

VOLUME 2

Moore Words

from



A-Z

WORDS DO MATTER

Aspire Banish Clarity Delicate
Elaborate Frigid Gaze Humble
Influence Jolt Kindred Lofty Myth
Neglect Objective Peril Quiver
Resilient Triumph Urge Venture
Withstand Xeric Yonder Zany

Inspiring
Stories To
Improve Your
Vocabulary

R. Lee Moore, Sr.

ARC ONLY

This is an **Advanced Reading Copy**
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Publishing date has not been set.

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WORDS DO MATTER

Moore Words

INSPIRING STORIES TO IMPROVE YOUR VOCABULARY

VOLUME 2

MOORE WORDS, VOLUME 2

Inspiring Stories To Improve Your Vocabulary

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Ronald Lee Moore, Sr.

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Cover design and book layout

One Creative Mind, LLC, publisher

ISBN: 979-8-9905229-9-2

Contents

A Summertime Surprise	page 5
Not Quite Juneteenth	page 17
The Crew On Call	page 67
City, Country, City: A True Southern Experience	page 111

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Words
DO
Matter!

Dedication

To the seekers— those who hunger for historical truth, crave cultural understanding, and cherish the power of a well-chosen word...

To the readers who see stories not just as entertainment, but as bridges—to the past, to each other, and to parts of themselves they haven't yet discovered...

To the young minds growing in a world of abbreviations, looking for language that can stretch, inspire, and reflect their real experiences...

To lovers of literature, imagination, and relatable storytelling...

This book is for you.

May each page expand your vocabulary, ignite your curiosity, and remind you that your voice—your story —and Words DO Matter.

Here are simple instructions to improve your vocabulary:

Vocabulary Building Made Easy

- Review the word list and definitions.
- See it in action – notice how bolded words are used in the story.
- Check bold words with definitions at the bottom of each page.
- Keep the list handy for quick reference.
- Practice by using the words, new and familiar, in your own sentences.
- Add one new word each week – that's 52 a year!
- Share your experiences with family and friends.

By following these steps, you'll enhance your vocabulary effectively!

INTRODUCTION: VOLUME 2

In a time where swipes and scrolls have replaced chapters and paragraphs, where abbreviations and emojis often stand in for full expression, it has become increasingly important to preserve the richness of language and the timeless power of storytelling. *Moore Words: Volume 2* is not just a collection of stories—it is a revival, a resistance, and a gift.

This book invites you to pause from the digital noise and step into a world where words still matter and stories still carry weight.

Each short story within these pages is crafted with care, offering more than entertainment. They are vessels of knowledge—woven with social, cultural, and historical threads that not only inform but enlighten. Whether you’re reading about a forgotten tradition, a pivotal moment in history, or a relatable modern dilemma, every tale is rooted in purpose and passion.

But *Moore Words: Volume 2* offers something more; vocabulary expansion with heart. Scattered throughout these stories are words—some familiar, others refreshingly rare—that stretch your thinking and deepen your understanding. These words are clearly defined and intentionally placed, encouraging readers to connect meaning with usage, all while enjoying narratives that are engaging and emotionally stirring.

Why does this matter now?

Because with the rapid rise of social media, AI-generated content, and bite-sized video culture, we are at risk of losing the cherished art of storytelling and the mastery of language. In the race to be quick, clever, and concise, we sometimes forget the value of depth, nuance, and precision. The ability to tell a story—rich in detail and vocabulary—is not just a literary skill; it's a life skill. It empowers us to share our truths, build connections, challenge ideas, and leave legacies.

Let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Technology is a tool, but language is a foundation. And *Moore Words: Volume 2* seeks to honor that foundation by integrating meaningful vocabulary into compelling stories that still feel modern, real, and relatable. It's a reminder that pages—real, physical pages—can still surprise us, move us, and teach us something new.

Whether you're a student hoping to build a stronger vocabulary, a parent looking for stories that matter, an educator seeking fresh material, or simply a reader who loves both language and life, this book is for you.

If you are familiar with some of the words, practice using them until they become part of your vocabulary, your everyday writing or conversation.

So turn the page—literally.

Join us in preserving the art of reading, writing, thinking, and speaking with intention. Celebrate stories that carry cultural legacy. Embrace words that challenge and elevate. And remember that in a world full of noise, the clearest voices are often the ones that have taken time to learn the language of storytelling.

Welcome to *Moore Words: Volume 2*—where every story is a lesson, and every word matters.

Regards,

—*R. Lee Moore, Sr.*

MOORE WORDS USED IN THE FOLLOWING STORIES:

- A Summertime Surprise
- Not Quite Juneteenth, Not Yet

Aspire: To have a strong desire or goal to achieve something important.

Banish: To force someone or something to leave a place as a form of punishment or rule.

Clarity: The quality of being clear, easy to understand, or easy to see.

Delicate: Easily damaged or requiring careful handling.

Elaborate: To explain something in greater detail or with more information.

Frigid: Very cold in temperature or lacking warmth in emotion.

Gaze: To look at something steadily and with focus.

Humble: Not proud or boastful; showing modesty.

Influence: The power to change how someone thinks or acts.

Jolt: A sudden, strong movement or surprise that shakes you up.

Kindred: Having similar nature or origin; related in spirit or feeling.

Lofty: Very high in the air or noble in ideas and goals.

Myth: A traditional story, often involving gods or heroes, which explains natural events or beliefs.

Neglect: To fail to take care of something or someone properly.

Objective: A goal or purpose; or something based on facts rather than feelings.

Peril: Serious and immediate danger.

Quiver: To shake slightly, often from fear, cold, or excitement.

Resilient: Able to recover quickly from challenges or tough situations.

Shrewd: Smart in a practical or clever way, especially in dealing with people or situations.

Triump: A great victory or achievement.

Urge: A strong desire to do something or to encourage someone to act.

Venture: A risky or daring journey or activity.

Withstand: To resist or stand firm against something difficult or dangerous.

Xeric: Relating to very dry environments or adapted to little water.

Yonder: Far away, but within sight (often used poetically or in old-fashioned speech).

Zany: Funny in a strange or silly way; wildly unconventional.

A SUMMERTIME SURPRISE: MALIK'S MOORE WORDS SECRET

Based on “Moore Words: Volume 1—Inspiring Stories to Improve Your Vocabulary in a Changing World”

The final bell of the school year didn't just ring—it screamed, "Yeahhh". It was as if the school building itself was relieved to be done babysitting teenagers for nine straight months. The halls of Central High exploded into joyful chaos. Backpacks were tossed, lockers slammed, someone blasted an off-key version of “Summertime” from a Bluetooth speaker, and three different friend groups broke out into spontaneous dance battles near the cafeteria.

Jamarion yelled, “SUMMER, BABY!” at a volume that surely woke the janitor.

Tyrell tried to moonwalk out the double doors but got tripped up on his untied laces, causing Kaliyah to mutter, “A walking caution sign, I swear.”

And while everyone else made their grand exits, Malik lingered behind, letting the moment stretch. He didn’t dread summer—far from it—but something tugged at him. A strange **urge**, like he wasn’t quite done learning yet. Not in a test, quiz, raise-your-hand kind of way, but in a real way. A useful, life-might-change-today kind of way.

That’s when he remembered the little book on Ms. Singleton’s desk. He’d seen it earlier during their “clean out your folders” free period but hadn’t gotten the chance to explore it. Everyone else had been too busy making TikToks and turning in crumpled hall passes. But now? Now the hallway was quiet. The perfect time to investigate.

Ms. Singleton’s classroom was mostly dark except for one shaft of sunlight filtering through a crooked window blind. There it was—the book. Malik walked over, slowly, reverently, like it might float away if he moved too fast.

Urge: A strong desire to do something or to encourage someone to act.

It was hand-sized, thick but not intimidating, with a cover in warm shades of brown and tan, almost like old leather and cinnamon bark. The embossed title read: *Moore Words from A-Z: Inspiring Stories to Improve Your Vocabulary, Volume 2.*

He opened it. The pages smelled like coffee and nostalgia. The first story he flipped to was titled:

“Hot Fun in the Summertime: The Crew On Call.”

“Wait... what?” he muttered.

He scanned the first paragraph and immediately did a double take. The characters in the story? A group of Black teens hanging out in an urban city. They were funny, loud, curious, and familiar. One of them had a smart mouth with facetious phrases. Another talked so much he made your ears sweat. One character—clearly the “Malik” of the group—was obsessed with words and asked wild philosophical questions like, “If ice cream trucks are real, why not fruit trucks?”

Malik **gazed** at the page, stunned.

Was he dreaming?

Gaze: To look at something steadily and with focus.

Then came the vocabulary. Not in boring list form—no way. These were baked into the story like chocolate chips in cookie dough. Bold, beautiful, expressive words used right.

“Kaliyah’s **objective** was to stay photo-ready all summer, even if the block was 92 degrees and her edges were fighting for their lives.”

“Tyrell’s latest plan involved something **zany**, loud, and likely illegal, but he swore it would get them TikTok famous by Friday.”

Then came his favorite line:

“After stuffing themselves with barbecue, mac and cheese, snow cones, and six slices of peach cobbler, the crew lay around in a deeply **crapulous** state—regretting nothing but planning revenge on whoever brought the second pan of banana pudding.”

Malik snorted out loud. “Crapulous?! That’s a real word?”

Objective: A goal or purpose; or something based on facts rather than feelings.

Zany: Funny in a strange or silly way; wildly unconventional.

Aspire: To have a strong desire or goal to achieve something important.

Even with his reputation as the crew's dictionary, this book was stretching his brain in the best possible way. He flipped to another story.

“Not Quite Juneteenth, not yet.”

This one was deeper. A young girl living in modern-day America wakes up in enslaved 1864 Galveston, Texas. She embarks on a journey—emotional, spiritual, and a little mystical—that helps her connect to her heritage through food, experiencing slavery first hand, and the family that embraced her in this time traveled historical journey BEFORE Juneteenth.

“She didn't just **aspire** to learn her history—she hungered for it, craving knowledge like a drumline beat echoing in her chest.”

“Her uncle told her about the General's arrival in Galveston, about the day the enslaved finally heard they were free. And her heart, so young and soft, broke and soared all at once.”

“The collard greens smelled of salt and garlic, but beneath the taste was memory—generational, raw, delicious truth.”

Malik sat back in the chair, the weight of the story pressing against him in the most amazing way. His fingertips rested

gently on the edge of the page, as if turning it too quickly might disrupt the magic still lingering in the air. This wasn't just schoolbook history with dry dates and forced essays. No, this was living memory—culture told through story, memory wrapped in rhythm, words with soul that made you sit up straighter and feel something.

The next story he landed on was titled:

“City, Country, City: A True Southern Experience.”

The title alone made him pause. He knew the city like the back of his hand—basketball courts with bent rims, double-parked cars, murals with eyes that seemed to watch you pass. But Edenton, North Carolina? That was a different world.

As he read, he was transported alongside a young teen from the city who had been sent to stay with family down South for the summer. No skyscrapers. No corner stores. No Wi-Fi. Not even a faucet in the kitchen.

Instead, the water came from a pump on the back porch—a creaky, rusted fixture that wheezed and splashed like it had its own mood swings. And the bathroom? Malik had to reread the line twice: an outhouse. Yes, an actual outhouse. No flush, no mirror, no air freshener—just a wooden shack a few

yards from the back door, guarded by mosquitoes the size of hummingbirds.

At first, the character in the story was overwhelmed. But slowly, Malik read how the summer unfolded with a rhythm all its own. There were mornings spent picking vegetables from the well tended gardens, afternoons learning to shell peas with aunties who laughed louder than church choirs, and evenings watching the sun disappear behind rows of trees taller than rooftops.

The story glowed with tradition, culture, and family legacy—passed not in textbooks, but in the long pauses between rocking chairs and the warm crackle of elder voices.

The teen would sit for what felt like endless hours on the front porch, listening to stories told in thick southern accents and flavored with phrases he didn't always understand—words thick with memory, coated in history, and humming with unspoken wisdom. He didn't always know what everything meant, but he knew it was important. Sacred, even. And those words? He took them back to the city as souvenirs for the soul, priceless gift he didn't even know he needed.

Malik sat there, stunned by the quiet beauty of it all.

And he couldn't stop turning the pages.

Each new story unfolded like a miniature universe—fresh, vibrant, and specific. These weren’t stories with vocabulary just added in for effect. No. These words were braided into the storytelling, woven so naturally into the plot and characters that they felt essential—like rhythm in a song or seasoning in a stew.

Every story had a theme—something real.

Every story had a purpose—a message you didn’t see coming until it hit you in the heart.

Every story had an emotion—joy, pain, pride, and wonder.

And throughout them all were words like facetious, where characters joked in ways that bordered on disrespect but never crossed the line. Words like obsequious, used to describe that one uncle who never stopped complimenting—even when nobody was listening. Words like zealous, for the girl who ran the community garden like it was her life’s mission. And yes, the now legendary crapulous, for when too much barbecue and sweet tea led to a nap that felt like a food coma.

These words weren’t just dropped in like vocabulary assignments—they were challenges and gifts all at once. They made you laugh, then stop and look them up, then realize, “Oh... I know somebody exactly like that.”

The stories were easy to read—accessible, funny, and real—but deep in what they offered. They weren’t trying to impress you; they were trying to invite you. To reflect. To imagine. To relate. Malik suddenly felt like he wasn’t just reading a book—he was walking through a cultural museum, flipping through a living history book, and laughing at a modern sitcom all rolled into one.

They taught without preaching.

They inspired without bragging.

They welcomed him into every scene as if to say: You belong here. This is your story too.

Malik looked down at the book—its brown-and-tan cover warm against the cool desk. It was more than a book. It was a bridge. A lens. A mirror. And for the first time in a long time, he didn’t just want to read—he wanted to know more.

He was hooked.

He wasn’t sure what the summer would bring. But now, he had a mission.

Find that book again. Maybe get his own copy. Read it cover to cover. Learn every word, every lesson.

Why Moore Words Matters – Especially for Today's Youth

Moore Words from A-Z offers:

Expanded Vocabulary – Helps students naturally learn powerful, descriptive language.

Cultural & Historical Literacy – Features stories about Juneteenth, southern traditions, family legacy, and modern urban life.

Engaging & Relatable Storytelling – Characters and plots that reflect real teens and communities.

Social Awareness – Encourages reflection on identity, belonging, growth, and heritage.

Reading Enjoyment – Makes literacy fun, approachable, and inspiring in a world ruled by social media shorthand.

Maybe even start writing his own stories. Ones that felt just as rich, just as funny, just as full of culture and rhythm and spice and soul.

And when he did?

He'd use Moore Words.

Because sometimes, more vocabulary isn't just about sounding smart.

It's about becoming whole.

So yes, LOL and OMG are cool.

But wouldn't you rather aspire, gaze, and feel crapulous after your auntie's third slice of sweet potato pie?

Malik would..

And now—maybe—you will too.

ARC ONLY

ARC ONLY

NOT QUITE JUNETEENTH: NOT YET

The June sky over the countryside stretched wide and blue, brushed with cotton ball clouds. Ayana Harper, sixteen and restless, had wandered far from her family's Juneteenth picnic. She needed space to breathe, away from the crowd, the speeches, and her cousin's sticky cobbler hands.

As she slowly walked down a grassy slope near a wire fence, something stirred in the tall grass.

“A calf?” she said, squinting.

Sure enough, a light-brown calf had wriggled through a broken post and was now trotting toward the woods. Ayana gave chase, laughing.

