

Do You Know Me?

Study Guide



Sankofa African American Theatre Company
in partnership with
Gamut Theatre Group

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2021 FEBRUARY

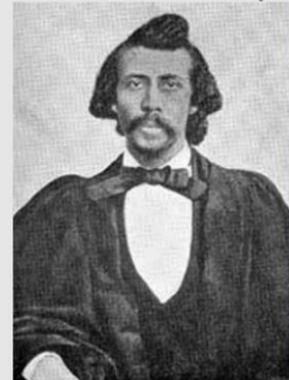
Do You Know Me?

A Digital Performance Episode
by
Sharia Benn

“Do You Know Me?” connects student audiences to Harrisburg’s rich history of abolitionists and civil rights activists who worked to end slavery, secure the vote, and challenge the segregation that continues to plague our communities.

This digital performance features local student talent, as well as professional artists to breathe life into poetry, interviews, speeches, and letters that are all a part of our local and national history.

William Howard Day



Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson



Poetry, Letters, and the Underground Railroad

Combining history and drama, the piece takes us on a journey through poetry, letters, and the underground railroad, highlighting the words of influential local and national African American leaders.

By sharing this truthful knowledge of culture, history, and identity, students gain a better understanding of the past so they can be better agents for social change in the future.

Maude Coleman



Sponsored by

Dauphin County Commissioners and Highmark

Compiled by Kim Greenawalt

Table of Contents

People

Joseph Bustill	3
Maude Coleman	4
William Howard Day	5
Amanda Gorman	6
Harriet McClintock Marshall	7
Alice Dunbar Nelson	8

Place: A Timeline of The Underground Railroad in Dauphin County	9
--	---

Classroom Activities and Discussion	11
--	----

For Further Study	13
--------------------------	----

Appendix: Texts Performed in <i>Do You Know Me?</i>	14
--	----

“She Weaves” by Marian Cannon Dornell	14
---------------------------------------	----

Letter from Joseph Bustill to William Still	15
---	----

“WPA Slave Interview after Miriam Goodman” by Marian Cannon Dornell	16
---	----

Excerpt from Harrisburg Central High School Dedication by William Howard Day	16
--	----

“I Sit and Sew” by Alice Dunbar Nelson	17
--	----

Letter from Maude Coleman to PA Governor James Duff	18
---	----

“The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman	19
--------------------------------------	----

People

Joseph Cassey Bustill (1822—August 19, 1895)



Left: Tanner's Alley, the street on which Bustill lived and worked as an Underground Railroad operative. Photo credit: explorepahistory.com

- **Connection to Dauphin County:** Resident on Tanner's Alley; led Underground Railroad operations with William Jones; founded Capital Presbyterian.
- **Education:** Educated in the "best schools" of Philadelphia (*The Journal of Negro History* 10.4 (1925), 641).
- **Occupations:** Teacher. Wigmaker.
- **Church Membership:** Capital Presbyterian Church
- **Activism:** Harrisburg Fugitive Aid Society (co-founder)

Contributions: Along with co-founding Harrisburg's Fugitive Aid Society, Bustill was one of the youngest and most significant conductors of the Underground Railroad. Bustill was one of the first African Americans to instruct school in Harrisburg from 1850-1862, and he worked with Judge Mordecai McKenny to found Sunday school for a collective of churches. Additionally, Bustill founded Harrisburg's Capital Presbyterian Church.

Legacy: Bustill assisted freedom seekers in Harrisburg by supporting the work of the Underground Railroad, and his contribution is memorialized with a marker at the site of the former Tanner's Alley in the Eighth Ward. He served as an ambassador for Black education and activism in Pennsylvania and beyond. Capital Presbyterian Church, which he founded, still stands today.

About Bustill: "He was always a polished writer and convincing speaker. He unstintingly gave his time and talent to every good cause. He was the youngest member of the remarkable Underground Railroad, being only seventeen.... Like Paul, he was 'a citizen of no mean city' —a Philadelphian of the Philadelphians—and was able to add to its honor and glory." — Anna Bustill Smith, "The Bustill Family," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 10, no. 4. Chicago University Press, October 1925.

Maude B Coleman (1879—February 25, 1953)



Left: Image of Coleman from the Harrisburg Telegraph on Friday, 15 Sep 1939.

