

WU?@therep

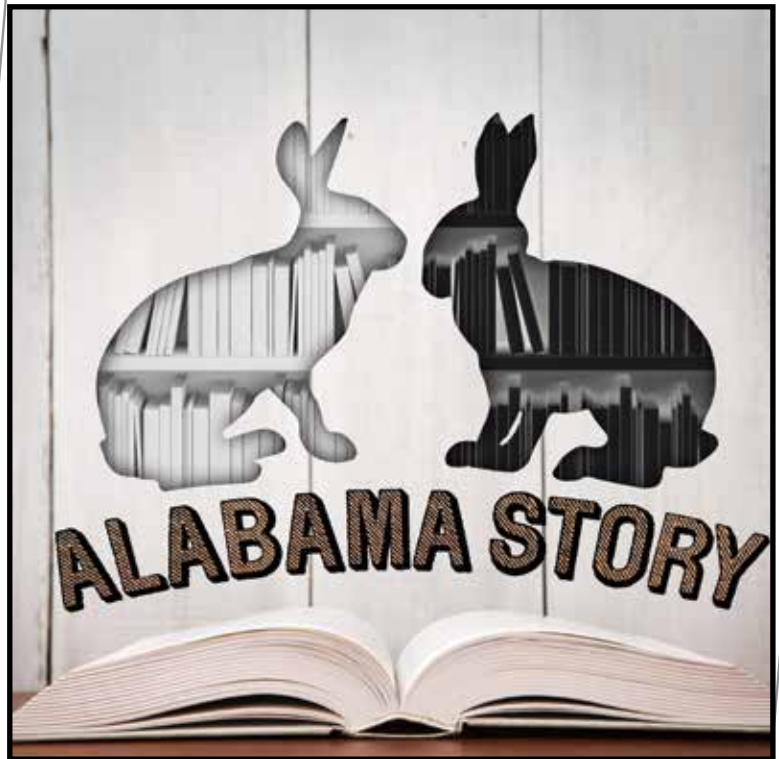
ALABAMA STORY

BY KENNETH JONES

DIRECTED BY PAUL MASON BARNES

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The Rep REPERTORY
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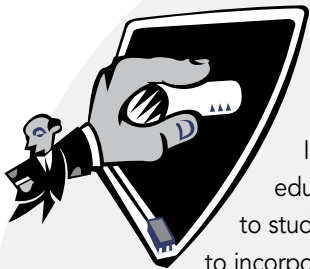


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At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things are worth slowing down

for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together WU? @ THE REP—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions (A/S/L), a plot summary (FYI), biographical information (F2F), historical context (B4U), and other bits and pieces (HTH). Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means IRL, anyway.

CU@therep!



The Teacher's Lounge

In an effort to make our educational materials accessible to students and easy for educators to incorporate into the classroom, our study guide is written in a student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, www.repstl.org, for additional information including activity suggestions and behind-the-scenes information. Any materials, either from this guide or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom.

NEATO!

As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

HOW TO BE THE BEST AUDIENCE EVER!

TAKE YOUR SEAT

An usher will seat your class as a group, and often we have a full house with no seats to spare, so be sure to stick with your school until you have been shown your section in the theatre.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Before the performance begins, be sure to turn off your cell phone and watch alarms. If you need to talk or text during intermission, don't forget to click off before the show resumes.

BREAK TIME

This performance includes an intermission, at which time you can visit the restrooms in the lobby. Intermission is only 15 minutes though, so hurry back to your seat.

SNACK TIME

There is no food or drink permitted inside the theatre, so make sure you finish your snacks in the lobby before you enter the house.

NOW HEAR THIS

Just as you can see and hear the actors, they can see and hear you. Any talking, even whispering, can be heard by those around you and those onstage, so please wait until the show is over to chat.

NO PAPARAZZI PLEASE

The theatre is a camera-free zone. Flash photography interrupts the action onstage and is prohibited by Actors' Equity Association rules. You can sneak a peek at production photos on The Rep's website at repstl.org.

TAKE A BOW

Let the actors know you respect their work by responding to the curtain call at the end of the performance. Show your appreciation for a job well done through applause.