“Hey! That’s not your field!”

The calf picked up speed. Ayana followed, sneakers thudding on the soft dirt. The wind caught her braids as the world turned into blur—trees, grass, and then—

Splash.

The ground gave out beneath her, and Ayana plunged into a cold, rushing brook.

Pulled From the Past

When Ayana Harper came to, the world smelled like wet grass, ash, and something faintly sour—like sweat left too long in the sun. Her clothes clung to her like seaweed, soaked from the brook she’d fallen into. Her head ached, her hands stung, and her eyes took a moment to focus.

Clarity: The quality of being clear, easy to understand, or easy to see.

A dark-skinned man leaned over her, a damp rag in one hand and a look of **clarity** in his eyes—clear, steady, almost gentle.

“You back with us, child?” he asked in a low Southern drawl, voice worn smooth like river stones.

Ayana blinked. “I think so... what happened?”

“Pulled you from the stream just ‘fore your head hit the rocks. Looked like you was chasing one of my calves.”

Her eyes narrowed. The sky looked... wrong. Too clean. Too still. No planes, no cell towers. Her wet sneakers looked ridiculous against the man’s hand-sewn boots. “Where am I?”

“Galveston,” he said. “Ain’t but a mile from the Seabrook property line.”

“Galveston?” Ayana pushed herself upright, eyes wide.

“That’s right.” He studied her, brows furrowing. “You got a mighty strange way of dressin’. You from the Seabrook house?”

She swallowed hard. “No, I’m not from here. What year is this?”

“Year?” He scratched his beard. “Eighteen sixty-four.”

Ayana's mouth dropped open. Her heartbeat raced. "Oh my God. I fell into the water in 2025 and came out... here?"

The man blinked. "You really did hit your head, didn't you?"

Ayana's stomach twisted. Not quite Juneteenth... not yet.

She barely heard him. Her thoughts spiraled. She had come to Galveston in 1864. Just before Juneteenth. A time when freedom had been promised but not delivered. It was like history had reached out and pulled her backward.

She could hardly breathe.

Back in 2025

Ayana was no stranger to being overlooked. At sixteen, being a Black girl meant constantly shifting between two worlds—one that celebrated her style, her slang, her music, and one that ignored her voice in the classroom, followed her in stores, and whispered judgments behind smiles.

She was tired of fighting to be seen as equal, tired of teachers mistaking her intelligence for attitude, and of classmates who called her "too loud" when she was just being heard. Her mama always said, "You are your ancestors' dream, baby girl. So don't let nobody make you feel like a footnote."

But now, here she was—right in the middle of their dream... before it even came true.

“Come on now,” the man said, reaching for her hand. “You best get outta them wet clothes ‘fore you catch your death.”

She hesitated, then took it. His grip was firm but gentle—not trying to control, just help.

He introduced himself on the walk back as Amos. A field hand. A husband. A father. “Ain’t got much,” he said, “but we make it work.”

As they walked down a narrow dirt road, Ayana saw rows of cotton stretching like white oceans. Bent backs moved between them—men, women, even children—hands covered in cuts from the sharp bolls, their shirts soaked through with sweat.

Everywhere she looked, there was labor.

And nowhere, not even in the breeze, was there rest.

Ayana felt a sharp **jolt** in her chest—not from pain, but from understanding. She had read about slavery, seen movies and

Jolt: A sudden, strong movement; surprise that shakes you up.

Venture: A risky or daring journey or activity.

diagrams. But seeing it unfold in front of her? Watching real people walking, bent under the weight of a system built to break them? None **ventured** to resist nor escape.

That was different. That was unbearable.

The House Behind the Cotton

The dirt road wound past rows of cotton that seemed to stretch to the horizon. Ayana had never seen anything like it. The plants stood about chest-high, topped with fluffy white blooms, but the beauty of the cotton masked the **peril** it brought. Each boll had jagged edges that cut into bare fingers. Tiny drops of blood spotted the leaves where pickers worked, hunched like shadows under the punishing Texas sun.

“They start us before sunrise,” Amos explained as they walked, “and don’t let up till the horn blows at dusk. Some days it too dark to even see the cotton we pickin’.”

Ayana’s sneakers squished with each step. Her damp clothes clung to her skin, but she felt selfish even noticing her discomfort when she saw a boy no older than nine dragging a heavy sack across the plowed trenches.

Peril: Serious and immediate danger.

“Does it always feel this hopeless?” she whispered.

Amos didn’t answer at first. Then he said, “Some days. But we ain’t forgot how to laugh. That’s how we survive. How else could we **withstand** being treated this way?”

They reached a cluster of small wooden cabins beyond the fields. The cabins leaned like tired old men, each one made from gray, splintering planks. Tin and burlap patched the roofs. Smoke curled from a narrow chimney pipe atop one of the shacks.

Amos pushed open the door to his cabin.

Inside was a single room. Dirt floor. One corner had a straw mattress covered with a quilt stitched from scraps of old dresses and work shirts. A pot simmered over a wood fire built between three stones. The scent that filled the space was smoky, earthy, and warm—field peas, salted pork fat, onions, and sweet potatoes.

“This here’s what we got for dinner,” Amos said. “Some days it’s just beans. Other times we get scraps—pig tail, skin, or the foot if they feel generous.”

Withstand: To resist or stand firm against something difficult or dangerous.

Ayana sat on a stool near the hearth. The fire warmed her skin and her soul. The smells were both unfamiliar and comforting. She could almost taste the broth in the air.

“I never thought survival could smell like this,” she said softly.

Amos raised a brow. “It ain’t fine eatin’, but it’ll fill your belly.”

Mabel entered the room next. She was tall and stately, her dark skin glowing with the heat of the fire, her hair wrapped in a scarf. She gave Ayana a slow once-over, then nodded.

“You the girl who fell in the creek?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You got a name?”

“Ayana.”

“Sound like a name with some purpose to it,” Mabel said.

Ayana smiled shyly. “I like to think so.”

Yonder: Far away, but within sight (often used poetically or in old-fashioned speech).

From a back curtain emerged four children—Josiah, Rose, Liddy, and Micah—ranging from toddler to teenager. Their clothes were patched and faded, their eyes wide and curious.

Josiah spoke first. “She look like she from **yonder** stars.”

“She dressed like one of them **zany** folks in the traveling carnivals,” Micah said, pointing at her sneakers.

Ayana laughed. “You’re not far off.”

They all sat cross-legged on the floor as Mabel spooned the stew into wooden bowls. They didn’t have much, but they ate like a family—close, grateful, talking over one another, laughing even when the stories were sad. It reminded Ayana of Thanksgiving with her cousins in Houston. She recognized a **kindred** spirit. The way people laughed to keep from crying.

The food was simple, but it was sacred. The peas were soft and rich from the pork, the cornbread gritty and sweet, and the sweet potatoes melted on her tongue like sugar and smoke. She closed her eyes and let the flavors linger. This was soul food in its purest form—born of necessity, but flavored with hope.

Zany: Funny in a strange or silly way; wildly unconventional.

Kindred: Having similar nature or origin; related in spirit or feeling.

“I don’t understand,” she said aloud. “How can you all still find joy here?”

Mabel looked up. “Because if we don’t, we vanish.”

Amos nodded. “They took our land, our names, our languages. They try to take our joy, too. But joy’s the one thing they can’t chain.”

Ayana felt something stir in her. These people had been torn from their homelands, stripped of culture, sold, whipped, and **banished** to the lowest rung of society. But they had rebuilt something—an entire world. With laughter, food, music, and stubborn love.

They had created a new culture from the ashes of the one stolen from them. What once seemed like a **myth** became a reality for her.

She looked at Mabel, who sat straight-backed even as her feet were swollen from the fields. At Amos, who spoke little

Banish: To force someone or something to leave a place as a form of punishment or rule.

Myth: A traditional story, often involving gods or heroes, which explains natural events or beliefs.

but moved with quiet pride. At the children, whose eyes gleamed with wonder.

“They see you like you ain’t human,” Mabel said suddenly, as if reading Ayana’s thoughts. “Like you some animal with no mind, no heart. But we got stories. We got dreams.”

Ayana nodded. “You have more than that. You have legacy.”

Josiah leaned in. “Tell us ‘bout where you from.”

Ayana took a breath. “It’s... a lot.”

And so she told them. About electric cars and cell phones. About music players no bigger than a spoon. About social media and video games. About the first Black man who traveled to outer space.

“You lyin’,” Rose said, pointing in the air. “Ain’t no way nobody can go up there, let alone one of us!”

“It happened,” Ayana said. “His name was Guion Stewart Bluford Jr. , born in Philadelphia.”

The cabin fell silent. Even the fire seemed to hush.

“Maybe we do get free after all,” Mabel whispered.

Ayana didn't say what she was thinking—that freedom, even in 2025, still came with asterisks.

"I mean," she said carefully, "we're not picking cotton anymore. But Black girls like me still get told to be quiet. Still get overlooked. Still get paid less, listened to less, loved less."

"That don't sound like freedom," Amos murmured.

"It's a work in progress," she replied. "Like y'all. Like Juneteenth."

Mabel smiled. "Not quite free. Not quite Juneteenth."

Ayana felt a tear slide down her cheek.

"Not yet," she whispered. "But we're getting there."

The Port and the Price

The next morning, Ayana woke before the rooster. The cabin smelled of ash and earth and the lingering scent of last night's stew. As Mabel quietly stoked the embers in the hearth, Ayana slipped outside into the humid dawn, drawn by the low sound of gulls crying in the distance.

She followed a sandy path Amos had pointed out the day before. It led east through the trees and opened suddenly into Galveston Bay.

The harbor was extremely inviting—a mix of early morning fog, cut hay, and salt breeze. The water stretched out like a silver sheet, glittering under the rising sun. Old wooden docks creaked as fishermen prepared their boats to launch. The gulls circled overhead, squawking at everything.

But Ayana didn't see the beauty—not right away.

All she could feel was the weight of history pressing down like an invisible weight on her chest.

Galveston's shoreline wasn't just a fishing hub. It had once been Texas' largest slave-trading port, rivaling even New Orleans in human trafficking. Before the Civil War, slave ships came directly to these docks—first legally, then in secret. After 1808, when the international slave trade was banned, smugglers rerouted their vessels here, unloading Black bodies in darkness and silence.

Neglect: To fail to take care of something or someone properly.

Ayana closed her eyes. She could almost hear the cries of families torn apart, could smell the fear and sickness that came with being chained below deck for weeks. The Gulf waters might have looked peaceful now, but they were haunted by sorrow.

She thought of John Seabrook Sydnor, the prominent Galveston slave trader and politician. He wasn't just a man with a name on a plaque—he had trafficked in lives. He helped build this island's economy, not on oil or cotton, but on human beings. Sydnor Street still ran through town in Ayana's time, but she had never known who he was.

"Funny," she muttered, "how some names get statues and others get **neglect**."

Behind her, Amos had followed quietly.

"You feel it, don't you?" he said, voice low.

Ayana nodded. "All of it."

He stared at the water. "They bring us in boats, just like cattle. Make us walk past these docks in chains."

"And then they call it progress," Ayana whispered.

Quiver: To shake slightly, often from fear, cold, or excitement.

Amos chuckled dryly. “Progress for them, maybe.”

He began walking the length of the docks, pointing out the warehouses.

“Used to be holding pens in there,” he said. “Brick buildings with barred windows. They feed you corn mush once a day, make you **quiver** in your own stink until you sell.”

Ayana swallowed hard. “They sold people here... like crops.”

“Worse,” Amos said. “Crops don’t cry when you take their babies.”

Ayana’s stomach turned. She tried to imagine what it felt like—being auctioned, prodded, inspected like meat.

The island had once been filled with these auctions. Courthouses hosted them on steps. Taverns allowed bidding in back rooms. Families were separated by the snap of a gavel.

The economy thrived.

The area with its abundant water resources was ideal for growing crops such as wheat, corn, peanuts and rice. Cotton

Xeric: Relating to very dry environments or adapted to little water.

from enslaved fields passed through the docks. Sugar, rice, tobacco—all grown by Black hands, exported by white greed. Even **xeric** crops were grown where there was very little water, such as blackberries, oregano, rosemary lemongrass and my favorite, okra. The crates that are loaded onto a ship carried the fingerprints of pain.

“I read about this,” Ayana said. “In school. A little. But it’s different when you’re standing in it.”

Amos looked at her sideways. “You say you from 2025?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t seem like it got that much better.”

Ayana took a deep breath. “We’re not shackled anymore. But we still feel the chains. Let me tell you about some giants of our time.”

“Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, just to name a few.”

Amos was intrigued. He had the **urge** to know more.

Urge: A strong desire to do something or to encourage someone to act.

Influence: The power to change how someone thinks or acts.

“They were giants. Black men who stood up and said, ‘Enough.’ They marched, they spoke, they fought—not with fists, but with truth. They weren’t perfect, but they were powerful. They had **influence**. They shook the world.”

Ayana paused. “Sidney Poitier was one of the first Black actors in Hollywood to get real respect. Michael Jackson changed music forever. And we even had a Black president.”

Amos stopped walking.

“You lyin’.”

Ayana smiled. “His name was Barack Obama. He talked about hope. About change. But even he had to fight to be heard.”

Amos looked out over the bay. “Ain’t no river strong enough to carry that dream unless folks keep paddling.”

“And there were powerful Black women as well,” Ayana continued. “Hattie McDonald, Whitney Houston, and Serena Williams.”

They stood together in silence, the wind tugging at their clothes. Ayana felt the ghosts of the past settle around them—watching, listening.

“I don’t get it,” she said quietly. “How did y’all live through this and still... laugh? Still build families?”

Amos looked at her, eyes full of something that glowed behind pain.

“We had each other,” he said. “That’s all. We made a new kind of love. One born from knowing everything could be taken—and giving it anyway.”

Ayana thought of Mabel, braiding Liddy’s hair by the fire. Of Micah sneaking cornbread to Rose when she scraped her knee. Of how they sang at night—not songs of slavery, but of survival.

They had forged joy from sorrow.

“We gotta tell the truth,” Ayana said. “Not the pretty version. The real one. About what was taken—and what y’all made from the pieces.”

Amos nodded. “That’s your job now. You carry the memory.”

Ayana looked back at the water, rippling against the dock.

“Then I’ll carry it like a drum,” she whispered, “so the world don’t fall asleep.”

Secrets and Songs

The sun was dipping low as Ayana and Amos returned to the cabin. A soft orange light spilled across the dirt path, warming the air and painting the cotton fields in gold. Somewhere nearby, a mockingbird sang a tune that Ayana swore she'd heard before—maybe in a spiritual, maybe sampled in a rap song.

Back inside, the family was preparing for supper. The air was thick with the smell of fried cornmeal and roasted onions. Mabel crouched over the fire, using a cast-iron skillet balanced on a makeshift grate of stones. She stirred slowly with a wooden spoon so smoothly it looked like it had been used for generations.

“What’s cookin’?” Ayana asked, trying not to drool.

“Fritters,” Mabel said. “Cornmeal, onion, a little molasses in the batter. We fry ‘em when the sun gets low.”

Micah added, “And we got greens tonight! Wild mustard, picked ‘em fresh near the river.”

Resilient: Able to recover quickly from challenges or tough situations.

The scent was irresistible. It was earthy, rich, and a little sweet. The smoke stung Ayana's eyes, but she didn't mind. This was the kind of food that wrapped itself around your ribs and made your bones remember where you came from.