- **Connection to Dauphin County:** Resident at 129 Short Street; advocated for residents of the Eighth Ward threatened by the second Capitol Complex Extension Project; petitioned Governor Duff in 1950 to protect the established African-American neighborhood near Forster Street.
 - **Education:** Graduate of University of Washington, Oberlin College, and Pennsylvania School of Social Work.
 - **Occupations:** Special Inter-Racial Consultant for the State Welfare Department for 30 years. Founding member of the Phyllis Wheatley Colored Harrisburg Branch of the YWCA in 1920. First African American tax collector in the country, according to a Pittsburgh Courier article in 1926. Sole “female delinquent tax collector” in Pennsylvania (Chicago Defender, 1935).
- **Church Membership:** Married at First Baptist Church in Harrisburg; honored with “Maude B. Coleman Day” at Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1926; husband John Coleman was member of Capital Presbyterian Church; buried at William Howard Day Cemetery alongside husband.
- **Activism:** Dauphin County Republican Women’s Organization (executive board); Dauphin County Organizer of Colored Women; member of Republican City Committee, American Red Cross, and the Rebecca Aldridge Civic Club of Harrisburg; president of the Auxiliary to Harrisburg’s branch of the NAACP; state organizer of Colored Women by the State Committee of Pennsylvania (Republican appointee); among many other organizations/affiliations.

Contributions: Coleman was an activist and politician who devoted her life to securing democracy for all people. She was a founding member of the Phyllis Wheatley Colored Branch of the YWCA in November of 1919, before its formal organization in 1920. Appointed as Pennsylvania’s first Interracial Consultant by Governor Pinchot, Coleman worked with many labor industries throughout Pennsylvania to ensure the employment and safe working environment for African Americans. Her successful intervention in racial clashes in Pennsylvania led to similar work in Detroit and Lansing, Michigan. In 1947, she wrote *The History of the Negro in Pennsylvania*, published by the Department of Welfare.

Legacy: Coleman advocated for the rights of women of color and committed her life to the activist work of interracial reconciliation that still continues today. She was honored by the Francis Harper Club in Harrisburg in 1926. Several organizations named their groups after Coleman, including the Maude Coleman council, the Maude B. Coleman Republican Women of Montgomery County Council, and a community center in Easton, Pennsylvania.

About Coleman: “Maude Coleman is a woman thoroughly equipped along political lines, having engaged in political, social service, and Y.W.C.A. work...” — *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 1920.

William Howard Day (October 19, 1825—December 3, 1900)



- **Connection to Dauphin County:** elected school director in Harrisburg, PA in 1878.
- **Education:** Oberlin College and Livingstone College
- **Occupation:** Abolitionist, Editor, Teacher, Minister
- **Church Membership:** Day's mother was a founding member of the first AME Zion Church in New York City. Ordained minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and preached at a large congregational church in Lincolnshire, England while he lived abroad. Worked with the Young Men's Christian Association while there.
- **Activism:** Day was a well-known abolitionist and traveled internationally, forming the African Aid society while in England. Secretary of the National Negro Convention held in Cleveland, Ohio in 1848. Generated "Address to the Colored People of America," along with committee member Frederick Douglass. Elected president of the National Board of Commissioners of the Colored People in 1858.

Above: William Howard Day. Photo Credit: WITF/Wikipedia

Contribution: After the Civil War, Day returned to the United States and worked for the Freedmen's Bureau and as a school inspector in Maryland and Delaware. In 1878, Day was elected school director in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He was the first colored school board member and president. He won reelection in 1881, retaining his position on the board until 1884. Though he did not seek reelection in 1884, the public appealed for his return in 1887, and he was easily elected to another three years as Harrisburg School Board president. In 1879, during his tenure, Day also helped open Livingstone College with J.C. Price, William H. Goler, and Solomon Porter Hood. Established in Salisbury, NC, for colored students, this institution remains a predominantly Black college.

Legacy: William Howard Day Cemetery was established in nearby Steelton in the 1900s as a burial place for all people, including people of color who were denied burial at the nearby Baldwin Cemetery. It remains a popular burial site for local African American families.

About Day: Dr. William Wells Brown praised Day's professional conduct in *The Rising Sun* in the following terms: "As a speaker, Mr. Day may be regarded as one of the most effective of the present time; has great self-possession and gaiety of imagination; is rich in the selection of his illustrations, well versed in history, literature, science and philosophy, and can draw on his finely-stored memory at will."