THANKS FOR BEING A GREAT AUDIENCE!

REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Director of Education

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Marsha Coplon

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A/S/L

GARTH WILLIAMS is the author and illustrator of *The Rabbits' Wedding*, the book at the center of the controversy. He acts as a narrator and plays various characters throughout the play.

As the Director of the Alabama Public Library Service, **EMILY WHEELLOCK REED** makes it her mission to provide the best literature to the people of the state, no matter the cost to her career.

THOMAS FRANKLIN, Emily's assistant, supports her fight against censorship and shows great concern for her safety.

Based on a real-life state senator, **E.W. HIGGINS** goes head-to-head with Emily Wheelock Reed in a fight to remove *The Rabbits' Wedding* from the shelves of the Alabama Public Library Service.

JOSHUA MOORE returns to Montgomery periodically to volunteer at Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dexter Avenue Baptist church and runs into a friend from his past each time he does so.

LILY WHITFIELD grew up with Joshua, as his mother was a servant in her family's home; they were friends, but their differences in social standing kept them from truly understanding one another.

H

PROVENANCE: a record of ownership of a work of art or an antique, used as a guide to authenticity or quality

UNCLE REMUS: the fictional title character and narrator of a collection of African-American folktales published in book form in 1881.

MATRICULATION: the act of being enrolled at a college or university

VOX POPULI: a Latin phrase meaning the opinions or beliefs of a majority

GERMANE: relevant

TICONDEROGA: the brand name of a certain type of #2 pencil

REPOSITORY: a place where something may be stored

DOGTROT: a humble cabin-like dwelling popular in the 19th-century rural South. Some quarters for enslaved people were dogtrot constructions.

"HIGH COTTON": a Southern term meaning happy, successful or prosperous. If the cotton is high, it means the crop is abundant and will bring fortune to the planters.





SPOILER ALERT!

This synopsis contains spoilers about the story of the show. If you wish to be completely surprised by what you see on stage, you may want to wait until after the play to read this article.



The play begins with a short prologue as Garth Williams, the author and illustrator of *The Rabbits' Wedding*, appears onstage to act as the narrator. The other actors join him onstage as storytellers and broadly introduce themselves and the story that they are about to tell.

Emily Wheelock Reed, the Director of the Alabama Public Library, enters her office in February of 1959. She has broken the heel of her shoe on the way to work and discovers that her radio does not work, making it an unpleasant morning. Her assistant, Thomas Franklin, walks her through her schedule for the day as Emily sorts through her mail. She excitedly finds the American Library Association's new Notable Books list.

A month later, Lily Whitfield reunites with Joshua Moore outside a park in Montgomery. They grew up together, as Joshua's mother was a worker on the Whitfield's Demopolis Cotton plantation. As they reminisce, there is a growing tension in the air. While she remembers their time together fondly, there is something that Joshua seems to remember that Lily is forgetting. They say their goodbyes as Joshua heads towards his meeting at the church. A little later that morning, Thomas arrives late to work and reveals a conservative newspaper with a concerning headline. It seems that local conservatives are outraged that the Alabama Public Library Service is carrying *The Rabbits' Wedding*, an illustrated children's book that depicts a rabbit with black fur marrying a rabbit with white fur. Community members have been calling in to complain. Emily brushes it off as a non-concern, but the conflict begins to escalate within a month.

Alabama State Senator E.W. Higgins pays Emily an unannounced visit and shares a list of books that cause him concern as a way to prove to Emily who really runs the library. When he leaves, Thomas fills her in on the senator's history as a segregationist and warns her to be careful.

Joshua has returned to Montgomery and runs into Lily at the same park bench. They catch up on where they are in their lives, though Lily seems to avoid many of Joshua's questions and gets upset about the oncoming rain. They run through the gates and into the park to avoid the downpour. At the same time, Emily Wheelock Reed sits down for a finance meeting with Senator Higgins. There is an odd formality to it, almost like a hearing.