As they ate, Ayana noticed something deeper than hunger in the way they shared their food—Mabel slipping the crispier fritter onto Micah's plate when he wasn't looking. Josiah slicing his own cornbread in half for Liddy. Even Amos giving up the last sip of his greens' potlikker so no one else went without.

This wasn't just nourishment. It was protection. **Resilient** love in action.

After supper, Mabel pulled out a patchwork quilt and gathered the children around her.

“Time for your lesson,” she said.

Josiah groaned. “Again?”

“Every night,” she said, “till the words become yours.”

Ayana leaned in, curious. Mabel began to sing—not loudly, not like a performance, but like a whisper meant for the soul.

♪ ♪ Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus... ♪

Ayana froze. She knew this song. Her grandmother had sung it while braiding her hair, had called it an “old freedom song.” She never knew it had once been a coded message.

“They’d sing that,” Mabel explained, “when somebody was planning to run. The song’d spread from cabin to cabin, carryin’ the news without ever speakin’ it plain.”

“A secret signal,” Ayana murmured. “That’s... brilliant.”

“It had to be,” Amos said. “Words got folks whipped. Songs slipped by.”

Rose added, “Sometimes we braid maps in hair. Tell stories in quilts.”

Ayana’s eyes widened. “You mean the patterns mean something?”

“Every square got a tale,” Mabel said, stroking the quilt in her lap. “One for safe houses. One for danger. One say turn left at the river. You got to be shrewd when they watch your every move.”

Ayana was floored. She thought of how people today used TikTok dances, coded memes, “shade,” and slang to speak truths that couldn’t be said outright. Maybe things hadn’t changed as much as she’d thought.

Later, she sat outside with Amos while the children drifted off to sleep inside.

“Y’all really built something beautiful here,” she said softly.

He looked surprised. “This?”

“This. The food, the music, the quilts, the language—it’s culture. It’s yours. It came outta suffering, yeah, but it’s still yours.”

He nodded slowly. “Truth is, we don’t always feel like we got much left. They stripped us down. Took our drums. Our gods. Our names.”

Ayana placed a hand over her heart. “But you made new names. New gods. New songs. You took what they gave to break you and turned it into memory. That’s not just surviving—that’s creating.”

Amos looked at the stars. “Still feels like a miracle sometimes. To love this much when you expected nothin’ but pain.”

Ayana nodded, feeling tears rise. “Love here means something more. You don’t just love because it’s easy. You love because you have to.”

A breeze picked up, rustling the corn stalks behind them. It carried the scent of smoldering firewood and the faint sweetness of crushed mint, which Liddy had tucked into the window earlier to keep the bugs away.

Ayana looked up. “Do you ever think about what comes next?”

“Freedom?”

She nodded.

“Yeah,” he said. “But freedom ain’t just a word you whisper. It’s something you gotta earn, even when you already deserve it.”

Ayana thought about her life back in 2025.

Freedom didn’t always feel like freedom there, either.

It meant watching documentaries about Dr. King every February, while classmates still called her “aggressive” when she raised her hand too often.

It meant reading quotes from Malcolm X online while police stared at her and her friends like suspects at the mall.

It meant admiring Muhammad Ali’s defiance and Sidney Poitier’s grace and Michael Jackson’s genius—while still

getting told by teachers she was “too loud,” “too confident,” “too much.”

Freedom meant being followed through Target in a hoodie.

Freedom meant code-switching when around “them”, changing how you speak or behave to gain social acceptance.

Freedom meant still needing to fight for respect, and still not being fully seen.

Ayana whispered, “I guess we’re still learning how to be free.”

Amos didn’t answer, but he reached out and gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

And in that moment, in the stillness between fireflies and stars, she understood something deeper than any textbook had ever taught her.

These people weren’t passive victims of history. They were architects of resilience. They had laid the foundation for her—brick by bitter, beautiful brick.

Frigid: Very cold in temperature; lacking warmth in emotion.

Urge: A strong desire to do something or to encourage someone to act.

Delicate: Easily damaged or requiring careful handling.

Working the Fields

The next morning, Ayana rose to the clang of a cracked metal bell being struck outside. It was still dark—barely past 4 a.m.—and the air was thick with humidity and the scent of churned soil. Mabel was already up, tying a cloth around her hair.

“Time to move, baby,” she said gently. “We don’t get to snooze through the sunrise.”

Ayana stumbled into her clothes—borrowed ones this time, because her jeans and shirt were still damp and sticky from the brook. She wore a threadbare cotton dress and some leather-strapped sandals too small for her feet.

Outside, Amos and the children were gathering at the tool shed near the main house. Two white overseers on horseback barked orders while sipping coffee from tin cups.

Ayana’s heart pounded. The **frigid** tone in the men’s voices made her instinctively stand straighter. One of them narrowed his eyes at her.

“New girl?”

“She with me,” Amos said quickly. “Sister’s daughter.”

“Hmph. Keep her in line.”

Ayana swallowed the knot in her throat and followed the others. She had the **urge** to explain what just happened the day before but thought better of it. As they entered the field, the sky began to lighten into pink and orange. But there was no beauty here—only row after row of cotton, stretching farther than Ayana could see.

They worked in silence at first. Ayana crouched beside Mabel, who demonstrated how to twist the cotton bolls gently from the plants without getting pricked.

But there was no avoiding the sharp edges. Within twenty minutes, Ayana's fingers were covered in tiny cuts. The cotton looked soft, but it was anything but gentle—**delicate** to the eye, but cruel to the touch.

The sack tied around her shoulder grew heavier with each row. The strap dug into her collarbone.

Sweat beaded on her face, soaked into her dress. The heat wasn't just physical—it was oppressive, like the sky itself had joined the system that kept these people low.

“Why don’t y’all run?” she whispered to Mabel as they worked.

“Where we gon’ go?” Mabel said. “Ain’t like we blend in anywhere.”

Ayana looked up at the overseers, who patrolled the rows like hunting dogs.

“They got dogs. Guns. Eyes everywhere,” Mabel continued. “And they pay folks to turn us in.”

Ayana’s chest tightened. “So you just... stay?”

“We survive. And that takes more than runnin’. It takes wisdom, baby. Takes patience. Takes knowin’ when to plant seeds and when to wait for rain.”

Ayana reached for another boll, her fingers burning. “You ever dream of more?”

Mabel smiled faintly. “Every day. But dreamin’ can be **peril** if you don’t keep it quiet.”

Hours passed. They took a short break for a sip of water—a shared bucket that everyone drank from. The water was lukewarm and metallic-tasting, but Ayana had never been so grateful for it.

As they ate a midday meal—cold corn mush wrapped in cloth from the night before—Ayana sat under a pecan tree with Micah and Rose.

Peril: Serious and immediate danger.

“They never teach this stuff in school,” she exclaimed. “Like... the truth?”

“They don’t wanna remember,” Micah said. “They wanna move on.”

“But we’re still stuck in it,” Ayana said. “Even in my time.”

“How’s that?”

Ayana sighed. “My people still get arrested more, paid less, blamed faster. They want us to be like everyone else—but don’t wanna give us what everyone else has.”

She paused. “Sometimes it feels like we’re free in name, but not in life.”

Micah tossed a pecan shell into the grass. “Then freedom ain’t real. Not yet.”

Later that afternoon, Ayana worked beside Liddy, who hummed a tune under her breath. It wasn’t a spiritual—more like a rhythm to help pass the time.

“You ever get angry?” Ayana asked her.

“All the time,” Liddy said. “But we gotta be careful. Anger get you whipped. Or worse.”

“What do you do with it?”

“I hide it,” Liddy said. “Bury it deep. But I sing it out sometimes. In songs they don’t understand.”

Ayana thought of how she and her friends in 2025 used music the same way—to vent, to resist, to claim space. She thought of artists who rhymed about oppression and brilliance and Black pride. Maybe that was their way of surviving, too.

“People still don’t get us in my time,” Ayana said. “They say we’re too loud, too bold. They call us names for speaking truth.”

Liddy smirked. “Then keep speakin’. Even if it make ‘em uncomfortable.”

By evening, Ayana could barely move her arms. Her fingers were raw, her back was stiff, and her spirit felt bruised.

But as the family walked back to the cabin, she heard laughter.

Real laughter.

Rose and Micah were teasing Josiah about how many times he tripped over his own feet that day. Liddy was skipping, her braids bouncing with each step. Amos and Mabel walked hand in hand, their shadows long and intertwined like tree roots.

How?

How could people be so broken by circumstance and still move with joy?

And that's when Ayana realized:

This wasn't survival.

This was rebellion.

To love in a world that tells you you're unworthy?

To protect one another when you're treated like property?

To sing, to dance, to feed, to pray—when the world wants you silent?

That was power.

That was their resistance. That was how they would last.

Ayana looked up at the sky—no longer blue, now streaked with purple and fire.

It was the same sky her ancestors once looked at, in chains and in hope.

She had chased a calf into a brook.

And found her people waiting.

Not Quite Juneteenth

The evening air buzzed with insects and low murmurs. Fireflies blinked between the trees like nature's lanterns. Inside the cabin, the family gathered around the hearth as Mabel lit the lamp with a matchstick, its glow casting flickering shadows on the walls.

Ayana sat with her back to the wall, fingers still sore from the cotton, and heart heavy with urgency. She couldn't hold it in anymore. Not just the knowledge of what was coming—but the truth of what still hadn't come.

"I have to tell you something," she said softly.

They all turned to look at her. Even the littlest one, Josiah, stopped licking molasses off his fingers.

"I'm not from here. Not from this time."

Amos gave her a long, slow **gaze**. Mabel set down her sewing. Rose leaned forward, curious.

"I fell into a brook back home—in 2025—and woke up here, in 1864. I know how strange that sounds, but it's the truth."

Gaze: To look at something steadily and with focus.

No one spoke at first.

“You a spirit?” Josiah whispered.

Ayana laughed gently. “No. I’m just a girl. But I came back for a reason.”

Mabel crossed her arms. “Go on, child.”

“In just over a year, a Union general—General Gordon Granger—he’s going to arrive right here, in Galveston. He’ll stand up in front of everybody and read an order. General Order No. 3. It will say that all enslaved people are free. Not just in words. But by law. He’ll read it loud enough for the wind to carry.”

They stared at her as if the lamp had grown wings.

“But... we free now?” Liddy asked hopefully.

Ayana shook her head. “Not yet. The Emancipation Proclamation happened already, yes. But your master hasn’t told you. And he won’t. Not until someone makes him.”

Amos frowned. “You saying they been hidin’ our freedom?”

Clarity: The quality of being clear, easy to understand, or easy to see.

“Yes,” Ayana said. “For over two years by then. The war will be almost over. But here in Texas? Y’all won’t know until June 19, 1865.”

There was silence. Not confusion—**clarity**.

Pure, aching realization.

Mabel closed her eyes. “So we been working, bleeding, buryin’, prayin’... all while already free?”

Ayana nodded.

“Not quite free,” Amos whispered. “Not quite Juneteenth.”

“Not yet,” Ayana echoed.

The emotion in the room changed. It wasn’t just disbelief—it was heartbreak. It was betrayal.

“We got to tell folks,” Micah said, jumping up and urging the others. “Tell ‘em what’s comin’.”

Amos gently pulled him back down. “That might bring more trouble than hope, boy.”

Quiver: To shake slightly, often from fear, cold, or excitement.

“But we got a right to know!” Micah cried. “How else we s’posed to prepare?”

Ayana could see the boy’s hands **quiver** with a need to act.

“You do have a right,” she said firmly. “But you also have to be smart. This is where things get complicated. You’re not just waiting for freedom—you’re preparing for it. Quietly. Safely.”

“What’s the point of bein’ free if you gotta hide it?” Rose asked.

Ayana’s heart squeezed. “Sometimes the **objective** is to survive long enough to be loud later.”

She looked around the room. “Freedom will come. But so will other things. They’ll try to rewrite what happened. Make it sound like it wasn’t so bad. Like slavery was just... folks helping out on farms.”

Mabel scoffed. “Helpin’? We been beat, sold, torn from our babies.”

Objective: A goal or purpose; or something based on facts rather than feelings.

Elaborate: To explain something in greater detail or with more information.

Ayana nodded. “I know. And that’s why Juneteenth matters. It’s the day y’all knew. The day y’all got to start telling the story yourselves.”

Amos leaned forward. “But what happens after?”

Ayana took a breath. “Progress. Pain. Pride. All tangled up.”

She began to **elaborate**:

“There’ll be Black churches, Black schools, Black-owned businesses. There’ll be HBCUs (Historically Black College and University) and jazz and blues and soul food restaurants on every corner.”

She paused. “But there’ll also be Jim Crow. Lynching. Sharecropping. Laws written to push y’all down again. Even in 2025, my people still fight for basic dignity.”

Mabel whispered, “It don’t end with freedom.”

Ayana shook her head. “No. But it begins with it.”

Amos stood. “Then we prepare.”

“Prepare how?” Rose asked.

“We teach,” he said. “We learn to read, even if we gotta do it by moonlight. We write songs that tell the truth. We hide what

they try to erase. We fortify our minds.”

Liddy clapped softly. “And our hearts.”

Ayana felt a swell of pride. These people had no vote, no wealth, no freedom.

But they had each other.

And a vision.

A **lofty** one.

Mabel took Ayana’s hand. “You said you came back for a reason.”

Ayana nodded, blinking tears. “I think it was to remind you that your love built the future. That you didn’t just survive history—you shaped it.”

The room was quiet. But in that quiet, something was planted.

Not just hope. But legacy.

Ayana stood slowly and whispered, “Not quite Juneteenth...”

They all answered in unison: “Not yet.”

Lofty: Very high in the air or noble in ideas and goals.

The Return

That night, Ayana could barely sleep.

The quilt Mabel gave her was warm and fragrant with pine smoke and lavender leaves tucked between the stitches. But Ayana lay wide-eyed, staring at the ceiling, her mind filled with images: bloodied cotton fingers, stolen lullabies, coded quilts, and fire-lit faces singing freedom into the night.

She didn't know how long she drifted, but at some point, she heard the sound again—hoofbeats. But softer now, echoing inside her chest.

Then came the rushing of water.

And a voice.

A herdsman's voice.

“Hold on now, girl—don’t let go...”

Then silence.

When Ayana opened her eyes, she was lying in the brook.

Jolt: A sudden, strong movement or surprise that shakes you up.

Cold water rushed around her ankles. Her T-shirt clung to her ribs. Her curls were soaked and full of leaves. And somewhere beyond the woods, a Juneteenth band was still playing a Stevie Wonder cover.

She sat up slowly, heart pounding, the **jolt** of reality hitting her like thunder.

She was back.

Home.

Ayana stumbled out of the water, shoes squishing, and ran toward the festival grounds. When she reached the crowd, no one seemed to notice anything unusual. Kids waved flags, aunties danced with paper fans, uncles flipped ribs on the grill while soul music poured from the loudspeakers.

The scent of barbecue, hot oil, and peach cobbler wrapped around her like an old song. But Ayana stood in the middle of it all—changed.

Forever changed.

She ran to her mom, who was sitting under the tent, chatting with her friends and sipping lemonade.

“Baby, what happened to you?” her mom asked, eyes wide. “You look like you fell in a swamp.”

Ayana nodded. “I kinda did.”

She dropped into her chair, dripping, breathing hard. Then she whispered:

“I saw them.”

Her mother blinked. “Who?”

“Our ancestors. In Galveston. Before Juneteenth. A year before.”

Her mother looked at her, unsure whether to laugh or worry.

Ayana leaned closer, her voice steady now. “Mama, they didn’t even know they were free. Not yet. But they hoped. They loved each other even when everything was designed to break them.”