Amanda Gorman (March 7, 1998—present)



- **Connection to Dauphin County:** While not from Pennsylvania, Amanda’s work, and the work of other young folks of color, is the legacy of Black authors and activists from Harrisburg and beyond.
- **Education:** Harvard University
- **Occupation:** writer, first National Youth Poet Laureate
- **Activism/Accomplishments:** the youngest inaugural poet in US history, guest speaker at national events, writer for Nike’s Black History Month campaign

Above: Ms. Gorman at the Inauguration
Photo Credit: Ms. Gorman’s social media

Amanda Gorman is the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, as well as an award-winning writer and *cum laude* graduate of Harvard University, where she studied Sociology. She has written for the *New York Times* and has three books forthcoming with Penguin Random House.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, she began writing at only a few years of age. Now her words have won her invitations to the Obama White House and to perform for Lin-Manuel Miranda, Al Gore, Secretary Hillary Clinton, Malala Yousafzai, and others. Amanda has performed multiple commissioned poems for CBS This Morning and she has spoken at events and venues across the country, including the Library of Congress and Lincoln Center. She has received a Genius Grant from OZY Media, as well as recognition from Scholastic Inc., YoungArts, the *Glamour* Magazine College Women of the Year Awards, and the Webby Awards. She has written for *the New York Times* newsletter *The Edit* and penned the manifesto for Nike's 2020 Black History Month campaign. In 2017, Amanda Gorman was appointed the first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate by Urban Word – a program that supports Youth Poets Laureate in more than 60 cities, regions and states nationally. She is the recipient of the Poets & Writers Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award, and is the youngest board member of 826 National, the largest youth writing network in the United States.

Source: <http://www.theamandagorman.com>

Harriet McClintock Marshall (August 14, 1840—July 25, 1925)



- **Connection to Dauphin County:** Resident; life-long member of Wesley Union A.M.E. Zion Church (her mother Catherine helped to found the original church).
- **Education:** Educated at the German School; could read and write, according to the federal census.
- **Occupations:** Teacher. Domestic Servant for the Eby Family on Front Street.
- **Church Membership:** Wesley Union A.M.E. Zion Church.
- **Activism:** Underground Railroad.

Above: Mural on the side of the Jackson House. Harriet is on the right, center. Photo Credit: VisitHersheyHarrisburg.org

Contribution: Harriet assisted with efforts in the Underground Railroad. Alongside her mother, Catherine McClintock, she clothed, fed, and educated freedom seekers. One of those who escaped slavery, Elisha Marshall, became her husband.

Legacy: She helped to construct a monument dedicated to African Americans who fought in the Civil War, and that monument still stands in Lincoln Cemetery today. Harriet worshipped and served for decades at Wesley Union A.M.E. Zion Church, the church that remains to this day. Her family's multigenerational legacy in Harrisburg continues to resound. She is represented in a mural on the side of Jackson House.

About Marshall: "She had been a resident of Harrisburg nearly all her life and has been a member of Wesley Union A.M.E. Zion for sixty years." — *Harrisburg Telegraph*, July 25, 1925.

"During the early years of her young womanhood she assisted with the care of the 'Underground Slaves,' in old Wesley Church. This work was taking place in the midst of terrific conflict over slavery. She with others helped to feed, clothe and care for sick and well; then helped to establish or sent the slaves on to another station. She often told of the gratitude of escaped slaves but was always very secretive about the details." — from *The Descendants of Catherine Yellotz William McClintock*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1770's (family history compiled by descendant Olive Layton Harris, 1977).

Alice Dunbar-Nelson (July 19, 1875—September 18, 1935)



- **Connection to Dauphin County:** Frequently lectured at Wesley Union A.M.E. Zion Church; husband, Robert, was activist within the Eighth Ward; diary discusses time in Harrisburg; scrapbook of suffragist work includes articles and artifacts relating to speaking engagements and work throughout Pennsylvania, including Harrisburg.
- **Education:** Straight College (now Dillard University); Columbia University; Cornell University; Pennsylvania School of Industrial Art; and University of Pennsylvania.
- **Occupations:** Teacher. Poet. Playwright. Journalist. Newspaper editor.
- **Church Membership:** Episcopal
- **Activism:** Reconstruction and Readjustment Conference (Howard University); Women’s Committee of the Council of National Defense;

Delaware Republican Convention (delegate); American Interracial Peace Committee (executive secretary); Pennsylvania State Federation of Negro Women’s Clubs; and Delaware Crusaders for the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill.

