin this through a research trip to New York City in late May or early June, attending shows, readings, and workshops that focus on Black theatre. In addition to these events, I plan to make a stop at the New York Public Library to see their Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, so I can look back at previous productions that I would have otherwise not had a chance to see during my trip. This trip will also be extremely helpful in my search for graduate school options, as most schools I plan to apply to are in New York City. Therefore, I also plan on touring campuses while I am there. Furthermore, I will attend the International Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, NC, in late July/early August, requiring me to stay in North Carolina for approximately six days. This is where I will get the bulk of my experience in networking with fellow playwrights and attending performances that concentrate on Black Theatre, giving me a solid foundation for my research. I will also purchase resource materials that are not otherwise available to me from the UVA Library system to compile a bibliography for my dramaturgical packet and gather concepts I would like to incorporate into my script.

I have experience in playwriting and dramaturgical work, given that I took Dramaturgy, Playwriting I, and Advanced Playwriting in the drama department over the past three semesters. I have also helped with backstage production through this past New Works Festival (2024), where we produced a play I wrote in addition to four other student-written pieces. I was heavily involved in the rehearsal process and functioned as an assistant director in addition to my initial role as a playwright. My devising experience stems from the past two years of doing *Black Monologues*, for which Professor Davis has been a faculty mentor. Any gaps in my knowledge will be filled by Professor Davis, an independent study in Fall 2024 with Professor Doug Grissom, contacting other faculty members and speaking with my peers for feedback and assistance.

To culminate my research, I also plan to produce the script through Virginia Players Lab Series or Spectrum Theatre in the Spring 2025 semester. I have already been in conversation with previous Lab Series playwrights and directors to learn more about the process, and it's

Mary Hall
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become a dream of mine to produce a longer original play since Spring of 2023. Producing through Lab Series would help me secure the Helms Theatre and at least two show dates in April 2025. On the other hand, if I could not produce it with Virginia Players, I could potentially produce it with Spectrum Theatre, similar to how Cecilia Huang produced their original play with Spectrum in the Spring of 2023. This plan would require much more extensive planning in terms of a stage plot and staging it in the Student Activities Building, but with the help of my design team, it will be a success. If neither of these options pans out, I can conduct an independent study with Professor Davis and produce it as a staged reading with minimal production in a classroom space such as B006.

While I had the opportunity to see a short script of mine produced through the New Works Festival, the opportunity to create a 60-minute play from start to finish as a year-long research project would be monumental. It would provide me with a deeper understanding of my craft and prepare me for the process of MFA playwriting programs. I would be able to add this project to my resume and website, as well as supplementing my graduate school applications. I am absolutely honored to have Miller Arts' support in my previous and future artistic endeavors, and I thank you for your consideration.

PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS

I am currently a third-year Drama major at the University of Virginia, having finished all requirements for the major in the Fall of 2023. Under the Miller Arts Scholars program I have been lucky to receive two minigrants for the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 semesters respectively, which have gone towards focusing on my craft as a dramatic artist. I also seek to become President or the Drama Representative of Miller Arts Scholars for the 2024-2025 academic year.

As an actor, I have been in "Overcranked!" student films every Spring since my first year and have performed in theatrical productions at UVA since the Fall of my second year. Examples include *A Chorus Line* with Spectrum Theatre (Fall 2022), *Direct to You!* (Spring 2023), *Black Monologues 2023*, *Everybody* (Fall 2023), *Raphael's Islands* (Spring 2024), and *Delayed Departure* (Spring 2024).

Outside of playwriting and performance, I am the co-director of WXTJ Student Radio and the vice president of Virginia Players. I am also actively looking into MFA programs for playwriting to pursue my creative endeavors beyond my time at UVA.

PORTFOLIO

- *Running Out of Time*, produced in The New Works Festival (2024) at UVA (6:53-11:53)
- *Interrogation*, an excerpt of a short play

TIMELINE

Spring 2024

Early May

Receive notification of funding from Miller Arts Scholars

Summer 2024

Early June

Miller Arts Scholars funding distributed

Late May/Early June

Travel to New York City to conduct research, visit New York Public Library

Mid to Late June

Begin writing outline of script

Late July to Early August

Attend the International Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, NC to attend shows for research and network with fellow Black playwrights

By Late August

Begin writing script

Fall 2024

Over the Semester

Meet with Professor Davis and Professor Grissom to discuss drafts of the script and make revisions as needed

November 2024

Finish draft of script to submit to Virginia Players and Spectrum Theatre

Start dramaturgical packet

Finalize production team

Winter 2024/2025

December 2024

Receive notification of production from Virginia Players or Spectrum Theatre

Early January

Finish draft of script to audition actors

Spring 2025

Late January

Audition actors for production and finalize cast

Finalize dramaturgical packet

Early February

Begin rehearsals & adapt script as needed

Over the Course of April

Work on Outcome Report & Presentation

Early to Mid-April

Produce my Thesis Play either in the Helms Theatre or Student Activities Building

Late April

Present my research and findings at the Annual Outcome Event

- Including production photos, script excerpts, publicity media and video clips

BUDGET

TRIP	ESTIMATED COST	NOTES
New York Trip (Late May/Early June)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation—\$150 • Lodging—\$885 • Per-diem—\$395 • Shows—\$350 • Total—\$1,780 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per-diem Details—Breakfast \$18 / Lunch \$20 / Dinner \$36 / Incidentals \$5—\$79 (per day, 5 days & 4 nights)
International Black Theatre Festival Winston-Salem, NC (7/29 – 8/3, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation—\$472 • Parking—\$54 • Lodging—(In-Kind) • Per-diem—\$354 • Shows—\$300 • Research Materials—\$45 • Total—\$1,225 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per-diem Details—Breakfast \$13 / Lunch \$15 / Dinner \$26 / Incidentals \$5—\$59 (per day, 6 days) • Research—<u>Holy Ground: The National Black Theatre Festival Anthology</u>—\$45
Additional Research Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts & Scripts—\$250 • Final Draft 13—\$100 • Total—\$350 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal—Read one play per week from the week of 5/13/24 to the week of 8/26/24 • Book Titles Include—<u>The 90 Day Play & A History of African American Autobiography</u>
Production Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Costs—\$800 • Publicity & Marketing—\$2200 • Total—\$3000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Costs Include—Costumes, Set and Props, Sound, Lighting • Publicity Includes: Photography, Videography, Graphic Design, Printing
Total	\$6,335	

ITEM	ESTIMATED FUNDING	NOTES
Miller Arts Scholar Rising 4 th Year Award	\$3,000	<i>Grant Pending Acceptance</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying in my third year • Outcome in my fourth year • Distributed June 2024
DMP in African American and African Studies Funding	\$2,060	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$300 received upon acceptance <i>Grants Pending Acceptance</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remaining \$1,760 must be requested (\$1,260 Summer 2024, \$500 Spring 2025)
Minerva Grant	\$1,800	<i>Grant Pending Acceptance</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer 2024
Total	\$6,860	Any additional funding would go towards contingencies