Her mother touched her face gently. “Baby... you okay?”

“I am now,” Ayana said. “And I know what I’m supposed to do.”

Epilogue: We Are the Proof

On the last day of school, Ayana stood in front of her class, holding a folded quilt and a small speaker. Her teacher had allowed her to give a final project presentation—something “creative.”

She took a breath, then clicked PLAY.

The soft sound of a spiritual filled the room:

♪ ♪ Wade in the water, wade in the water, children... ♪

Ayana unfolded the quilt, showing off the patterns she'd sewn herself. A flying geese block. A log cabin square. A freedom path.

“My ancestors couldn’t write books,” she began. “So they told their stories in songs and stitches. They turned their pain into patterns. Their faith into food. Their suffering into strength.”

She looked around the room. Some classmates leaned in. Others stared, surprised by her sudden fire.

“Juneteenth isn’t just a day off,” she said. “It’s a **triumph**. A warning. A beginning. The people who waited for freedom—

Triump: A great victory or achievement.

they weren't weak. They were wise. They survived so we could be here."

She paused, voice **humble** but powerful.

"And now it's our turn—to remember, to speak up, to push forward."

Ayana held up a single strip of cloth. "We are the thread. If we forget them, we **banish** their memory. If we remember, we honor their dreams."

A long silence followed.

Then—applause.

And not just polite applause. Real, moved clapping. A few students stood. Even her teacher wiped her eyes.

Ayana smiled. She didn't need to **aspire** to be a hero.

She only needed to tell the truth.

Humble: Not proud or boastful; showing modesty.

Banish: To force someone or something to leave a place as a form of punishment or rule.

Aspire: To have a strong desire or goal to achieve something important.

Final Note

Ayana would never forget the heat of that cotton field. The taste of cornbread cooked on stone. The warmth of Mabel's voice. The way Josiah called her a spirit. The knowing in Amos's eyes.

She would never forget that freedom isn't a finish line—it's a promise.

Not quite Juneteenth. Not yet.

But someday...

Always.

Lessons learned drawn from both Ayana's journey and the lived experiences of the enslaved family she encounters. They foster both empathy and historical understanding:

1. Freedom is more than a word—it's a lived experience.

Although slavery was legally abolished, the enslaved people Ayana meets are still in bondage because no one told them they were free. This shows that freedom requires access to truth, justice, and the power to act—not just laws on paper.

2. Our ancestors were resilient, creative, and wise.

The enslaved family uses quilts, songs, and quiet wisdom to survive. They are not just victims of history but architects of culture. Ayana learns that Black history is full of strength, invention, and resistance.

3. Silence can be deadly—but stories give life.

The people of 1864 don't know they're free because their enslavers kept it hidden. Ayana realizes that sharing stories, especially uncomfortable ones, is a form of activism and justice.

4. Dignity can exist even in oppression.

Despite brutal conditions, the enslaved family cares for each other with tenderness, humor, and joy. They prove that love and dignity can withstand cruelty, and that culture grows even in the harshest soil.

5. History repeats if we forget.

Ayana sees that many of the struggles in 1864 still exist in 2025—discrimination, injustice, and invisibility. The story teaches that remembering history isn't about guilt—it's about growth, responsibility, and awareness.

6. Everyone has a role in shaping the future.

Ayana realizes she doesn't have to be famous to make a difference. By carrying her ancestors' stories and speaking truth, she becomes a link in the chain of progress.

7. Freedom requires preparation.

The family doesn't just wait for freedom—they get ready for it by teaching, learning, and building unity. Ayana learns that we must prepare ourselves emotionally, mentally, and spiritually to fully live in freedom.

8. Culture is a powerful form of resistance.

From secret songs to cooking traditions, the story shows how Black culture was preserved in quiet, clever ways—even under surveillance and violence. Culture becomes a shield, a torch, and a language of survival.

9. Love is a revolutionary act.

In a system meant to destroy them, the characters show love to one another—through meals, protection, humor, and sacrifice. This teaches that choosing to love in unjust circumstances is not weakness—it's power.

10. The past is not past—it's part of us.

Ayana's time-travel reminds us that history isn't something we leave behind—it's something we walk with. It influences our present, and how we respond to it shapes the future.

VOCABULARY WORDS FOR THE FOLLOWING STORY:

- The Crew On Call

Abandon: To leave something behind or give up on it completely.

Ambiguous: Having more than one meaning; not clear or definite.

Benevolent: Kind, generous, and wanting to do good.

Brisk: Quick, energetic, and active in movement or action.

Cautious: Careful to avoid danger or mistakes.

Conspicuous: Easy to see or notice; attracting attention

Diligent: Working hard and carefully.

Dismal: Gloomy, sad, or depressing.

Eloquent: Expressing ideas clearly and with strong emotion.

Evaluate: To judge or determine the value or importance of something.

Fortify: To strengthen or protect something, often against attack or hardship.

Frivolous: Not serious; silly or unimportant.

Gratify: To please or satisfy someone.

Grudge: A strong feeling of dislike or anger that lasts a long time.

Harmony: A pleasing combination of different things, often sounds or ideas.

Hinder: To slow down or block progress or action.

Ignite: To catch fire or to start something exciting or intense.

Impulsive: Acting without thinking about the consequences.

Jeopardy: Great danger or risk.

Jovial: Cheerful and full of fun.

Keen: Sharp, intense, or eager (can refer to senses, interest, or intelligence).

Knavery: *Dishonest or unscrupulous behavior; trickery.*

Linger: To stay in a place longer than expected or needed.

Lucid: Clear and easy to understand

Meander: To wander or move slowly without a clear direction.

Meticulous: Very careful and precise about details.

Notion: An idea, belief, or opinion.

Notorious: Famous for something bad.

Obstacle: Something that blocks the way or makes progress difficult.

Optimistic: Expecting good things to happen; hopeful.

Plummet: To fall suddenly and quickly from a high place.

Pragmatic: Dealing with things in a practical way, not just based on ideas.

Quell: To put an end to something, especially with force.

Quench: To satisfy a thirst or to put out a fire.

Reliable: Able to be trusted or counted on.

Resilient: Able to recover quickly from difficulty or trouble.

Sincere: Genuine, honest, and without pretending.

Subtle: Not obvious; delicate or hard to notice.

Tenacious: Not giving up easily; determined.

Tolerate: To accept something difficult or unpleasant without complaining.

Unanimous: Fully agreed upon by everyone.

Unique: One of a kind; unlike anything else.

Versatile: Able to do many different things well.

Vivid: Very clear, bright, or detailed—easy to imagine or picture.

Wander: To move around without a fixed course or destination.

Wary: Careful or cautious about possible danger or trouble.

Xenial: Relating to hospitality, especially being kind and friendly to guests.

Xerox: To copy something using a machine.

Yearn: To have a strong desire for something.

Yield: to produce or provide; to give way under pressure

Zeal: Great energy or enthusiasm for a cause or activity.

Zephyr: a gentle, mild breeze.

ARC ONLY

HOT FUN IN THE SUMMERTIME: THE CREW ON CALL

As the summer break was in full swing, the neighborhood of Eastwood Heights wasn't quiet. It never was. The city buzzed with car horns, radios playing old school soul, and kids running down cracked sidewalks chasing ice cream trucks. But for Jamarion, Tyrell, Malik, and Kaliyah, this summer was going to be different.

They didn't want to spend their break just hanging out, sleeping in, or aimlessly scrolling through social media. They wanted to give back—especially to the elders who had raised, watched over, and prayed for kids like them their whole lives. The four friends met at their usual spot—Kaliyah's porch steps—with a notebook, a few half-baked ideas, and a whole lot of ambition.

“It’s time to settle on a name. We could call it... I don’t know... The Crew On Call,” Jamarion said, tapping his pencil on his knee. “It’s got a ring to it, right? Like we’re ready for anything.”

Jamarion, tall and strong with muscles that seemed to ripple beneath his T-shirt, was the unofficial captain of the group. He had a way of leading without barking orders—a kind of calm confidence that made people listen. **Resilient** and grounded, Jamarion was always thinking five steps ahead, even when he didn’t say much. He brought **harmony** to the group. He’d learned early on that in their neighborhood, planning wasn’t just smart—it was survival. He would never **abandon** a good idea, even when others lost interest.

Tyrell stretched out beside him on the porch swing, tossing a half-empty bag of chips from hand to hand. “The Crew On Call? Sounds like we superheroes or something. I like it!” he said with a **brisk** grin. His facetious tone always made the

Resilient: Able to recover quickly from challenges or tough situations.

Harmony: A pleasing combination of different things, often sounds or ideas.

Abandon: To leave something behind or give up on it completely.

others laugh, even when he wasn't trying that hard. Tyrell was the group's comic relief, always quick with a joke and ready to roast his friends when things got too serious. He could never be accused of **knavery**. He could find humor in almost anything, and his ability to keep spirits lifted made him the heart of the crew in ways he didn't realize.

Malik leaned against the porch column, already taking notes in his composition book. His diligence was legendary in the neighborhood—he was the kind of kid who actually liked reading library books in the summer. With thick glasses perched perfectly on his nose and a vocabulary that often sent Tyrell into fits of dramatic confusion, Malik was the brainiac of the bunch. He didn't just talk about ideas—he built systems, checklists, and schedules.

It was Malik who first suggested combining community service with paid work. “We can offer a free side for shut-ins and seniors, and a paid side for folks who want their lawns mowed or errands run,” he explained. His tone was always

Brisk: Quick, energetic, and active in movement or action.

Knavery: Dishonest or unscrupulous behavior; trickery.

cautious, thinking of every potential issue in advance, not wanting to put anyone's safety in **jeopardy**.

Kaliyah nodded excitedly as she sat cross-legged at the top of the steps. “We help out and still make some change. I’m in.” Her hair was pulled back in a puffball that danced with every head turn, and her smile could stop traffic. Kaliyah was impeccable on the basketball court, the best dancer at every block party, and the only one in the group who could throw a spiral football better than most boys on the school team.

But beyond her talent, what made her special was her **zealous** spirit—when she believed in something, she poured her whole self into it. Although full of energy, she was the group’s compassionate **zephyr**. “My neighbor Miss Thelma recently had hip surgery,” she added. “Can’t hardly get out to the store. I already help her when I can. Imagine how many more Miss Thelmas are out there.”

Jamarion smiled. “Exactly. We don’t need to wait for somebody to save the block. We can be that somebody.”

Cautious: Careful to avoid danger or mistakes.

Jeopardy: Great danger or risk.

Zeal: Great energy or enthusiasm for a cause or activity.

Zephyr: a gentle, mild breeze.

So, right then and there—on a warm summer morning—they made a pact. The Crew On Call would be their summer project. Their mission? Show love, offer help, and set an example for what youth could do when they came together with purpose. They would **fortify** their community one act of kindness at a time.

Their service would be twofold:

Volunteer Side: Visiting seniors, running light errands, reading to shut-ins, tidying up rooms, bringing the trash cans back to the curb. No charge—just care and company.

Paid Side: Yard work, lawn mowing, small tech help (Malik's specialty), moving boxes, or even setting up video calls so older folks could talk to their grandkids across the country.

They divided up tasks:

Jamarion would talk to Officer Mobley and Pastor H.W. to get names of elders who needed help.

Malik would **evaluate** their workflow and design a system of appointment slots and progress charts.

Fortify: To strengthen or protect something, often against attack or hardship.

Evaluate: To judge or determine the value or importance of something.

Tyrell would handle the flyers—after all, his flair for words and drama made him the unofficial marketing department. He also had free access on his job to **Xerox** as many flyers as needed.

And Kaliyah? She'd be their front-line connection, already trusted by many on her street. Her charm could **ignite** excitement in the most **dismal** of days.

“Crew On Call,” Malik said again, scribbling the name across the top of the notebook page in bold letters.

Tyrell leaned back, letting out a long sigh. “You know what? This summer’s gonna be fire.”

And with that, they stepped into something more than just a good idea—they stepped into purpose.

Xerox: To copy something using a machine.

Ignite: To catch fire or to start something exciting or intense.

Dismal: Gloomy, sad, or depressing.

Community Connections: A Plan Takes Root

The next step in their plan was reaching out. If The Crew On Call was going to work, they needed names—real people, real needs. So Jamarion made a few calls, and the crew spent the next afternoon making rounds to three trusted adults who had always looked out for them.

First Stop: Pastor H.W.

Reverend Harold Whitmore, affectionately known as Pastor H.W., was recently retired after forty years of ministry at Alpha Temple Church of God in Christ. His walk was slower now and he seemed to **meander** a bit more. His hair had gone fully silver, but his voice still carried warmth and authority. He had watched the four kids grow from jumpy toddlers at VBS to confident, capable teens. He had been praying for them for years—and now, he was seeing his prayers walk up the church steps with notepads and purpose.

“Pastor, we’re starting something this summer,” Jamarion said. “A service group. Helping elders. Giving back.”

Meander: To wander or move slowly without a clear direction.

The pastor's eyes sparkled as he leaned on his cane. "Well now, I knew God had something brewing in you all. I just didn't know you all would **yield** to His will this quickly."

They laughed.

Kaliyah explained, "We're building a list of folks who might need help—reading, a quick meal, just some company."

"You're doing ministry," Pastor H.W. said with a grin. "That's what you're doing. And I see you are **sincere** about giving back to the community. Let me talk to Pastor Clark—he's young, but **keen**. We can get you the church's shut-in list by Sunday."

"Appreciate you, Pastor," Malik added. "We want to be organized and respectful about it."

Pastor H.W. patted his shoulder. "And I'll keep praying. But clearly, y'all are the answer to somebody's prayer already."

Next: Meals on Wheels

The building wasn't fancy—just a small office beside the community food pantry—but inside, it smelled like fresh bread and purpose. Karen, the program coordinator, was short and efficient, with clipboards tucked under both arms.

Yield: to produce or provide; to give way under pressure

“We deliver over 80 meals a day,” she said, “but we only stay long enough to drop off. What you’re doing is what we wish we had time for—conversation.”

Malik showed her their appointment checklist on his tablet. “We’re planning one-hour time slots. Not too long—just enough to make someone’s day better.”

Karen smiled. “You’ve got the right idea. I’ll include your flyer with next week’s deliveries. And I’ll give you a short list—folks who said they’d love a visitor if someone had the time.”

Last Stop: Officer Ben Mobley

The crew found Officer Ben outside the Eastwood Heights Rec Center, leaning on his cruiser and chatting with two middle school boys about signing up for summer flag football. The minute he saw them, he waved them over.

“What’s up, my A-team?” he said, grinning.

“We got a project, sir,” Tyrell said. “Volunteer work. Seniors. Elders who need a hand. We’re callin’ it The Crew On Call.”

Officer Mobley rubbed his chin. “You mean y’all trying to be a neighborhood blessing? I like that. Actually, I love that.”

Sincere: Genuine, honest, and without pretending.

“We already got Pastor H.W. and Meals on Wheels helping us find folks,” Jamarion added. “But if you know people in the community who could use some visits—let us know.”

Officer Mobley nodded. “I’ll talk to the housing authority too. There’s a few seniors at Glenwood Towers who barely get out. This could mean a lot.”

He looked at them one by one. “Y’all got maturity. But you’re gonna need stamina too. You wouldn’t want your progress to **plummet** for lack of help. Think about adding more teens. I got a list of good kids looking for something to do besides sitting on stoops.”

“Send them our way,” Kaliyah said with confidence.