Contribution: She advocated for women’s suffrage, war aid efforts, and positive interracial relations in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and communities across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Her major edited work, *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence*, published in Harrisburg in 1914, features fifty-one of the best and most famous speeches of Black men and men of America, Africa, and Europe from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Legacy: She used her talents for writing and speaking and served as an advocate for women’s suffrage, war aid, and anti-lynching efforts. She is considered a Harlem Renaissance poet, and her plays, poetry, short stories, and journalism make her an iconic African American writer.

About Dunbar-Nelson: “I recall, as a kid in Harrisburg, PA, the sweeping grace with which she swept into the large parlor of the Justin Carters before she took the vow which tied her into marital fetters to her present husband, Athletic Commissioner Robert J. Nelson. A Lady-in-Waiting, fresh from the pompous corridors of some 18th-Century French drawing room, was the impression.” — Orrin C. Evans, “On a Personal Note,” *Afro-American*, April 29, 1933.

“Mrs. Alice Dunbar Wilson, one of the most widely-known colored lecturers and writers in the country today has been secured to speak before the Forum in Wesley Church, Forster street, to-morrow afternoon. Mrs. Wilson is widely-known as a lecturer of note.... The subject of her talk to-morrow ‘His Country’ is one of interest to all.” — *Harrisburg Telegraph*, February 23, 1918.

Place

A Timeline of The Underground Railroad in Dauphin County

Prior to 1850: Harrisburg was an important Underground Railroad hub as the closest state capitol to the Mason-Dixon line.

1836: Harrisburg formed an antislavery society that raised demands for immediate emancipation.

1837: Harrisburg hosted a statewide antislavery convention.

1850: Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act. This law required local law enforcement to assist in the capture of runaway slaves. There were 900 free Black citizens living in the City of Harrisburg at this time.

1850s: Joseph Bustill and William Jones work as conductors or agents of the Underground Railroad, hiding fugitives in the Tanner's Alley Neighborhood and securing them safe passage to a variety of locations: Lancaster and Philadelphia to the east, and Sunbury, Williamsport, Elmira (NY), and Rochester (NY) to the north. Catherine and Harriet McClintock Marshall would also have been working with fugitives at this time.

1860: The free Black population of Harrisburg had doubled.

About Tanner's Alley

Part of Harrisburg's Eighth Ward, destroyed in 1913 to make space for the capitol complex, Tanner's Alley was a lively neighborhood with several churches, the black Masonic Hall, businesses, restaurants, and dance halls.



Tanner's Alley in the early 1900's. Photo Credit: PA State Archives

About Wesley Union AME Zion Church

One of the prominent buildings in the Tanner's Alley neighborhood was the Wesley Union AME Zion Church. Not only was the building a prominent church in the neighborhood, but its congregation—including the Marshalls were active in the Underground Railroad. While the original church was destroyed in the razing of the neighborhood, Lincoln Cemetery—Wesley Union's cemetery—is still extant with the tombs of William Howard Day and Harriet McClintock Marshall.



Wesley Union AME Zion Church in 1910, at the corner of South Street and Tanner's Alley

Photo credit: Historical Society of Dauphin County

Classroom Activities and Discussion

POETRY

While this digital performance utilizes the poetry, oratory, letters, and interviews of people from the past, these forms of writing are still used today in the fight for racial equity.

Discussion: Amanda Gorman and the 2021 Presidential Inauguration

After one of the most politically divisive years in recent history, Ms Gorman, America’s first youth poet laureate, became the youngest inaugural poet in United States history. After listening to “*The Hill We Climb*,” linked below in its entirety, discuss how Gorman carries on the legacy of poets like Alice Dunbar Nelson.

Link to Amanda Gorman at the Inauguration:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz4YuEvJ3y4>

ORATORY

Many activists have used oratory—speeches—as an effective means of advocating for equity. But what makes an effective speech? Rhetoric—the art of persuasion—is arguably the cornerstone of effective oration.

Discussion: In small groups, or as a class, discuss the rhetorical elements in his quote on education that make it memorable. One starting place could be Day’s use of repetition.

“Education is not simply the reading of a few lines of an author; it is not simply the committing to memory the rules in the textbook; it is not the ability to chatter like a parrot an author’s words; it is not simply extent, it is depth. And the depth will never be sounded until the mind of the student can by application weave the thought of the author into the thoughts of his own—until the implanted lessons can be deduced – led out into thoughts which are our own.”

