

Study Guide  
**My Brothers and Me**

A one-man multi-character drama about moments in the everyday walks of life of the African American male.



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Artistic Genre: Theatre

Performing Artist: Ron McCall

# Alabama Touring Artist Program

presented by the Alabama State Council on the Arts

This Study Guide has been prepared for you by the Alabama State Council on the Arts in collaboration with the performing artist. All vocabulary that is arts related is taken directly from the Alabama Course of Study, Arts Education. With an understanding that each teacher is limited to the amount of time that may be delegated to new ideas and subjects, this guide is both brief and designed in a way that we hope supports your school curriculum. We welcome feedback and questions, and will offer additional consulting on possible curriculum connections and unit designs should you desire this support. Please feel free to request further assistance and offer your questions and feedback. Hearing from educators helps to improve our programs for other schools and educators in the future.

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## Set up:

Artists typically arrive 60 minutes before their scheduled performance in order to set up. Please have the space available to the artist as soon as he arrives.

All artists will need some kind of setup prior to arrival. Please communicate with the artist to discuss needs. Before arrival, please make sure floors are clean, and any electrical hook ups are in place for the artist. If he has asked to use your amplification system, please have it ready for a sound test as soon as the artist arrives. Please provide a staff person to assist the artist with set up.

## Role of the Audience:

Although many students may not choose to pursue professional careers in the arts, many will choose to remain lifelong participants in, and learners of, the arts. A role that all students may play is that of an appreciative, responsive audience member. This role is one that has lifelong value to the learner as well as to the performer. Learning appropriate audience behavior is an integral component of all of the arts education areas. Positive audience qualities are part of the overall goal of *Achieving Excellence Through Arts Literacy*.

- Alabama Course of Study: Arts Education;  
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**Role of the Audience (continued):**

Appropriate audience behavior includes sitting still and being very quiet during the performance. Audiences clap at the end of particular sections of the performance, or when they see something amazing that they want to tell the performer they really like. If a performer takes a bow, that is always a time to clap. You should not clap to music unless the performer asks you to. It is never appropriate to talk during a performance, unless in this instance the artist asks a question. We ask teachers and students to practice these rules of performance etiquette during the Alabama Touring Program productions.

**What to expect:**

My Brothers and Me is a monologue performance lasting approximately 45 minutes. Mr. McCall is the only actor, but he portrays many characters. It will be important for students to pay attention to decide when each character changes. Students are asked to remain quiet and attentive. Dialogue is important in order to understand the message of the performance. Once the performance is over there will be a 15- 20 minute talkback with the actor and students. Students will be asked to raise their hands and speak loudly so that everyone will hear them. This is a good time to ask questions about the play.

**Historical Background:**

This production is a unique compilation of verse, poetry and prose quilted together by “Old Man Cephus McQueen’s” stories of his fictional yet truth based brothers. This one-man multi-character drama speaks to the reality of those life defining moments found in the everyday walks of life of the African American male.



## The Writers



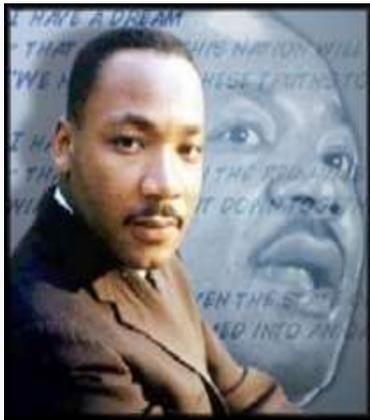
**Paul Laurence Dunbar** (June 27, 1872 – February 9, 1906) was an [African American poet](#), novelist, and playwright of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Much of his popular work in his lifetime used a [Negro dialect](#), which helped him become one of the first nationally-accepted African American writers. Much of his writing, however, does not use dialect; these more traditional poems have become of greater interest to scholars.



**James Mercer Langston Hughes** (February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form [jazz poetry](#). Hughes is best known for his work during the [Harlem Renaissance](#). He famously wrote about the period that "Harlem was in vogue."<sup>1</sup>



**Oscar Brown, Jr** (October 10, 1926 – May 29, 2005) was an American singer, songwriter, playwright, poet, [civil rights activist](#), and actor.



**Martin Luther King, Jr.** (January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968) was an American [clergyman](#), activist, and prominent leader in the [African-American Civil Rights Movement](#).<sup>[1]</sup> He is best known for his role in the advancement of [civil rights](#) in the United States and around the world, using [nonviolent](#) methods following the teachings of [Mahatma Gandhi](#).<sup>[2]</sup> King has become a national icon in the history of [modern American liberalism](#).<sup>[3]</sup>



**Julius Lester** (born January 27, 1939) is an [American](#) author of [books for children](#) and adults,<sup>[1]</sup> and taught for 32 years (1971–2003) at the [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#). He is also a photographer, as well as a musician who recorded two albums of [folk music](#) and original songs.