The Plan Comes Together

By the end of the week, they had a working list of seven elders who could use a visit, a hand, or a friendly conversation. Kaliyah called each one ahead of their visit so they wouldn’t be **wary** if the volunteers were unfamiliar.

Plummet: To fall suddenly and quickly from a high place.

Wary: Careful or cautious about possible danger or trouble.

Miss Thelma, recovering from hip surgery. She lived three houses down from Kaliyah and had once made a peach cobbler so good it made Malik tear up. She needed groceries, a little help getting dressed, and someone to fetch her trash bins. She could no longer **wander** about the neighborhood. She now preferred crock pot recipes and gospel music from the '60s.

Mr. Jordan, retired factory worker and former amateur boxer. Recently finished radiation for prostate cancer which made him fatigued. He loved old sports documentaries and storytelling. Didn't need much—just a conversation partner and someone to fix his stubborn remote.

Ms. Rachel, a widow who once ran a daycare out of her home. Her children had moved away, and the loneliness clung to her like a fog. She adored puzzles, especially rural farm scenes, and said the sound of young people laughing was better than TV.

Ms. Doris, nearly blind but sharp as ever. She sported a **uniquely** crafted raffia hat; burnt orange, her signature color. She loved being read to and insisted visitors bring peanut brittle.

Wander: To move around without a fixed course or destination.

Unique: One of a kind; unlike anything else.

Mr. Lou, a Navy vet who now walked with a cane and had dozens of old jazz records he hadn't played in years. His player was broken, but he swore he still remembered how to swing.

Mrs. Williams had arthritis so bad she could no longer fold laundry or cook. But she had every episode of *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times* on DVD and welcomed anyone willing to join her for a mini-marathon.

Mr. Eugene, hard of hearing, but always joyful. He lived alone and kept his windows open just to hear the outside world. He missed talking to people and had stories about Eastwood Heights going back 50 years.

Rotations & Rules

They would visit two days a week, with two crew members assigned per visit. Appointments capped at one hour, with an egg timer set for 45 minutes—enough time left for meeting and greeting as well as drawn-out goodbyes so nobody overstayed. That way, they'd stay on schedule—and the elders wouldn't get overwhelmed.

“One hour max per visit. Do not **linger**, no matter how much they want you to stay longer.” Jamarion repeated, like a mantra. “And no visits on Wednesdays. We need a day to regroup, reflect, and chill so we don’t get burnt out.”

“Read to ’em, talk with ’em, watch TV or help with tech—whatever they need,” Kaliyah said. “We’re not nurses, but we got time and love. Let’s be **benevolent**, not burnt out.”

“Same with groceries,” Jamarion added. “Only folks we already know. Trust and receipts. This ain’t no ‘run off with Miss Thelma’s change’ operation.”

Malik remarked. “Nah. But if she got them butter biscuits again, I might not leave. That craving might make me do something **impulsive**.”

They all laughed—but it was a focused kind of laughter. The kind that came from knowing what they were doing was real.

“This is gonna be big,” Kaliyah said. “Bigger than us.”

“Good,” Jamarion replied. “Let’s be big. Let’s be the kind of summer nobody forgets. Let’s be **zealous** about it.”

Linger: To stay in a place longer than expected or needed.

Benevolent: Kind, generous, and wanting to do good.

Impulsive: Acting without thinking about the consequences.

Zeal: Great energy or enthusiasm for a cause or activity.

First Round: In the Field

Saturday morning came with the kind of golden sunlight that makes everything feel possible. Malik had finished the visit schedule the night before, color-coded and uploaded to the shared Google Calendar he set up for the team. Jamarion printed copies for backup. Each visit was booked in one-hour slots, with thirty-minute buffers in between. Their plan wasn't flashy—but it was **pragmatic**.

Stop One: Miss Thelma

Kaliyah and Malik were up first. They knocked gently on the door of a small brick house with pink roses trailing over the railing. Miss Thelma's small rowhome, just three doors down from Kaliyah's, was a patchwork of floral curtains, seashells from Barbados, and decades of gospel records stacked beside a dusty turntable.

Her porch was swept clean, but the hydrangeas on either side had grown wild—like her personality. Thelma herself was a spitfire in orthopedic sandals, with skin like polished mahogany and eyes that missed nothing. Her cane had a carved hummingbird handle, and she tapped it with flair as she

Pragmatic: Dealing with things in a practical way, not just based on ideas.

welcomed them in. “You came on time, bless you. You know I believe in punctuality, don’t **tolerate** tardiness.. My family didn’t raise no ‘maybe’ people. We learned to always be **reliable**”

She wore a loose lavender house dress and gold bangles that jingled when she moved. The living room smelled of eucalyptus rub and fried onions, and Mahalia Jackson hummed low from a dusty speaker on the shelf. “I’m craving something from home,” she said, gesturing to a handwritten recipe card. “Crock pot curry. Bajan-style. Chicken thighs, coconut milk, sweet potatoes, thyme—the real stuff, not the dried-up dust y’all kids call seasoning.”

Malik took the list, while Kaliyah knelt beside her to adjust the compression socks over her swollen ankles. At the supermarket, they moved with **diligent** care. They debated the ripeness of plantains, compared prices on turmeric, and gathered ingredients like treasure hunters. At the spice aisle, they bumped into Marcia and her mom, Carmen.

Tolerate: To accept something difficult or unpleasant without complaining.

Reliable: Able to be trusted or counted on.

Diligent: Showing care and effort in work or duties.

“Y’all grocery shopping together now?” Marcia teased, eyes bright with **jovial** energy.

“It’s for Miss Thelma,” Kaliyah said with a straight face that broke into a smile.

“Well,” Carmen said warmly, “if she’s teaching y’all to cook Bajan food, that’s a **gratifying** thing on both sides.”

Then to Delroy’s Bodega for the special spices—pimento, curry leaves, scotch bonnet peppers. Delroy’s cat, as usual, was draped like royalty across a loaf of potato bread.

“You come for the flavors of the Caribbean, you deal with His Majesty,” Delroy joked, nodding to the cat. His humor wasn’t **frivolous**—it lightened the moment just right. “Why don’ cha add a bottle of dat ginger beer to **quench** ya thirst,” as he let out a hardy laugh.

Back at Miss Thelma’s, they unpacked, arranged ingredients in Tupperware, and wrote labels in thick marker.

Jovial: Cheerful and full of fun.

Gratify: To please or satisfy someone.

Frivolous: Not serious; silly or unimportant.

Quench: To satisfy a thirst or to put out a fire.

“Bring your own Tupperware next time,” she said. “Next week, we meal prep. And Malik? I saw the way you looked at Kaliyah when she picked the thyme. Boy, don’t burn the curry.”

They laughed hard and long, and when the egg timer rang, they stayed just one minute more, savoring the warmth.

Stop Two: Mr. Jordan

Next up, Jamarion and Tyrell knocked on a weathered green door at the corner duplex. Mr. Jordan answered with a firm handshake and a stronger grin.

Mr. Clarence Jordan’s rowhome sat beneath a basketball hoop nailed to a telephone pole—a relic from the days when neighborhood kids gathered for summer tournaments. The windowsills were lined with boxing gloves, dusty trophies, and pictures of a younger Mr. Jordan standing beside legends. He opened the door in a Philadelphia Eagles T-shirt and worn slippers. His voice was a deep baritone, roughened by age and radiation.

“Come in, boys. I just finished my laps up and down the hallway. Doc says keep movin’ or lose it.”

Inside, the house was warm, clean, and lined with sports memorabilia. A shelf of VHS tapes held titles like “Ali vs.

Frazier" and "The Sweet Science." Tyrell reached for the remote, the infamous broken one.

"This the stubborn little rascal?"

"Yup. Works when it wants to. Like my knees."

Jamarion got to work cleaning the contact panel while Tyrell pulled up ESPN Classics on his phone. They watched old clips and listened to Mr. Jordan break down footwork, stance, and showmanship with **eloquent** precision.

"I used to spar down at Joe Frazier's gym," he said, pointing to a black-and-white photo. "Took a punch so hard, I forgot my mama's phone number. But I never felt more alive."

Jamarion shared that he lived near Bernard Hopkins and admired his discipline. Mr. Jordan nodded knowingly.

"Discipline's everything. In the ring, in life. Remember that when your friends want to drag you sideways."

He gave them stories, lessons, laughter, and insight—all wrapped in a single hour. His mind was **lucid**, his delivery **meticulous**, and his memories **vivid**.

Eloquent: Expressing ideas clearly and with strong emotion.

Lucid: Clear and easy to understand

When the timer buzzed, he smiled softly. “That was good medicine. Better than anything I’m takin’. Don’t forget to come back, now.”

“We’ll bring Ali highlights next time,” Tyrell promised. “You bring your best stories.”

Mr. Jordan chuckled. “Son, I got a million of ‘em.”

Stop Three: Ms. Rachel

Later that afternoon, Malik and Maya visited Ms. Rachel. The puzzle table was already set up when they arrived.

Ms. Rachel’s place was a modest twin house with white lace curtains and wind chimes that tinkled gently in the breeze. The walkway had cracked tiles and a faded “Welcome” mat, but the roses on the porch were **meticulously** tended. Rachel opened the door slowly but smiled wide.

“My puzzle people are here. Thank the Lord.”

Her voice was soft, almost musical, with the accent of someone raised in southern soil. She wore a cream sweater over

Meticulous: Very careful and precise about details.

Vivid: Very clear, bright, or detailed—easy to imagine or picture.

a floral house dress and her gray hair was wrapped in a scarf the color of fresh corn. The inside smelled like chamomile and lemon oil. The puzzle table faced a large window, the kind that begged for sunlight and a cup of tea. A farm scene puzzle was laid out, half done. A red barn. Rolling fields. Chickens.

“I grew up on a farm in Edenton, North Carolina,” she began. “Chickens, a **notorious** rooster named Earl, and a pond we used to skip stones across. Lost my brother in that pond. Not to drowning—he married and moved to Detroit.”

They laughed, and Maya pulled out her speaker, playing gentle Sam Cooke songs while they puzzled.

Trent asked about her old daycare.

“Oh, babies everywhere,” she said wistfully. “Had twins who’d bite each other just to see if I was watching. Had a girl who’d only nap if you sang ‘Amazing Grace.’ I miss that noise. Miss it like a second skin.”

When they finished the top half of the barn roof, she teared up quietly.

“Y’all don’t know what this means. I ain’t felt seen in months. Like I went invisible after my kids left.”

“You’re not invisible to us,” Maya said gently.

Ms. Rachel stood and hugged them both. “Tell your mamas they raised good ones. Tell ‘em proud don’t even cover it.” Her words were **subtle**, but the gratitude ran deep.

In the following days they would visit with:

Ms. Doris, nearly blind but sharp and **tenacious** as ever. She loved being read to and insisted visitors bring peanut brittle. Her thoughts were **lucid**, even if her eyesight failed. She challenged Malik to spell “ephemeral” backward before agreeing to let them in.

“I don’t let just anybody read to me,” she warned. “If you’re boring, I’ll let you know.”

Kaliyah read aloud from the newspaper, but Ms. Doris interrupted often—“Slow down!” “Enunciate!” “You missed a comma!”

Tyrell whispered, “She holding a **grudge** against the entire English language.”

Notorious: Famous for something bad.

Subtle: Not obvious; delicate or hard to notice.

Tenacious: Not giving up easily; determined.

Lucid: Clear and easy to understand

Grudge: Strong feeling of dislike; anger that lasts a long time.

But the visit ended on a sweet note when they handed over her favorite peanut brittle. Ms. Doris smiled wide. “You’re a **reliable** bunch. Not many like you anymore.”

Mr. Lou, a Navy vet who now walked with a cane and had dozens of old jazz records he hadn’t played in years. His record player was broken, but he remained **resilient**, humming the melodies from memory.

Mrs. Williams had arthritis so bad she could no longer fold laundry or cook. But she had every episode of *The Jeffersons* on DVD and welcomed anyone **keen** enough to join her for a mini-marathon.

Mr. Eugene, hard of hearing but always joyful. He lived alone and kept his windows open just to hear the outside world. He missed talking to people and had stories about Eastwood Heights going back 50 years. He was **versatile**—a former janitor, gardener, Sunday school teacher, and neighborhood barber.

Reliable: Able to be trusted or counted on.

Resilient: Able to recover quickly from difficulty or trouble.

Keen: Sharp, intense, or eager (can refer to senses, interest, or intelligence).

Versatile: Able to do many different things well.

The crew was truly making an impact on the community, and the elders were all abuzz with **optimistic** energy. There wasn't one **wary** soul to be found.

This wasn't just a summer project—it was legacy work. The teens weren't just helping—they were becoming **xenial** stewards of memory, history, and connection.

Debrief and Reflection

Wednesday evening found the core team gathered on Jamarion's porch, where the wide slats creaked under the weight of sneakers and the wisdom of teenagers carrying more than their years. The porch light buzzed overhead, flickering slightly—its pattern **ambiguous**, yet oddly comforting. Fireflies blinked lazily in the front yard, and somewhere in the distance, the neighborhood ice cream truck played its familiar jingle on loop—a lullaby of summer.

Jamarion had pulled out a fan from the hallway; it hummed beside them, its slow rotation brushing their sweaty necks.

Optimistic: Expecting good things to happen; hopeful.

Wary: Careful or cautious about possible danger or trouble.

Xenial: Relating to hospitality, especially being kind and friendly to guests.

Ambiguous: Having more than one meaning; not clear or definite.

The table between them was a battlefield of open notebooks, pens with chewed caps, half-empty water bottles, and a large greasy pizza box from Little Dante's with one lone slice left—anchovies, of course.

“Somebody please put that slice out of its misery,” Tyrell groaned, waving it off like it was alive. “Nobody wants that salty sea monster.”

Kaliyah laughed, her tone **jovial**. “Y’all so dramatic. Just let it live.”

Malik finally leaned forward and claimed it. “I ain’t scared,” he said, taking a huge bite, then speaking around it. “Miss Thelma said her Bluetooth keeps disconnecting. Gospel playlist was tryna do battle with the static. ‘Take Me to the King’ sounded like it was underwater.”

They all laughed. Jamarion wiped his eyes. “You gonna fix it?”

“Yeah,” Malik said, reaching into his backpack and pulling out a small black cube. “I’ll bring my portable speaker next time. Let her kitchen bump properly. Might even throw in a Marvin Sapp remix.”

Jovial: Cheerful and full of fun.

Kaliyah sat with her knees pulled to her chest, journal balanced on her thighs. “Memory boxes are wild, y’all. Ms. Rachel had all these old perfume bottles and photos from when she taught middle school. We were sitting on her carpet just passing stuff around like it was sacred. When she pulled out that disco skating pic? She lit up. Told me she once won a contest wearing glitter platforms and gold hotpants. I didn’t even know what hotpants were!”

Maya giggled. “She told me she had a crush on a guy who looked like Richard Pryor with better hair.”

Tyrell chuckled. “Ain’t no such thing.”

“But it made her laugh,” Maya said, her tone hopeful. “And then she told me something I won’t forget. She said, ‘You brought my memories home.’ That got me.”

Tyrell grew quiet, unusually still. Then he sat up. “Mr. Jordan said his stories are ‘a time machine in a coffee can.’ His words. Told me he’s been waiting years for someone to sit and just... listen. That ain’t nothing.”

“He said he marched in Newark with Amiri Baraka,” Jamarion added. “Said he once shook Muhammad Ali’s hand after a charity match at the rec center.”

“That man is a podcast,” Tyrell said with reverence. “We gotta record him.”