LETTERS

Do You Know Me? featured two different letters: timely coded correspondence from one Underground Railroad agent to another and a letter to an elected official. While coded correspondence with life-or-death stakes may not appear in daily life, contacting local, state, and national elected officials to express beliefs on policy is still commonplace.

Activity: identify the politicians who represent you on a local, state, or national level. Research their positions on an issues that affect you. Examples include their stance on student load debt, the environment/climate change, racial equity, immigration, or Medicare for All. After you identify your elected official and an issue that you care about, write this person a letter as to why they should see this issue from your perspective. Or write a letter thanking this person for their work on championing policy that aligns with your beliefs.

INTERVIEW

According to the Oral History Association, “oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies.” Oral historians rely on interview like the one performed in *Do You Know Me?* in order to preserve the past. There are organizations and social media accounts today, like Story Corps or Humans of New York, that catalogue quotes and interviews from individuals to preserve stories about life in America and around the world.

Activity: partner with a classmate or, for homework, find a relative, and conduct an interview with that person and record what this individual has to say. Below are the questions from the interview in *Do You Know Me?* that you can use as a guide for your own interview questions.

1. Where do your people come from?
2. What kind of work do you do?
3. What do you do for pleasure?
4. How do you see your future?

Below is a link to a Story Corps list of sample interview questions:

<https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/>

If there’s additional time, try creating a script by transcribing the interview you took and performing it as if you were the interviewee.



Mary Crane, 82, ex-slave from Mitchell Indiana; Photo Credit: Library of Congress

This image is part of the Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938

For Further Study

Sources/additional resources for biographies of individuals featured in *Do You Know Me?*

- *One Hundred Voices: Harrisburg's Historic African American Community 1850-1920*. This is where the majority of the biographical information contained in this study guide comes from: <https://digitalharrisburg.com/commonwealth/100names/>
- More information on William Howard Day can be found on the African American Registry's website, linked here: <https://aaregistry.org/story/william-howard-day-editor-and-minister/>
- Amanda Gorman's professional website with her biography and info on upcoming publications: <https://www.theamandagorman.com/>

Sources/additional resources for Harrisburg's Eighth Ward

- Digital Harrisburg, a collaboration between Messiah University, Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, and other community partners aims to provide a public resource for learning about and understanding Harrisburg, build community and institutional connections across the region, and deepen student knowledge of local history, the humanities, and digital technology. Exhibits include *Race and Place in Harrisburg*, *The Old Eighth Ward*, and a collection of oral history, *Stories in Place*: <https://digitalharrisburg.com/>

Sources/additional resources for the Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania

- PA's tourism website, featuring locations from across the state that served as Underground Railroad stops: <https://www.visitpa.com/experience/underground-railroad>
- The William C. Goodridge Freedom Center and Underground Railroad Museum, located in York: <http://www.goodridgefreedomcenter.org>

Sources/additional resources for understanding slavery

- Monticello's Digital Classroom provides resources on what slavery/plantation life would have been like. All topics covered on this website can be found here: <https://classroom.monticello.org/topics/>

Additional online resources for Black History Month and antiracism

- National Museum of African American History and Culture provides digital access to exhibit items ranging from Pre-Revolutionary War to the present that document the experience of African Americans: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/>
- Sankofa African American Theatre Company has a compilation of anti-racism resources on their website here: <https://www.sankofatheatrebg.com/anti-racism-resources>

Appendix: Texts Performed in *Do You Know Me?*

"She Weaves" by Marian Cannon Dornell (2015)

Chalang-shooshBANG!" the loom sing-shouts
as Naomi conducts the chorus
of harness, pulleys, pedals, heddles,
sinking sheds, sley hook, cords, and reed.
"Chalang-shoohBANG!" accompanies her thoughts.
They call me slave
but I'm a artist woman, not afraid
of work: I sheared
master's flock before he sold them. I carded
their wool. I'll learn
how to grow
flax, if need be. I grow
the plants that fix the dyes. I boil
the wool. I pull
color from out the air,
color nobody seen. They need me here.
No need for me to run.
I'm sick of folks around here singing
their steal-away songs. Folks who run, they fools.
Master say I'd be the last he sells
because I mean so much to him. He say
I can stay,
even if business keep falling off.
When the money gets better again, he say
he'll start giving me cash for myself. "Soon
as the tavern starts turning a profit again," he say.
Chalang-shooshBANG!"
Slave catchers came
through again last week. Runaways try to steal
north by way of the Susquehanna. Don't them fools
know ain't no Promised Land on earth?
Ten, twenty years ago we worked forty-strong here:
coopers, carters, teamsters, and wheelwrights,
a miller, planters and harvesters in the fields and gardens,
workers in the stable and smokehouse,
the tavern, mill, hands to keep the springhouse full
of vegetables and fruits from the garden and orchard
and make Master's brandies from his still.
Now, we shriveled to twelve who run this place--
one run away, too many sold.
Master lined us up in the quarters. Gathered us, forced
us to stand outside our cabins. First