**Reverend Carlton Leake** (born February 16, 1964) is a native of Memphis, TN. He has written the musicals such as *When Music Was Music I & II* and *Venus of Broadway*. He has also written the book, music and lyrics of several theatrical musicals. In 2000, he was the Guest Composer for the Columbus Symphony Orchestra. He currently serves as the musical director for the Ensemble Theatre in Houston, TX

### **Curriculum Connections:**

1. Learning how to make correct choices (problem solving).
2. Following directions: Follow one and two part oral instructions.
3. Selecting appropriate voice tone, gestures, and facial expressions to enhance meaning. Using mind, body and voice (theatre content standard).

## Vocabulary:

1. **Costume** - Clothing worn by an actor during a performance. These clothes help to make a person appear to be someone or something else, other than who they really are, especially in a theatrical performance
2. **Properties, props** - Objects used on stage such as furniture, glasses, books.
3. **Fable**: Narration intended to enforce a useful truth, especially one in which animals or inanimate objects speak and act like human beings. Unlike a folktale, it has a moral that is woven into the story and often explicitly formulated at the end. The Western fable tradition began with tales ascribed to Aesop. It flourished in the Middle Ages, reached a high point in 17th-century France in the works of Jean de la Fontaine, and found a new audience in the 19th century with the rise of children's literature. Fables also have ancient roots in the literary and religious traditions of India, China, and Japan. (Merriam Webster)
4. **Scenery** - Painted backdrops on a theatrical stage to indicate time and place.

## Things students should know:

1. Theatre requires the audience to use imagination. It is important to watch for clues to tell you who a character is and what will happen next. Be ready to pretend you are in a new place, in a new time, and watching people in a new story. What is the story?
2. Actors use mind, body and voice to create characters. An actor imagines the character using her mind; she stands the way she imagines that particular character would stand; and she speaks with a voice appropriate for that character.
3. Sometimes actors improvise. Actors have to be ready to change at any moment. For example, if the audience laughs or claps for a really long time, an actor must pause without losing character. If someone else on stage says her lines in a different order than what was rehearsed, the actor has to be ready to continue the conversation in a new way, without any planning ahead of time. If a costume piece falls off, or a prop is left in the wrong place, all these things have to look like they were supposed to happen. An actor's ability to adapt to any new situation, or improvise is what makes a good actor.

**Students should know (continued):**

4. Stories often teach us lessons. It is important to discover the main idea behind every story. Actors need to know the main idea so they can make it clear to the audience. You should look for the main idea in every story you see, hear or read. Study all the details for clues to discover the main idea.

**Suggested Activities to do before the performance:**

1. Explore the word *consequences* . Discuss the consequences of good and bad behavior. Have students relate personal experiences.
2. Explore folktales as stories or legends that are passed down orally from one generation to the next and become part of a community's tradition. Allow students talk about modern day stories and legends such as the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus. Explore the main idea of each story or legend and discuss the role it plays in the community. Have students answer the question, "Why do you suppose this story exists in this community? What purpose do you suppose it served (serves)?"
3. Explain what a moral is. Read several fables to the class and have them identify the moral. Then ask them to relate the moral to their own lives, and imagine what the fable would look like if they encountered it as a movie?

**Suggested activities to do after the performance:**

1. Read several fables and act them out in class. Have the students identify the characters and then choose a character for themselves. They will also have to identify the important details to include, and understand what sequence they occur in the story. You may want to have them create a sequence of still pictures with each character in a position that tells part of the story. Make sure they are correct sequentially. These are called *tableaux* in theatre. Older students may create lines (writing exercise) for themselves from the story that they may memorize and perform. Have groups of students perform for each other. Ask the other students in the audience to identify the main idea, and the details performed. They should practice being a good audience as well.

### **Post-performance activities (continued):**

2. Ask students to identify your class rules. Divide them in groups and have each group create a play using these rules. They must imagine a story where one or more of these rules are not followed. Encourage them to imagine the consequences in order to create a storyline. Then decide: Who are the characters? How does it start? What happens? How does it resolve itself? Perform for the rest of the class. Have the audience identify the main idea of the play.
3. Repeat #2 above using rules from home. Each student should be encouraged to bring a list of rules from home to discuss with his group. Students choose which rules and consequences to use to create their story. They may wish to use real characters, or make up new ones. *Tableaux* are easier for younger children. Older children may engage in script writing and you may ask them to include vocabulary words they are studying.

### **Reflective Questions to explore with students:**

1. Do all actions have consequences?
2. Why do people not follow rules when they should?
3. Conflict and resolution are important concepts for drama and theatre. What conflicts did you notice in the play? How were the conflicts resolved?
4. When and where do you think this play happened? What clues did you use to come up with your answer? (Higher Order thinking - finding details to support response to open ended question).
5. How is a live play different from a movie?
6. How did you have to use your imagination while watching this play?
7. How would you go about creating your own play? What would you need to do first? What next? etc? Who would you work with? Why?
8. Why did communities create stories with morals?
9. How do you suppose people communicated before they learned to write?

**Finally:** If you are looking for a writing assignment we love getting letters from students. Especially those that answer some of these questions.