“Trent’s mic setup is legit,” Jamarion said. “If we ask, he’ll loan it. We can call it The Jordan Chronicles.”

“We could build a whole series,” Malik added. “Like an oral history project. Voices from our block, our city.”

The idea buzzed between them like electricity. The kind that didn’t need to be plugged in to be powerful—**zealous** energy all around.

Maya flipped her notebook closed. “Ms. Rachel said hearing laughter in her home again reminded her that she still matters. That she’s not invisible.”

The group grew still. That word—**invisible**—hung in the air, as real as any.

So many of the elders they visited had been fading into silence. Into background. Into memory.

But now—they were stepping forward again.

Zeal: Great energy or enthusiasm for a cause or activity.

Jamarion's younger sister, Joi, peeked through the screen door, holding up her empty water cup. "Y'all got any more juice or just grown-folk feelings out here?"

Everyone laughed.

Tyrell stood and handed her a Capri Sun from the cooler. "It's both, lil' sis. Hydration and transformation."

As Joi disappeared inside, Kaliyah exhaled. "What we're doing...it's bigger than us. It's not just chores or check-ins. It's heart work."

Tyrell nodded slowly. "This ain't just summer work anymore," he said softly. "This is legacy work."

There was a long silence—but it wasn't hollow.

It was thick. Sacred. The kind of silence that only follows truth being spoken out loud.

Malik reached for his pen. "Let's write that down. Legacy work. That's our flyer theme for July."

"Maybe put it on a T-shirt," Maya added. "Make it our crew motto."

Jamarion leaned back against the post, eyes tracing the stars barely visible above the city haze. “What we’re building...it’s not just for now. It’s for later. For somebody else’s tomorrow.”

They all nodded in **unanimous** agreement.

Down the block, a car rolled by with the windows down, soft R&B humming from the speakers. The scent of grilled meat drifted over from the Johnsons’ yard. Streetlights blinked on like old friends waking up.

Inside Jamarion’s house, the clock struck 9:00. Porch lights flickered on up and down the street.

But none of them moved to leave.

Because in that moment—sitting on a creaky porch, arms sticky with summer, hearts stretched by experience—they understood something deeply:

They weren’t just helping people live better lives.

They were becoming better people.

And it was all happening—right here, right now.

One visit, one story, one legacy at a time.

Unanimous: Fully agreed upon by everyone.

Growing the Crew

The following Monday, the Crew On Call met under the big oak tree behind the rec center—clipboards, notepads, and leftover lemon cookies in tow. After a successful first round of visits, it was clear they couldn't keep up the momentum without reinforcements.

“We need help,” Jamarion said, not as a complaint, but a **pragmatic** statement. “We’ve got seven elders, and a waiting list growing already.”

“Plus, we’re still in school mode,” Kaliyah added. “Some of us got summer reading. Malik’s got that robotics camp. We can’t burn out.”

Malik pulled up the contact sheet. “We’ve got Trent, Donovan, and Maya confirmed. They’re solid—and we’re all eager to grow.”

Maya was the first to arrive, holding a backpack and iced tea. “What’s up, team?”

“We need your help full-time,” Tyrell told her, half-joking. “The seniors are already asking for you.”

Pragmatic: Dealing with things in a practical way, not just based on ideas.

“Oh, I’m in. Ms. Rachel invited me to help her frame old photos. She even said I got a ‘gentle touch.’”

Donovan and Trent rolled up minutes later on their bikes, all smiles and sweat.

“You said there was pizza,” Trent said, scanning the scene.

“Only if you commit,” Kaliyah said, arms crossed playfully.

Trent raised his hands. “I’m committed. Y’all got a good thing going. I’m down for grocery runs, storytelling, even dishes—as long as nobody asks me to sew.”

The group laughed—cheerful and warm.

Meeting the New Recruits

That afternoon, Officer Mobley introduced the crew to three more teens: Brianna, Josh, and Micah—all regulars at the rec center.

“They’re looking for purpose, like y’all,” he told Jamarion. “Give ‘em a chance to shine.”

Diligent: Working hard and carefully.

Frivolous: Not serious; silly or unimportant.

“Brianna’s organized,” he continued. “Josh is great with yard work. Micah? He’s quiet but **diligent**. Trust me.”

They held a mini-orientation under the shade of the rec center awning. Malik walked the new members through scheduling and confidentiality.

“Visits are one hour max. We don’t take money, and we don’t take risks. If you feel uncomfortable, leave and call one of us. We got each other’s backs.”

“Every elder gets a log sheet,” Maya added. “We keep notes—favorite meals, music, mobility needs. That way we treat them like people, not **frivolous** tasks.”

Brianna smiled. “I love that. My Nana passed last year. I would’ve loved a crew like this for her.”

Tabling the Paid Services

As the team grew, so did conversations about what came next. Jamarion brought it up during a team huddle.

“We’re not ready to launch the paid side yet. Too much moving at once.”

“I agree,” Malik said. “Let’s do it right. We’ll table that part until after we meet with the strip mall proprietors. Get advice. Build structure.”

Kaliyah nodded. “Besides, the volunteer stuff? It’s **gratifying** lives.”

Tyrell added, “And if we do yard work, I want us to have real gear. I’m not out here with Dollar Store gloves again.”

Planning the Business Outreach

The team set a date for the strip mall walkthrough. They would visit:

Mr. Jackson’s Barbershop

Victoria’s Sweet Shop

TinkerTech Repair

A new juice bar owned by a young couple from Atlanta

A bookstore that had just opened with a “Read Local” sign

“Each one, we ask: What do you wish you knew when you started?” Malik said. “We listen. We learn.”

“Then we plan our paid services,” Jamarion finished. “And make it more than a summer hustle. Make it last.”

Gratify: To please or satisfy someone.

Wisdom from The Black Wall Street Mall

Saturday arrived hot and bright. The Crew On Call met outside The Black Wall Street Mall—a row of locally owned shops that stood **conspicuously** like a pride flag of Black entrepreneurship. Their mission: gather wisdom from those who had built something lasting.

First Stop: Jackson's Fresh Cuts

The barbershop buzzed with clippers and conversation. Mr. Jackson, mid-fade on a customer, called out, “Ayy, it’s the young legends. Come on in!”

Jamarion explained their project, and Mr. Jackson listened while lining up his client’s edges.

“You want this to last?” he said. “Two things: keep records and keep showing up. It’s consistency that separates a hustle from a business.”

He wiped his clippers. “And always treat your first client like your most important. That’s how you earn trust.”

Conspicuous: Easy to see or notice; attracting attention

Second Stop: Victoria's Sweet Shop

The scent of peach cobbler and pound cake greeted them like an old auntie. Mama Vee was behind the counter, arms floured, apron stained.

“You know I believe in y’all,” she said, handing them mini sweet potato pies. “But hear me—don’t forget the people in your purpose. You get busy with checklists and pricing, but don’t lose the heart.” Her advice was **eloquent**, heartfelt.

Third Stop: Tinker Tech Repair

Devyn was adjusting a screen behind the counter when they arrived. She wiped her hands and grinned.

“Let me guess—you’re here to pick my brain?”

Malik nodded. “We want to learn how to run a business right.”

Devyn leaned on the counter. “Okay. LLCs. Basic contracts. Liability insurance. Don’t wait till something goes wrong to protect yourselves. And learn how to invoice—Word docs ain’t gonna cut it.”

Eloquent: Expressing ideas clearly and with strong emotion.

Meticulous: Very careful and precise about details.

Tyrell scribbled fast, **meticulous** in his note-taking.

Devyn laughed. “Come back next week. I’ll show you how to draft a service agreement.”

Fourth Stop: Juice by Nature

Inside the new juice bar, the vibe was all hardwood counters and natural light. A young couple, Dre and Simone, welcomed them with samples of pineapple-spinach smoothie.

“We started from a food truck,” Dre said. “What kept us going? Vision boards. Every idea—write it down, picture it, build toward it.”

Simone added, “And document your wins. Whether it’s a handwritten thank-you note or a compliment from a customer—those keep you going on hard days.”

Their outlook was hopeful and wise.

Final Stop: Open Books Bookstore

A new addition to the neighborhood, the bookstore had a “Read Local” sign in cursive across the front window. Inside, shelves stood half-filled, but the potential felt abundant.

The owner, Omar Sharif was shelving new arrivals when they approached.

“Youth-led service org?” he asked, adjusting his glasses. “You’re already doing the thing most businesses forget—serving first.”

He handed Malik a journal. “Write everything. Not just what works. Write your failures too. You’ll learn more from those.”

The Walk Back

They walked home under the hazy glow of late afternoon, minds spinning with ideas and inspiration.

“We’re not ready for paid services—yet,” Jamarion said. “But now we know how to get ready.” Malik nodded. “We’re building memories.”

“Yeah,” Jamarion added. “And removing every **obstacle** between generations.”

Malik held up his new journal. “First page: ‘Crew On Call – Phase Two.’”

“We got this,” Maya added, her voice **resilient** and sure.

And they did. The foundation was laid, the mentors were in place, and the crew was ready to build something that would last well beyond the summer.

Obstacle: Something that blocks the way or makes progress difficult.

They didn't need fame or credit. Just the chance to **quell** loneliness, **hinder** isolation, and show that even small acts of kindness could **gratify** a heart that had long since stopped expecting visitors.

They had formed a **unanimous** bond around one powerful **notion**: that time, love, and presence were more valuable than anything money could buy. And deep down, each of them began to **yearn** for more moments like these—moments that felt real, true, and unforgettable. It was the height of their summer.

To be continued...

ARC ONLY

Resilient: Able to recover quickly from difficulty or trouble.

Quell: To put an end to something, especially with force.

Hinder: To slow down or block progress or action.

Gratify: To please or satisfy someone.

Unanimous: Fully agreed upon by everyone.

Notion: An idea, belief, or opinion.

Yearn: To have a strong desire for something.

ARC ONLY

Here are some key lessons learned from Hot Fun in the Summertime: The Crew On Call, framed with relevance for middle school readers (grades 6–9):

1. Giving Back Has Power

The Crew learns that helping others—especially elders—has a powerful ripple effect. Their time and attention fortify the emotional and physical well-being of their neighbors, but also deepen their own sense of purpose.

Lesson: Community service doesn't just help others—it transforms you.

2. Listening Is Just As Important As Doing

Whether reading to Ms. Doris or chatting with Mr. Jordan, the Crew discovers that lingering and listening can mean more than doing chores.

Lesson: Sometimes the greatest gift you can give someone is your time and your ears.

3. Small Actions Can Break Big Barriers

Fixing a record player, folding laundry, or just showing up made seniors feel remembered and valued. These small gestures helped remove emotional obstacles like loneliness and isolation.

Lesson: You don't have to do something huge to make a big difference.

4. Elders Have Stories That Deserve Respect

By slowing down to evaluate and engage with their elders, the Crew learned lessons about history, resilience, and identity that aren't in textbooks.

Lesson: Older generations carry wisdom that can shape how we move forward.

5. Unity Builds Strength

The Crew learned that organizing themselves, assigning roles, and being dependable made their work reliable and respected.

Lesson: Teamwork makes your goals more achievable—and more meaningful.

6. Everyone Has Something to Offer

Each Crew member brought their own unique skill: Malik's planning, Tyrell's humor, Kaliyah's people skills, and Jamarion's leadership.

Lesson: Your strengths matter—and combining them with others creates real impact.

7. Bridging Generations Creates Legacy

The most profound takeaway is that this wasn't just summer work—it was legacy work. By connecting generations, the Crew preserved memories, built relationships, and sowed seeds for a more connected future.

Lesson: The work you do today can echo into tomorrow.

Summary for Discussion:

"Hot Fun in the Summertime" teaches students the importance of empathy, initiative, and intergenerational connection. It encourages them to see their community not just as a place to live, but as a living network of stories, wisdom, and opportunities to serve.

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VOCABULARY WORDS FOR THE FOLLOWING STORY:

- The City, Country, City: A True Southern Experience

Abstain: to deliberately avoid or refrain from something

Boorish: rude or insensitive behavior

Cajole: to persuade someone through flattery or gentle urging

Disparate: fundamentally different or distinct in quality or kind

Esoteric: intended for or understood by only a small group with specialized knowledge

Fractious: easily irritated or quarrelsome

Gregarious: sociable; enjoying the company of others

Hapless: unfortunate; having bad luck

Impetuous: acting quickly without thought or care

Jeopardy: Great danger or risk.

Kudos: praise and honor received for an achievement

Languid: slow, relaxed, or weak

Mollify: to calm or soothe someone's anger or anxiety

Noxious: harmful, poisonous, or very unpleasant

Obsequious: overly submissive or eager to please

Pernicious: having a harmful effect, especially in a gradual or subtle way

Quixotic: exceedingly idealistic; unrealistic and impractical

Reverent: feeling or showing deep respect or admiration

Spurious: not genuine, authentic, or true; false

Tangible: perceptible by touch; clear and definite

Umbrage: offense or annoyance

Voracious: having a very eager approach to an activity; extremely hungry

Wanton: deliberate and unprovoked (usually referring to cruelty or violence)

Xenial: hospitable, especially to strangers or guests

Yield: to produce or provide; to give way under pressure

Zealot: a person who is fanatical and uncompromising in pursuit of their ideals

CITY, COUNTRY, CITY

WELCOME TO ST. JOHN'S ROAD

When Mama told me I'd be spending the summer in Edenton, North Carolina, with her five sisters while she worked in Chicago, I thought she was joking.

"You're joking, right?" I asked, trying to **cajole** her into reconsidering, eyeing her over my half-packed suitcase.
"You're not really leaving me in the country for two whole months."

Mama didn't even pause folding my socks. "Not a joke, Sherita. I leave in two days, and you're going to live with your aunties. They've already argued over who gets to teach you how to fry chicken."

Cajole: to persuade someone through flattery or gentle urging

“But Mama,” I groaned, “there’s no Wi-Fi in the country. What about my friends? What about the mall?”

“You’ll survive,” she said, giving me that **reverent** smile that always made me feel like I was being blessed and sentenced at the same time. “Your life will not be in **jeopardy**. You’ll come back with more than you left with—stories, wisdom, maybe a few cooking secrets. You’re going to learn where you come from, and who you’re made of.”

Three days later, I was rolling down a two-lane road lined with green fields that stretched so far they looked like they touched the sky. Aunt Pearl drove the dusty blue Chevy truck, her sunglasses crooked and her mood **gregarious** as she hummed along to a gospel song.

“That right there,” she said, pointing to a faded church, “is St. John Baptist. Built by your great-granddaddy and his brothers. Most of our folks are buried behind it.”

Reverent: feeling or showing deep respect or admiration

Jeopardy: Great danger or risk.

Gregarious: sociable; enjoying the company of others

Esoteric: intended for or understood by only a small group with specialized knowledge

I pressed my forehead to the window and watched the stones blur by. The air smelled of honeysuckle and dirt. It felt old but not in a bad way—more like history had perfume.

We turned onto a gravel road marked by a rusted sign: St. John's Road.

The house appeared like a memory—two stories tall, weather-worn wood, rocking chairs on the porch, and ivy creeping up one corner like it had **esoteric** stories only the bricks could understand. The tire swing in front bobbed slightly in the wind.

Aunt Pearl honked twice. The porch exploded with activity.

Out rushed Aunt Thelma in a long skirt, Aunt Della in gardening gloves, Aunt May wiping flour from her apron, Aunt Ruth with her sweet tea, and Aunt Judy last, already wearing bright red lipstick and her signature heels—even in the country.