come the shuffle-jingle sound of shackled bare feet
coming down the path from the north.
Then you see the parade,
a rickety walking fence.
"Chalang-shooshBANG!"
Them chained together with iron collars
'round they necks. I never seen
the eyes, just they heads hung low, low
as them collars allow.
We thought Master pay them slave catchers
to come through to scare us. They don't have to worry
about me leaving. I free enough.
I free. Enough
CHALANG-SHOOSHBANG!

Joseph Bustill's Letter to William Still

Harrisburg,
March 24, 1856.

Friend Still:

I suppose ere this you have seen those five large and three small packages I sent by way of Reading, consisting of three men and women and children. They arrived here this morning at 8-1/2 o'clock and left twenty minutes past three. You will please send me any information likely to prove interesting in relation to them.

Lately we have formed a Society here, called the Fugitive Aid Society. This is our first case, and I hope it will prove entirely successful.

When you write, please inform me what signs or symbols you make use of in your despatches, and any other information in relation to operations of the Underground Railroad.

Our reason for sending by the Reading Road, was to gain time; it is expected the owners will be in town this afternoon, and by this Road we gained five hours' time, which is a matter of much importance, and we may have occasion to use it sometimes in future. In great haste,

Yours with great respect,

Joseph C. Bustill

“A WPA Writer Interviews a Former Slave: after Miriam Goodman” by Marian Cannon Dornell (2015)

Where do your people come from?

Wish I knew. Wish I knew where my farthest-back African come from. When I was a little chap some old man, older than I am now, he say I'm Ashanti. He say he can tell where I'm from 'cause I walk like Ashanti and my head shaped like his people. Say he remember when he was brought over from Africa. Say the men in his tribe weaved cloth out of cotton. Some kind of cloth for the king. Then he say to me, “You and me, we Ashanti. We Ashanti people We proud people. Say it! Say Ashanti!” So I say Ashanti. I say that name every night since because don't nobody ever talk to me like that before or since. And I been around -on plantations in Delaware then got sold South 'cause I tried to escape once—but I always remember what that old man say. Always remember I come from somewhere else. Where there's kings. Did you like your job? What kind of work did you do?

Picked cotton. Hard work. Worked from can to can't. It was tough work. But that old man say our people grew cotton so it was like I was feeling something from my homeland every time I touched it.

What did you do for pleasure?

I liked making shapes in the dirt floor of the cabin. Little pictures just come to my head. Could never help it. I got beat lots of times 'cause the driver thought I was writing, and we wasn't allowed. Reading and writing was against the law. I tell him I ain't writing, I'm drawing pictures from my head. He made me quit, but the pictures stay in my head to this day. Still don't have no paper or pencil but every night making my supper, I shakes some cornmeal in the pan and make my shapes with my fingers. When I'm through with my shapes, I fix my cornbread.

How do you see your future?

Always wanted to be free. That's my future.

Excerpt from Harrisburg Central High School Dedication by William Howard Day

“Education is not simply the reading of a few lines of an author; it is not simply the committing to memory the rules in the textbook; it is not the ability to chatter like a parrot an author’s words; it is not simply extent, it is depth. And the depth will never be sounded until the mind of the student can by application weave the thought of the author into the thoughts of his own—until the implanted lessons can be deduced – led out into thoughts which are our own.”

"I Sit and Sew" by Alice Dunbar Nelson (1918)

I sit and sew—a useless task it seems,
My hands grown tired, my head weighed down with dreams—
The panoply of war, the martial tread of men,
Grim-faced, stern-eyed, gazing beyond the ken
Of lesser souls, whose eyes have not seen Death,
Nor learned to hold their lives but as a breath—
But—I must sit and sew.