Lily and Joshua, meanwhile, have found shelter in the park. Lily states that she never understood why Joshua and his mother left the plantation, and Joshua doesn't understand how she can't remember the night they did. The scene flashes back to 1939, when they are 11 years old. They sneak out of the house in the middle of the night and share a kiss, but are caught by Lily's father. The meeting with Emily and the senator turns to *The Rabbits' Wedding*. Higgins demands that the book be pulled from the library shelves across the state, but Emily refuses to do so. In fear of being found alone with Lily in a deserted park, Joshua exits in a rush, leaving his mother's Bible behind. Senator Higgins begins to ask personal questions in order to reveal Emily's moral code, but she does not back down from the fight.

Following the meeting, Senator Higgins holds a press conference, stating that the Public Library Service will not be getting any funding until all of the controversial books are removed from the shelves. Emily removes *The Rabbits' Wedding* from general circulation and places it on the reserve shelf, where anyone who requests it can still have it.

Act Two begins one month later, in June of 1959. Garth Williams gives a sardonic speech about his rising state of popularity thanks to Senator Higgins and the controversy surrounding his illustrated children's book. In Emily's office, Thomas delivers the mail. The story has gone international, with everyone interested in Emily and the controversy. She opens one letter, which turns out to be a threat. Thomas shows concern,

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but Emily appears calm. Concerned about Senator Higgins' threat to her budget next year, Emily calls the American Library Association for some assistance, but gets nowhere.

On the Fourth of July, Lily finds Joshua on his way to Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is a pastor. She has come to return Joshua's Bible. Joshua reveals that he is no longer a religious man, not since he and his mother were cast out from the Whitfield plantation. Lily struggles to understand why they can't be the children they once were.

Back in the office, Emily confronts Thomas about his motivations regarding to the controversy. She accuses him of feeding information to the *Montgomery Home News*, the publication that first broke the story about *The Rabbits' Wedding*. Thomas vehemently denies this, and shares a story from his past about another woman that he worked for who got beaten down by Montgomery for her progressive views until she took her own life. Emily, deeply regretful of the accusation, apologizes. Thomas reveals that their budget is going to be approved the next day.

At the Capitol, Senator Higgins is in conversation with Representative Bobby Crone. Crone encourages Higgins to end this well-publicized battle over the book and move on to more important things. Higgins states that he can't let this pass, as the Civil Rights Movement is already taking away the Alabama that he grew up in. In Emily's office, she is visited by Herschel Webb from the *Montgomery Advertiser*. He reveals to her that Higgins gave a speech on the Senate floor regarding the American Library Association's list of Notable Books. Higgins is now protesting the inclusion of *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the libraries throughout the state. His further aim, however, is to pass a bill stating that the person in charge of the State Library Service must be a native of Alabama, meaning that Emily would not be able to hold

her position. She agrees to an interview with Mr. Webb in an attempt to turn the tide of the public conversation.

After seeing the published article, Representative Crone confronts Senator Higgins again. Crone wants an end to this war on books and encourages Higgins to make peace and compromise. He tells Higgins that he is retiring because he is dying, which has a great effect on the senator. Higgins gives a press conference, declaring that an agreement has been reached and that Emily will not be forced out of her job. However, back in her office, Emily reveals to Thomas that she has been offered a job in Washington, DC, which she plans to accept.

Around Thanksgiving, Lily and Joshua meet outside of her hotel in Montgomery. He gives her a copy of *The Rabbits' Wedding*. In her office, now cleared out, Thomas gives Emily the same gift, though hers is signed by Garth Williams himself. Lily and Joshua say a final goodbye to each other; Lily seeks forgiveness, which Joshua gives to her. Similarly, Emily and Thomas say goodbye. Outside the Capitol, Emily runs into Senator Higgins. She gives him a gift: a first edition copy of *Tom Sawyer*, his favorite book, and then departs.

Garth Williams, the narrator, returns to wrap up the story. Each character gets a moment to speak about significant events that happened in their lives following the events of the play. Joshua and Lily never saw each other again, but each revisited places from their past with their own children. Senator Higgins returned to small-town politics, while Thomas got his PhD and became the director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. In 2000, Emily was named the recipient of the Freedom to Read Award by the American Library Association. As the play ends, each character turns to Thomas and asks him to tell them a story.