“There she is!” Aunt May hollered.

Before I could even grab my bag, I was swallowed in hugs, perfume, and a few **boorish** exclamations about how tall I'd

Boorish: rude or insensitive behavior.

gotten. I held back from commenting on the fact that one of them accidentally bumped my toe with a suitcase.

“She’s tall like her mama,” Aunt Thelma said, giving me a long look.

“Got them same stubborn eyes,” Aunt Della added.

“And I bet she can eat,” Aunt Ruth winked. “You hungry, baby?”

I nodded. I felt like a **hapless** tourist caught in a welcome parade.

Then the cousins came out—three of them. One girl, two boys.

The girl wore a T-shirt that said “Black Girls Build Empires.” She stepped down and gave me a quick hug. “I’m Judy. Like Aunt Judy. You’ll get used to all the repetition around here.”

The taller boy wore beat-up sneakers and had a **fractious** smirk like he stayed ready to start a friendly fight. “Melvin,” he nodded.

Hapless: unfortunate; having bad luck

“And that’s Lee,” Judy said, pointing to a boy carrying a sketchbook. “He’s the artsy one. Quiet now, but give it time.”

Lee gave me a small wave. “Nice to meet you. You’ll get your portrait by the end of summer. Guaranteed.”

“Thanks?” I said, uncertain whether to be flattered or flee.

Aunt Pearl beamed. “You’ll fit right in.”

That night, I sat on the porch swing, exhausted. The fried chicken was perfect, the cornbread sweet, the collard greens **noxious** only to the uninitiated. The cousins were already planning who would teach me to catch frogs and who’d show me the “**obsequious** dance moves” they’d made up just to mock each other.

“This is gonna be a long summer,” I whispered.

Judy heard me. “Or the best one.”

I didn’t answer, but a small, **quixotic** part of me hoped she was right.

Fractious: easily irritated or quarrelsome

Noxious: harmful, poisonous, or very unpleasant

Obsequious: overly submissive or eager to please

Quixotic: exceedingly idealistic; unrealistic and impractical

PRIVY PANIC & PORCH WISDOM

Later that week, the kitchen was closed for mopping, and I was sent to the backyard pump to get water. The handle creaked like it hadn't been used in a century.

"You gotta pump it with heart," Melvin said. "No **languid** city arms."

"I got this," I said, trying not to sound too **impetuous**.

The water sputtered out with a groan. I drank from my hands. It tasted like copper and clarity.

Then came the outhouse.

"You've gotta be kidding," I said when they handed me a flashlight and toilet paper.

"Nope," Judy grinned. "Welcome to the **tangible** past."

I stepped outside like I was headed for battle. Every sound—every rustle—felt like a snake, a bat, or a **pernicious** spirit. But I made it.

Languid: slow, relaxed, or weak

Impetuous: acting quickly without thought or care

Tangible: perceptible by touch; clear and definite

Barely.

Back on the porch later, Aunt Ruth handed me a cold drink. “You did good.”

“Did I pass the test?”

“You passed the test and the test before that,” she smiled. “Not everyone can handle a fake sense of glamour and still walk tall.”

Melvin raised his glass. “All praises to the city girl.”

I grinned. “Thanks. I think.”

As the days passed, I started to realize that the things I thought were strange—like hauling water, picking vegetables, or using an outhouse—were part of something greater. They didn’t just build muscle. They built stories.

And slowly, without noticing it, I was changing too.

Pernicious: having a harmful effect, especially in a gradual or subtle way

MATRIARCHS AND MEMORIES

After dinner one night—fried chicken, butter beans, and cornbread so moist it nearly sang—we gathered on the front porch like it was a family tradition. Because, as I quickly learned, it was.

The air buzzed with cicadas, and the stars peeked out like they'd been waiting all day for this moment. Aunt May passed around warm peach cobbler in glass bowls, and everyone got quiet like church was about to start.

"Now that our bellies are full," she said, "it's time you learn about your people."

Judy sat beside me, cross-legged and alert. Lee was already sketching again, his pencil whispering across the page. Even Melvin, who usually had something rude or sarcastic to say, kept quiet.

"You know your great-grandma Esther," Aunt Ruth began, her voice low and **reverent**, "picked cotton from the time she was thirteen. From sunup to sundown. Her fingers bled. But she never once complained."

Reverent: feeling or showing deep respect or admiration.

“Why didn’t she just stop?” Judy asked. “Why not quit that life altogether?”

“Because she couldn’t,” Aunt Pearl said, gently. “To leave that work was to let your family go hungry. And Esther... she didn’t **yield** to anything that would hurt her people.”

“She sounds like a hero,” I whispered.

“She was,” Aunt May nodded. “And not the cape-wearing kind. The kind who made things happen quietly.”

“She dealt with some real mess, though,” Aunt Della added. “**Noxious** attitudes. Backbreaking work. Folks telling her she wasn’t worth anything.”

“But she was worth everything to us,” Aunt Ruth said. “She taught us to be cautious, but never scared. Strong, but never hard. She wouldn’t let hatred **mollify** our joy.”

Melvin broke the silence. “I bet she could’ve beat Henrietta in a fight.”

Yield: to produce or provide; to give way under pressure.

Noxious: harmful, poisonous, or very unpleasant

Mollify: to calm or soothe someone’s anger or anxiety

“Henrietta” was the chicken who’d chased me last week. I was still low-key traumatized.

Everyone chuckled, and Aunt Thelma clapped her hands once. “Let’s take a walk tomorrow. Show y’all where we went to school.”

THE SCHOOLHOUSE WALK

The next morning, we made the brisk walk to the old schoolhouse. The dirt road was lined with cornfields and buzzing bees. The sun hadn’t yet hit its high notes, and the air smelled faintly of dew and dust.

The schoolhouse looked like it had been lifted from a sepia-toned photograph. The paint peeled in long curls, and the porch sagged in the middle. But something about it still felt definite—like history itself had been folded into the wood.

Inside, dust floated in sunbeams like glitter. Wooden desks stood in uneven rows. An old chalkboard stretched across the front wall, faint lines of arithmetic still clinging to the slate.

“This place is...wow,” I said, stepping over a loose floorboard. “It’s like time took a break here.”

“Careful where you step,” Aunt Della warned. “That board tried to plummet me into the root cellar once.”

“Big Mama sat right there,” Aunt Ruth pointed to the front desk. “She used to write poems on brown paper lunch bags.”

“I think I found one!” Lee exclaimed, pulling a crumpled piece from a hidden gap in the floor.

It was faded but legible:

I bloom where no one planted,

I sing when no one hears,

I rise like morning sun. Despite the weight of years.

We all stood still, like we’d stepped into a sacred place.

“Big Mama was what some folks call an **esoteric** soul,” Aunt Thelma whispered. “Deep waters. Said her words weren’t meant for everyone—just the ones willing to feel.”

“She was also kinda a **zealot**,” Aunt Judy said, grinning. “If you said you didn’t like cornbread, she’d make you recite the Lord’s Prayer before you could leave the table.”

Laughter bubbled up from all of us.

Esoteric: intended for or understood by only a small group with specialized knowledge

Zealot: a person who is fanatical and uncompromising in pursuit of their ideals

PORCH REFLECTIONS

That night on the porch, under a soft breeze and a sky spilling stars, I leaned back and let the rocking chair lull me. Melvin was arguing with Judy about which constellation was which, and Lee was sketching our silhouettes like he'd been born for it.

"I never thought I'd like it here," I admitted. "I thought it'd be boring. Or too quiet."

"It's not the quiet that scares people," Judy said thoughtfully. "It's what they might hear in it."

"I don't miss the noise," I said. "I don't even miss the mall. That's **spurious**, right?"

Judy grinned. "You're learning."

I looked over at Aunt Ruth, who was humming a hymn and sipping tea.

"You think she ever regrets staying here?" I asked.

"Never," Judy said. "She says Edenton's where her heart planted itself. Where she grew strong. And now she's rooted so deep, not even time could pull her up."

I watched the fireflies blink across the lawn. “Do you ever feel... disconnected? Like we come from such dissimilar worlds?”

Judy looked at me, not unkindly. “Yeah. Sometimes. But roots and wings don’t have to argue. You just need to know when to use each.”

I nodded. That sounded **quixotic**, maybe, but beautiful.

That night, as I slipped beneath the patchwork quilt in my little upstairs room, I thought about everything I’d learned: about resilience, and rhythm, and remembering. I was still a little rough around the edges, still learning how to carry my part of the family’s legacy. But I was beginning to see:

This wasn’t just a summer.

It was an awakening.

Spurious: not genuine, authentic, or true; false

Quixotic: exceedingly idealistic; unrealistic and impractical

CHORES, CHICKENS, AND HOGS

The rooster crowed before the sun even thought about showing up.

I groaned into my pillow. “Why is he yelling? What has he accomplished?”

Judy’s voice came through the cracked door, bright and merciless. “Time to rise and shine, cousin! There are chores to be done!”

I rolled out of bed like a **languid** lump of laundry, my arms heavy and my mood worse. Downstairs, the kitchen buzzed with movement. Aunt Della flipped biscuits in the skillet, humming like she had already won the day.

“Eat up,” she said. “Grits, eggs, and molasses biscuits will help you work with a grateful heart.”

“What kind of work?” I asked cautiously.

“Feeding hogs. Gathering eggs. Sweeping the porch,” Aunt Ruth said, handing me a glass of juice. “It’s good for you. Builds character.”

Melvin sauntered in with a smirk. “City girl ready for the real world?”

“I’ll restrain from punching you,” I muttered, biting into my biscuit.

The hog pen smelled like a science experiment gone wrong.

“Don’t act brand-new,” Judy teased. “The **noxious** scent is part of the charm.”

I held my breath and followed them to the trough, carrying a sloshing bucket of slop that looked like leftovers from a food fight. The pigs came charging, their snouts **voracious** and wet.

“You gotta dump and dodge,” Melvin warned. “Otherwise they’ll think your shoelace is dessert.”

I **impetuously** dumped the bucket too early and missed the trough. Slop splattered across my boots.

“Nice aim,” Judy said, laughing. “Real Olympic form.”

I wiped my leg with a rag and muttered, “This feels like a punishment.”

Languid: slow, relaxed, or weak

Noxious: harmful, poisonous, or very unpleasant

Voracious: having a very eager approach to an activity; extremely hungry

“Nope,” Aunt Thelma said, arriving with a fresh bucket.
“This is life. It ain’t always pretty. But it’s ours.”

Next was the chicken coop. The chickens were chaotic, squawking like they were offended by our very presence. One particularly bold hen, Henrietta, eyed me like I owed her money.

“She’s kinda cantankerous,” Lee warned. “Don’t let her catch your fear.”

I reached in to grab an egg, and Henrietta flapped up with the fury of a dragon. I shrieked and dropped it.

“You okay?” Judy giggled.

“I’m not built for this!” I wailed, brushing feathers off my face.

“Yes you are,” Aunt Della said calmly. “You just haven’t found your rhythm yet.”

Impetuous: acting quickly without thought or care

THE TOBACCO BARN

That afternoon, Aunt Pearl led us down a dusty trail to the old tobacco barns. The sun was high, the air thick like syrup.

“These barns were our everything back in the day,” she said. “You think you tired now? Try hanging tobacco leaves for twelve hours with no fan.”

We stepped inside the barn and the smell hit me—sweet and smoky, like history burned slow and low. Bundles of dried tobacco hung from the rafters, tied in neat rows.

“I used to climb those beams,” Aunt Thelma said. “Tie the leaves tight, then hang them just right. One wrong move, and you’d plummet.”

Melvin whistled. “Y’all did all this without gloves?”

“Without gloves, without pay, without complaint,” she said. “Because we were building something.”

“I thought tobacco was just a crop,” I said.

“Nah, baby,” Aunt Ruth replied. “It was a lesson. In patience. In teamwork. In sweat.”

Judy turned to me. “Still think city life is tougher?”

I thought about the subway crowds, the constant honking, the pressure to always be “on.”

“It’s just... different,” I said. “**Disparate**, even.”

“Well,” Aunt Pearl said, “learning both sides will make you strong in ways others can’t even imagine.”

PORCH REFLECTIONS

That night, we all ended up on the porch again, sticky from sweat and coated in memories.

“You held your own today,” Lee said, handing me a glass of lemonade.

“Barely,” I sighed. “I’m sore in places I didn’t know could get sore.”

“Still,” Aunt May said, “you didn’t quit. That earns you points in this house.”

I looked at my hands—dirty, scraped, but proud. I’d done something real today. Something **tangible**.

Disparate: fundamentally different or distinct in quality or kind

Tangible: perceptible by touch; clear and definite

“You’re starting to get it,” Judy said. “It’s not about the chores. It’s about the connection.”

“To land?” I asked.

“To each other,” she answered.

I watched the fireflies blink across the yard like twinkling secrets, and for once, I didn’t feel like a visitor anymore.

AFTER-DINNER WISDOM

As the porch rocked and the cousins cracked jokes, Aunt Ruth leaned close and said, “We’re not trying to kill you with kindness, baby. We’re shaping you. Gently. Like our elders did us.”

I nodded, unsure how to say what I felt.

“You’ve got that city fire,” she continued. “But you’ve also got our roots. Be careful not to become so eager to prove yourself that you act like a fanatic about things that don’t matter.”

I blinked. “What if I mess up?”

“Oh, you will,” she laughed. “But messing up isn’t the danger. Staying stuck is. And don’t let anyone’s patronizing

praise or counterfeit compliments tell you who you are. You belong—mess and all.”

Later that night, the cousins and I lay out on quilts under the stars. The night was velvet-dark, and the moonlight stretched across our faces like soft grace.

“I never knew quiet could be so loud,” I said, my voice a whisper.

“It’s because you’re hearing your own thoughts now,” Lee said. “That’s what the city tries to drown.”

“Think you’ll be back next summer?” Judy asked.

“I hope so,” I said honestly. “I thought this would be all work, but it’s kind of... magic.”

“You’re adapting fast,” Melvin said. “Some folks get homesick or offended. Take **umbrage** at everything.”

“I’m good at change,” I shrugged. “I just didn’t expect to care this much.”

Judy turned to me. “That’s how we know it’s real.”

Umbrage: offense or annoyance

Boorish: rude or insensitive behavior

CRAB CATCHING AND SOUND SWIMMING

The next morning, Aunt Pearl barged into our room with the energy of a marching band.

“Y’all lazy bones get up! It’s Sound Day! Grab your towels, bait buckets, and good attitudes—we’re going to the water!”

Melvin shot up like toast from a toaster. “Finally! No hogs! No chicken attacks! Just sand, water, and victory!”

Judy laughed and threw a towel at him. “Try not to be too **boorish** about it.”

I rolled over with a groan. “Can I just... cease from moving for five more minutes?”

“Nope,” Aunt Pearl said. “The tide won’t wait for sleepyheads.”

We piled into the truck and drove past fields, pine trees, and fences overgrown with honeysuckle. As soon as we hit the Sound, the air changed—salty, fresh, and full of promise. The Albemarle Sound stretched out before us like a calm invitation.

“Smell that?” Aunt Pearl grinned. “That’s freedom—and fish.”

The water was shallow and warm around our ankles. Judy handed me a net and pointed to a line of wooden traps.

“We bait the lines with chicken necks,” she said. “Then we wait and scoop.”

“That sounds almost... peaceful,” I said.

“Until the crabs get involved,” Melvin added. “They’re fast, and they’re petty.”