I sit and sew—my heart aches with desire—
That pageant terrible, that fiercely pouring fire
On wasted fields, and writhing grotesque things
Once men. My soul in pity flings
Appealing cries, yearning only to go
There in that holocaust of hell, those fields of woe—
But—I must sit and sew.

The little useless seam, the idle patch;
Why dream I here beneath my homely thatch,
When there they lie in sodden mud and rain,
Pitifully calling me, the quick ones and the slain?
You need me, Christ! It is no roseate dream
That beckons me—this pretty futile seam,
It stifles me—God, must I sit and sew?

Letter from Maude Coleman to PA Governor James Duff

February 20, 1950
641 Boas Street

Governor James Duff Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Dear Governor Duff:

I know you are interested in the "Average Guy", and I am one of them. I received a letter from the Capitol Park Extension stating that the entire row of houses where I live is being taken over by the State for the erection of an office building to house the Department of Labor and Industry. The houses in this row are among the best homes for Negroes in Harrisburg. The home owners who live in them have had great pride in keeping the properties up. They are all modern and are occupied by our only Negro druggist in Central Pennsylvania, a practicing physician, a mortician, the best tourist home for Negroes in the city, and State and city employees.

Just last year, after the passing of my husband, I had my home converted into apartments at a cost of \$4,500. As I expect to go on retirement at the close of your administration, I had hoped to have this additional income to give me enough to live on.

Our position, Governor Duff, is not like that of other groups. It is absolutely impossible for us to rent or buy property in Harrisburg in any decent neighborhood because of all kinds of restrictions. Certain districts are designated zones for Negroes, and there seems to be an unwritten law against them living anywhere else. If these properties were typical slum houses, I could understand why they should be torn down, but they are not, and the citizens and voters who live in them are among the best in the city. This action coming on the eve of our Republican Campaign is not conducive to the best interests of those of us who are actively engaged in the success of the Party.

I am appealing to you not only for myself but for all the other homeowners in the area to be taken. At least we should be allowed to retain our present homes until some provision is made to provide decent homes for Negroes in Harrisburg. After all, Government people work in offices, but they must live in homes.

Your loyal friend and supporter,

Mrs. Maude B. Coleman

“The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman (2021)

When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending
shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade
We've braved the belly of the beast
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions
of what just is
Isn't always just-ice
And yet the dawn is ours
before we knew it
Somehow we do it
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed
a nation that isn't broken
but simply unfinished
We the successors of a country and a time
Where a skinny Black girl
descended from slaves and raised by a single
mother
can dream of becoming president
only to find herself reciting for one
And yes we are far from polished
far from pristine
but that doesn't mean we are
striving to form a union that is perfect
We are striving to forge a union with purpose
To compose a country committed to all cultures,
colors, characters and
conditions of man
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands
between us
but what stands before us
We close the divide because we know, to put our
future first,
we must first put our differences aside
We lay down our arms
so we can reach out our arms
to one another
We seek harm to none and harmony for all
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew

That even as we hurt, we hoped
That even as we tired, we tried
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious
Not because we will never again know defeat
but because we will never again sow division
Scripture tells us to envision
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and
fig tree
And no one shall make them afraid
If we're to live up to our own time
Then victory won't lie in the blade
But in all the bridges we've made
That is the promise to glade
The hill we climb
If only we dare
It's because being American is more than a pride
we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying
democracy
And this effort very nearly succeeded
But while democracy can be periodically delayed
it can never be permanently defeated
In this truth
in this faith we trust
For while we have our eyes on the future
history has its eyes on us
This is the era of just redemption
We feared at its inception
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves
So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?
We will not march back to what was

but move to what shall be
A country that is bruised but whole,
benevolent but bold,
fierce and free
We will not be turned around
or interrupted by intimidation
because we know our inaction and inertia
will be the inheritance of the next generation
Our blunders become their burdens
But one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might,
and might with right,
then love becomes our legacy
and change our children's birthright
So let us leave behind a country
better than the one we were left with
Every breath from by bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a
wondrous one
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the
west,
we will rise from the windswept northeast
where our forefathers first realized revolution
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the
midwestern states,
we will rise from the sunbaked south
We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge
battered and beautiful
When day comes we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it

Transcript taken from CNN:

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/20/politics/anderson-gorman-inaugural-poem-transcript/index.html>