BU THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Kenneth Jones' *Alabama Story* tells of the true story of Emily Wheelock Reed, the Director of the Alabama Public Library, who defended a children's book against a segregationist lawyer. Some characters and details of the play are fictional, but the themes of justice, censorship, and equality that are prevalent throughout the work are further supported by other events happening in America at that time. In order to fully understand the significance of Reed's fight, it is important to explore events related to the Civil Rights Movement in Montgomery, Alabama and this story.

1869: *Plessy vs. Ferguson*—this Supreme Court decision legalized "separate but equal," dividing the socio-political landscape of the United States for half a century.

1939: The American Library Association creates the Intellectual Freedom Committee, dedicated to addressing issues of freedom of speech and expression.

1953: The American Library Association declares belief in the "Freedom to Read," stating "it is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions."

1954: *Brown vs. Board of Education*—this decision overturns *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, declaring school segregation illegal.

1955-56: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and the Montgomery Improvement Association, successfully challenges segregation on city buses.

1956: The Alabama Library Service chapter of the American Library Association loses its membership because of a refusal to desegregate.

1957: Emily Wheelock Reed becomes the Director of the Public Library Service Division in Alabama.

1958: Harper & Row publishes *The Rabbits' Wedding* by Garth Williams.

1958-59: Alabama creates and implements the Joint Segregation Screening Committee to weigh the merits of numerous segregation bills being introduced.

MAY 1959: Emily Wheelock Reed appears before Senator E.O. Eddins (fictionalized by E.W. Higgins in the play) in the Senate Finance Committee to renew her appropriation request. She is asked to remove *The Rabbits' Wedding* from shelves, and she refuses.

1959: The city commission of Montgomery votes to close all 14 of Montgomery's public parks in response to a desegregation order.

August 1959: Senator Eddins appears before the Joint Segregation Screening Committee to present his bill on requiring native Alabamians to fill the position that Reed occupies.

1960: Emily Wheelock Reed leaves Alabama to take a job in Washington DC.

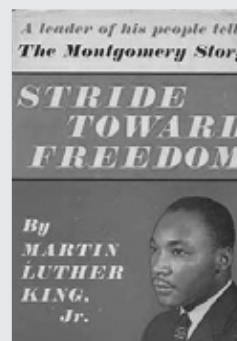
1960-62: The "sit-in" movement in Alabama tries to desegregate libraries. In 1962, Montgomery's public library desegregates under federal court order.

BTW



To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

One of the most highly revered books of all time, this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel follows Scout Finch's coming-of-age journey in the American South during a controversial trial, in which her father is a lawyer defending a black man.



Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Referenced in the play, this autobiography details the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and examines life in the city during the 1950s.

F27

Emily Wheelock Reed garnered national attention as a civil rights activist during the controversy surrounding *The Rabbits' Wedding*. While the play gives a nice biographical overview of Reed's life and work during this time in history, there were other civil rights leaders working next to her in Montgomery, Alabama, including some mentioned in the play.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The most famous of civil rights movement leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Baptist minister and activist who believed in advancing civil rights through nonviolence and civil disobedience. In 1955, he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott and in 1963 the March on Washington, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. King won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for leading non-violent protests during the movement. He was assassinated on April 4, 1968. Following his death, various commemorations were attributed to him, including a federal holiday called Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, celebrated in January.



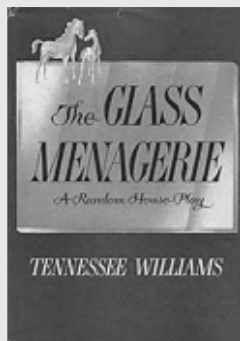
Rosa Parks

Referred to as "the first lady of civil rights" and "the mother of the freedom movement," Rosa Parks gained attention when she participated in the Montgomery bus boycott, refusing to give up her seat and move to the back of a segregated bus. She continued her work as an activist, collaborating with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She worked for local chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and continued to fight against injustice. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, among other awards. Rosa Parks Day is celebrated in Missouri on February 4.