Lee stood on the shoreline with his sketchbook. “I’m **abstaining** from crab duty today. They’re not good models. Too fidgety.”

I followed Judy into the water. Within minutes, we had our first catch—two blue crabs clicking and thrashing in the bucket like angry maracas.

“They’re kinda cute,” I said.

“Until one latches onto your thumb,” Judy replied. “Don’t get **impetuous** now.”

Melvin tried to scoop one and slipped, landing on his butt with a splash.

Abstain: to deliberately avoid or refrain from something

Impetuous: acting quickly without thought or care

“That was graceful,” I laughed.

“That was tactical,” he replied, totally soaked. “I’m just letting the crabs think I’m harmless.”

Aunt Pearl watched from the sand with a glass of iced tea. “Keep at it. And remember—**kudos** to whoever brings back the fattest crab!”

SWIMMING & STILLNESS

After catching our fill, we waded into deeper water. The sun was warm on our backs, and the gentle waves felt like soft lullabies.

“This is my favorite part,” Judy sighed. “Just floating.”

I closed my eyes and let the water carry me. It felt like the Sound knew all my secrets and still wanted to hold me anyway.

“This is... **tangible** peace,” I whispered.

“Exactly,” Lee said from the bank. “You can feel the quiet. It’s not **spurious** like a fake smile. It’s real.”

Kudos: praise and honor received for an achievement

Tangible: perceptible by touch; clear and definite

We floated for a while in silence. Then Judy said, “Don’t take this for granted. Some people only dream of moments like this.”

I nodded slowly. “I get it now.”

THE FEAST

Back at the house, the aunties were ready. A giant pot boiled over the fire pit. In went the crabs, corn, onions, potatoes, and sausage.

The scent was **voraciously** good—spicy, earthy, and nostalgic.

“Y’all better come hungry!” Aunt Ruth called.

“I was born hungry,” Melvin said, rubbing his belly. “I’ll eat till I can’t walk.”

“Just don’t be **wanton** with the butter,” Aunt Della warned. “It’s not a crime scene.”

Spurious: not genuine, authentic, or true; false

Voracious: having a very eager approach to an activity; extremely hungry

Wanton: deliberate and unprovoked (usually referring to cruelty or violence)

We ate outside, elbow to elbow. Sticky fingers, buttered lips, and too many laughs to count.

Aunt Thelma toasted with her sweet tea. “To sunshine, saltwater, and strong girls who don’t run from chickens!”

“To family,” Judy added.

“To the crab that pinched Melvin’s toe, no offense” Lee said.

“Offense taken,” Melvin grumbled. “Revenge pending.”

NIGHTTIME REFLECTIONS

That night, we laid out under the stars again. The moon cast silver ribbons across the grass, and the frogs croaked like an old choir.

“I didn’t expect this,” I said quietly. “I didn’t expect to feel... full. Not just in my stomach. Like, in my heart.”

“That’s what this place does,” Judy said. “It fills the empty spots you didn’t know you had.”

“You think I’ll remember this when I go back home?” I asked.

“If you don’t,” she said, “I’ll write you letters to remind you.”

“That’s so sweet it’s almost diabetic,” Melvin teased.

“Shut up, crab boy,” Judy shot back.

We laughed and listened to the crickets.

“I think this is what people mean when they talk about finding themselves,” I said.

“It’s not about finding,” Lee said from his blanket. “It’s about seeing. You’re already here. You just didn’t know it yet.”

I stared up at the stars, feeling both small and strong at the same time.

“You sound like a poet,” I said.

“Or a **zealot** for the stars,” he replied.

And for once, that didn’t sound silly at all.

Zealot: a person who is fanatical and uncompromising in pursuit of their ideals

Abstain: to deliberately avoid or refrain from something

Impetuous: acting quickly without thought or care

Boorish: rude or insensitive behavior

SWEET TEA AND GOODBYE

The last day arrived quietly, like it didn't want to wake anyone up. No fanfare. Just sunlight through the curtains and the smell of biscuits rising in Aunt Thelma's oven.

I lay in bed for a few extra minutes, hoping to **abstain** from the truth—I didn't want to leave.

Downstairs, the porch was already humming. Melvin was counting spades cards with **impetuous** confidence.

“Final porch game,” he declared. “Winner gets eternal bragging rights.”

“Please don't be **boorish** about it,” Judy groaned.

“I'm not! I'm just... passionate.”

“You're a sucker for spades,” Lee said from his spot by the railing.

We played until the sun pushed us into the shade. Judy and I beat Melvin twice, and he took it so personally he accused us of psychic cheating.

THE GOODBYE DINNER

Aunt Ruth called everyone to the yard around six. The long wooden table was set with mismatched dishes, mason jars of sweet tea, deviled eggs, fried fish, hush puppies, okra, and peach cobbler. It was less like dinner and more like a Southern love letter written in butter and cast iron.

“I wanted y’all to have a proper sendoff,” she said. “This ain’t just about goodbyes. It’s about remembering the flavors of family.”

As we filled our plates, neighbors wandered over. Hugs were exchanged, cheeks were kissed, and stories flowed like lemonade.

“Your mama used to dance barefoot in that yard,” an elder neighbor told me, her eyes misty. “She was always so **gregarious**, that one.”

“She still is,” I said, holding back tears.

Someone passed me a slice of cake, and I took a bite too big to speak. But that was okay. Sometimes silence speaks louder than any eloquent speech.

Gregarious: sociable; enjoying the company of others

TWILIGHT CONVERSATIONS

Later, I stood at the edge of the field, watching the horizon turn orange and gold.

“You good?” Judy asked, stepping beside me.

“Yeah,” I nodded. “But it hurts a little.”

“That’s how you know it meant something,” she said.

“**Tangible** memories always hurt a little when you pack them up.”

“You gonna miss me?”

“Maybe,” she smirked. “But only if you write.”

“I will,” I promised. “With my new vocabulary and all.”

“Just don’t go all **esoteric** on me. I don’t want to need a dictionary every time.”

We laughed. Then we were quiet again, watching the stars peek through the sky like they were slowly deciding to show up.

Tangible: perceptible by touch; clear and definite

Esoteric: intended for or understood by only a small group with specialized knowledge

PACKING AND PARTING

The next morning, I zipped my bag slowly. I looked at every corner of the room like I was afraid it would disappear once I left.

Downstairs, Aunt Della handed me a small mason jar of peach preserves.

“For the city,” she said. “Whenever you need a reminder of sweetness.”

Aunt Ruth pressed a folded paper into my palm.

“Big Mama’s last poem,” she said. “You’ve earned it.”

As we climbed into the truck, I turned around one last time. The porch. The swing. The ivy-covered walls. My whole summer stitched into a single view.

“I feel like I’m leaving part of myself here,” I whispered.

“You’re not leaving anything behind,” Aunt Pearl said. “You’re **yielding** to growth. And that never leaves you.”

Yield: to produce or provide; to give way under pressure

EPILOGUE: BROOKLYN ROOTS

Back in Brooklyn, everything was loud again. Car horns. Sirens. Shouting neighbors. The kind of noise I used to find comforting.

But I'd changed.

I didn't walk fast like before. I didn't keep my headphones in all day. I looked people in the eye when I passed them on the street. I smiled more—even if they didn't smile back.

At school, I read Big Mama's poem during our Black History Month assembly. My English teacher called it the most **reverent** and moving performance she'd ever seen.

I did my final project on Southern matriarchs, tobacco barns, and the history of outhouses.

Someone tried to tease me about it, but I didn't care. I'd learned not to waste energy on **spurious** opinions. Not when I had real roots now.

Reverent: feeling or showing deep respect or admiration

Spurious: not genuine, authentic, or true; false

TEA FOR TWO

That night, when Mama returned from Chicago, I brewed her a pitcher of sweet tea using Aunt Ruth's recipe—meticulously measured, just the right amount of lemon and love.

She took a sip and blinked.

"This is... incredible," she said. "Who taught you this?"

I smiled. "Five women. A few cousins. One mean chicken. And a whole summer of lessons."

She sat beside me on the couch and took another sip.

"You've changed," she said, studying me.

"I had to," I answered. "I've got too many legacies to live up to."

Then I pulled out my notebook and wrote on the first clean page:

I am the seed.

And I've begun to bloom.

Lessons Learned from Summer With the Aunties

1. Family Roots Are a Source of Strength

Through stories about Great-Grandma Esther and time spent with the aunties, the narrator learns that knowing where you come from helps you understand who you are. Even in unfamiliar places, your roots can anchor you.

“You’re going to learn where you come from, and who you’re made of.” – Mama

2. Resilience Is Grown, Not Given

Whether it’s feeding pigs, drawing water from a pump, or hearing about cotton-picking ancestors, the narrator learns that resilience isn’t about never being tired or frustrated—it’s about showing up anyway.

“We didn’t always want to... but we did it because we had to. We did it for each other.” – Aunt Ruth

3. Legacy Isn't Just What's Passed Down—It's What You Choose to Carry Forward

From heirloom recipes to handwritten poems and schoolhouse carvings, legacy is kept alive by those willing to remember and retell.

“She buried this here, so her words could grow someday.” – Aunt Thelma

4. Hard Work Builds More Than Just Muscles

The chores might be muddy, tiring, or uncomfortable, but they're not just tasks—they're acts of service, discipline, and unity.

“You don't get to pick the parts of the legacy you like. You've got to learn to tolerate the hard with the holy.” – Aunt May

5. Peace Isn't Boring—It's Healing

At first, the quiet country life feels too still for the narrator, but she eventually learns that silence allows space for reflection, growth, and emotional clarity.

“You mean peaceful? Yeah. That's the sound of no sirens, no honking...” – Cousin Judy

6. Culture Lives in Everyday Rituals

Drawing water from a pump, sharing peach cobbler on the porch, and visiting old barns become sacred acts that connect past to present. These moments teach that culture is preserved not only in history books, but also in daily habits and shared meals.

7. You Don't Have to Understand Everything to Respect It

From using a privy to working in a tobacco barn, the narrator is initially resistant—but gains empathy and appreciation once she participates and listens to the stories of others.

8. Community Is Built on Contribution

By helping with chores, crab boils, and storytelling nights, the narrator learns that belonging doesn't just come from being related—it comes from participating, listening, and serving.

Conclusion

As you turn the final page of this volume, we hope you've discovered more than just stories—you've uncovered new ideas, met characters who reflect both history and hope, and collected words that now feel like your own.

Each tale was designed not just to entertain, but to leave a lasting imprint: a new perspective, a powerful word, or a deeper understanding of the world and your place in it. Through laughter, learning, frustration, and triumph, these stories are meant to spark thought, inspire dialogue, and encourage growth—both intellectually and emotionally.

In reading *Moore Words*, Volume 2 you've joined a community of learners, dreamers, educators, and storytellers who believe that words have power, that stories can heal, and that language can bridge the gap between generations, cultures, and time.

We live in an era where attention is fleeting, language is abbreviated, and deep reflection is often traded for convenience. But you, dear reader, chose to slow down. To engage. To grow.

That choice matters.

So whether you read this book cover to cover or dipped in and out of the stories that called to you, we hope you feel a little more informed, a little more empowered, and a lot more equipped to share your thoughts with confidence and clarity.

Keep reading. Keep learning. Keep telling stories that matter. And above all—keep speaking with purpose.

The world still needs your voice.

Thank you for taking this journey with us. Until next time, stay curious—and keep turning the page.

Regards,

—R. Lee, Sr.

ARC ONLY

Social Media Abbreviations

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Social media abbreviations

Social media abbreviations are shortened forms of words or phrases commonly used in digital communication to save time, space, and effort—especially on platforms with character limits like X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, or Instagram. They allow users to communicate quickly and casually, often reflecting internet culture, humor, or trending topics.

Why they matter:

Efficiency: Speeds up conversations and posts.

Character limits: Helps users stay within word or character limits.

Community connection: Shows familiarity with digital culture and keeps you “in the loop.”

Tone & expression: Adds humor, sarcasm, emotion, or informality (e.g., “LOL,” “SMH,” or “FOMO”).

In short, social media abbreviations are a modern shorthand that helps people communicate faster and feel more connected in the fast-paced world of online interaction.

A-F

AMA - Ask Me Anything

AI - Artificial intelligence

ASAP - As Soon As Possible

ATM - At The Moment

BAE - Before Anyone Else (often used to refer to a significant other)

BFF - Best Friends Forever

BRB - Be Right Back

BTW - By The Way

DM - Direct Message

DYK - Did You Know

EOD - End of day

EOW - End of week

FB - Facebook

FF - Follow Friday (used to recommend people to follow, mainly on Twitter)

FOMO - Fear Of Missing Out

FTW - For The Win

FYP - For You Page (common on TikTok)

G-L

GG - Good Game (common in gaming communities)

GM - Good Morning

GN - Good Night

GRWM - Get Ready With Me (common in beauty/lifestyle videos)

GTG - Got To Go

HBD - Happy Birthday

HMU - Hit Me Up (contact me)

ICYMI - In Case You Missed It

IDC - I Don't Care

IDK - I Don't Know

IG - Instagram

IMO/IMHO - In My Opinion / In My Humble Opinion

IRL - In Real Life

JSYK - Just So You Know

JK - Just Kidding

LMAO - Laughing My A** Off

LMK - Let Me Know

LOL - Laugh Out Loud

M-R

MFW - My Face When

NBD - No Big Deal

NSFW - Not Safe For Work

NVM - Never Mind

OMG - Oh My God / Gosh / Goodness

OOTD - Outfit Of The Day

OP - Original Poster (the person who started a thread/post)

PM - Private Message

POV - Point of View

PPL - People

QOTD - Quote Of The Day

RN - Right Now

ROFL - Rolling On the Floor Laughing

RT - Retweet

A'

S-Z

SMH - Shaking My Head (disapproval or disbelief)

SN - Snapchat

SO - Significant Other / Shout Out

SRSLY - Seriously

TBH - To Be Honest

TBT - Throwback Thursday

TFW - That Feeling When

TGIF - Thank God It's Friday

TMI - Too Much Information

TTYL - Talk To You Later

TYT - Take Your Time

UOK - You Okay?

WBU - What About You?

WCW - Woman Crush Wednesday

WTF - What The [expletive]

YOLO - You Only Live Once

YW - You're Welcome

ARC ONLY

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DISCOVER THE FASCINATION OF WORDS WITH MOORE WORDS A-Z

Dive into a captivating series that transforms your reading experience into an enriching vocabulary adventure! *Moore Words A-Z* is not just a collection of stories; it's a journey through the vibrant lives of positive urban youth, family outings to historic sites, and the simple joys of food shopping that blossom into invaluable cultural lessons and more.

As you immerse yourself in these enchanting narratives, you'll encounter a carefully curated selection of words from A to Z, each highlighted in bold for easy reference.

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R. LEE MOORE SR. - AUTHOR



R. Lee Moore Sr. is an insightful author renowned for his engaging novels and short stories that carry a meaningful message. With a passion for encouraging readers to deepen their self-awareness, connect with others, and embark on a spiritual journey, Moore's writing transcends mere entertainment. Known as a raconteur, he weaves delightful narratives infused with rich historical context and factual insights, making his stories both captivating and educational.

In his latest series, Moore emphasizes the importance of vocabulary in our rapidly changing world dominated by social media. Through his compelling prose, he invites readers to reflect on their language and its power to shape understanding and connection in an increasingly digital age. With each story, R. Lee Moore, Sr. inspires growth and engagement, education and enlightenment leaving a lasting impact on his audience.



One
Cre8tive
Mind