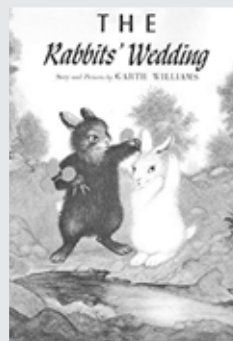
E.D. Nixon

Edgar Daniel Nixon was another important figure in the civil rights movement, though not as nationally known as King or Parks, since his work was more exclusive to Montgomery and the state of Alabama. Nixon was the president of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP, followed by the state chapter of the same organization, during the movement. He was one of the key organizers of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and selected Rosa Parks to be a key figure of that movement. Martin Luther King, Jr. describe him as "a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of the long oppressed people of the state of Alabama." He also worked for voting rights and civil rights for African-Americans both before and after the bus boycott.



The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams

If you like the structure and style of *Alabama Story*, you might also like this well-known memory play that follows Tom, the narrator and protagonist, through memories of his mother and sister.



The Rabbits' Wedding by Garth Williams

The original work at the center of the *Alabama Story* drama, this children's book features two rabbits who just want to play together forever.

IRL PROTECTING FREEDOM IN THE INTERNET WORLD

Emily Wheelock Reed sought to give everyone the same opportunities to utilize and access resources that interested them. As Director of the Alabama State Library Service, she fought to keep books on the shelf, no matter the political opposition. For her, people needed access to books to become informed on the world around them, and to learn about life outside of themselves. Not only did she want the public libraries in Alabama to be integrated, but she wanted to resources and materials within them to be free of censorship.

More than 50 years later, the United States finds itself having a similar argument about the freedom of information. However, instead of books and libraries, the fight is on the Internet. In many ways, the Internet has opened up the avenues by which we as a society process and absorb information. Books are available online, and anyone can publish one. News is available online 24 hours a day, seven days a

week, and comes from a wide variety of different sources. However, censorship still exists online. In the same way that Senator Higgins tried to stop the spread of information that he did not agree with in *Alabama Story*, so too do Internet providers. Currently, Americans are fighting for the freedom of the press from people who can have the power to limit access to informational resources. A similar debate over Net Neutrality, which aim to place a heavy price on Internet searching and consumption, continues on.

From books to websites, and from libraries to the Internet, Emily Wheelock Reed's fight for freedom of information lives on as the world adapts to new avenues of learning and communication.

How can you help to ensure that people have the freedom to access information that is of interest to them?

RBTL

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND CENSORSHIP

Alabama Story makes a major case for defending the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which states that all citizens have the right to free speech. The characters in *Alabama Story* all have the opportunity to voice and defend their beliefs, and the drama comes not explicitly from one person being right and the other being wrong, but instead from the two sides having different opinions. The play argues that everyone should have the ability and access to read whatever they are interested in reading, and that it is the duty of a government service to provide the access to materials of interest. Censorship of such materials is at odds with the values of the First Amendment, especially when provided by a public entity such as the State Library Service.

SEGREGATION AND EQUALITY

Emily Wheelock Reed is forced to shift her attention away from the integration of Alabama's public libraries due to the controversy surrounding *The Rabbits' Wedding*, but desegregation remains one of the major themes in the play, further supported by the fictional sub-plot between Lily and Joshua. As you may recall from the B4U section of this guide,

there was a major push for integration all throughout the United States, starting with *Brown vs. Board of Education*. It remains a key outcome for the Civil Rights Movement through the 1950s and 1960s. In the play, Bobby Crone even explains to Senator Higgins that desegregation is the way the world is moving, and implores Higgins to let go of the past. Lily and Joshua's friendship is more progressive than the feelings of Higgins; however, there is still a lack of equality, and Lily's perspective is one of naïveté as to the reality of Joshua's life.

STORIES AND LITERATURE

One of the recurring motifs in *Alabama Story* is books and the importance and impact of reading. Not only do Emily and Thomas have a strong affinity for reading as workers in the library system, but all of the other characters do as well. Garth Williams is an author himself, and Senator Higgins is sure to mention his strong connection to *Tom Sawyer* and a first edition copy that is lost to him forever. Lily and Joshua recall reading Uncle Remus stories, and Joshua has a strong connection to his mother's Bible. The play makes a strong argument for libraries and reading in the lives of everyone, and the importance of having the freedom to read anything that might be of interest.