

# GEORGE C. WOLFE

## PROGRAM SYNOPSIS

The frenetic pace and artistic sophistication of the New York theater scene are literally and figuratively miles away from the segregated, but nurturing, African-American community of 1960s Frankfort, Kentucky and the childhood of Tony Award-winning playwright and director George C. Wolfe. This program explores the juxtaposition of past and present in the life and work of the man who wrote and directed *Jelly's Last Jam*, directed *Angels in America*, and assumed leadership of one of New York's most important cultural institutions, the New York Shakespeare Festival/Joseph Papp Public Theater. Through interviews with Wolfe's family and influential members of New York's theater community, including Tony Kushner (*Angels* playwright), Gregory Hines (star of *Jelly*), and Patrick Stewart (star of Wolfe's 1995 production of *The Tempest*), viewers discover Wolfe's artistic vision and his significance in the world of contemporary culture.

### Part 1

The program opens with George Wolfe reading from the "Topsy" monologue from his play *The Colored Museum*, followed by various members of the New York theater world describing Wolfe. The next three short segments follow Wolfe from his days at Pomona College, where he wrote his first play, *Up for Grabs*; through his work at the Inner City Cultural Center, where he was influenced by Jack Jackson's multicultural philosophy; to his arrival and early days in New York City.

In "1986—The Colored Museum," Wolfe discusses his dominant influences—Brecht and minstrel shows—at the time he was writing what was to become his first major work, *The Colored Museum*. Intercut with excerpts from the "Miss Pat" monologue of the play are interviews with playwright Tony Kushner, writer Thulani Davis, and others who describe the mixed re-

sponses the play generated at the time, especially within the black community.

The next two segments look at the plays Wolfe wrote before and after *Colored Museum*. He tells how *Paradise*, which was clobbered in the press, prepared him for the controversy surrounding *The Colored Museum*. And he describes *Spunk*, which was based on the writings of Zora Neale Hurston, as his attempt to "live inside black rhythms."

In "1992—Jelly's Last Jam," producers Margo Lion and Pamela Koslow Hines and others reveal how Wolfe was chosen to write *Jelly* and the challenges that come with trying to read a Wolfe script. In fact, actor Gregory Hines admits he was not sure he wanted the part of Jelly until after he saw a staged reading.

This segment features excerpts from the play, a reading by Wolfe, and additional stories and insights into *Jelly* and into Wolfe as a writer and as a director. Writer Thulani Davis says that in New York Wolfe is known more as a director, but that he has the disposition of a writer. Wolfe himself says, "I love language, but I write language for the theater because I love the totalness of it." And later he reveals, "I'm a creature, I think, of the theater. I love the language, I love the visuals, I love the music. There will always be rhythms. I think more than anything else I write from rhythm." This segment ends with a reading from *The Colored Museum*.

### Part 2

"1992—Angels in America" is the story of how Wolfe came to direct Tony Kushner's play once it left London and Los Angeles and headed for Broadway. Producer Margo Lion knew Wolfe was the perfect choice, but Wolfe himself was surprised he was offered the job. "I am a Negro and this was a white play," he says.

Kushner, however, was "bowled over" by Wolfe and by his approach to the play, the controversies surrounding it, and the other complexities that would make it a challenge to





mount on the New York stage. “Any culture that develops from oppression has a strong relationship to irony and humor,” says Kushner as he talks about what he and Wolfe share in common—how issues of faith, race, and sexual preference have shaped their perspectives.

This section includes excerpts from *Angels* as well as the “Miss Roj” monologue of *Colored Museum*. Reggie Montgomery, the actor who played Miss Roj, describes angry reactions to this character and says, “*The Colored Museum* rings through everything [Wolfe] does.”

The “Public Theater” segment explores the two faces of Wolfe: the artist and the arts administrator (in 1993 he was named producer of the Public Theater). Among the plays he has directed at the Public is his version of *The Tempest*, which was produced in 1995. Patrick Stewart, who played Prospero, provides insight into Wolfe the director: “It’s nice to walk into a rehearsal room and find there’s a really smart director waiting for you.”

Footage of Wolfe in rehearsal for his latest hit, *Bring In Da Noise, Bring In Da Funk*, offer proof of another Stewart comment: “He’s never not paying attention.” This section also includes comments from Wolfe, Kushner, and critic John Lahr about the Public, its mission, and the challenges of running an institution.

The camera moves from the New York City skyline to the streets of downtown Frankfort, Kentucky as Wolfe asks, “How did I get here? How did I get here from Frankfort, Kentucky?” Wolfe’s Southern roots are not revealed until near the conclusion of the documentary, when Wolfe returns home to reminisce about growing up in a segregated town. In interviews with Wolfe, his family, friends, and teachers, we see how the community—made up of these same people—nurtured and encouraged him.

Wolfe says that, ironically, growing up in a segregated town may have been the best thing for him. “I’m an extraordinarily arrogant person,” he admits, “and a lot of people think that my arrogance is based on what I’ve accomplished

in my career. But it’s not. It’s based on where I’m from and the fact that I was an adored child.”

The final segment takes us back to the *Bring In Da Noise* rehearsals, where Wolfe’s creative process is illuminated. The play has no script. Instead, as those who worked on it explain, it was created collaboratively. The program concludes as it began, with Wolfe reading from *The Colored Museum*.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Playwright and director George C. Wolfe was born in 1954 in Frankfort, Kentucky, the third of four children to Anna Wolfe, a teacher at the Rosenwald Laboratory School, which Wolfe later attended. His father, Costello, was a clerk in the Kentucky Department of Corrections. Wolfe says that growing up in Frankfort in the late ’50s and ’60s helped prepare him for the challenges he later faced—and overcame.

“Growing up in the time of segregation forced me to develop an inner strength that has served me well,” he says, recalling a time when he arrived at Frankfort’s Capital Theater to see *101 Dalmatians*, only to be turned away because he was black. “It was a profoundly significant thing in my life, to deny a child access to any place because of the way they look. So I was trained very early, you might say, as an integration warrior who was supposed to go in and invade institutions.”

Although neither of his parents was ever involved in the theater, for almost as far back as Wolfe can remember, he has been “obsessed with theater.” By the time he was 6, he was recruiting neighborhood children to star in his backyard productions. “I was always creating scenarios, creating plays,” Wolfe says, “and anytime I did a play with my friends, I was never in them. I was always telling them the scenario and having them act it out.”

In 1968, when Wolfe was 13, he spent the summer in New York City with his mother, who

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was completing her doctorate at New York University. It was a turning point in Wolfe’s life. “I went to see *Hello, Dolly!* with Pearl Bailey, and a revival of *West Side Story* at the Lincoln Center,” he recalls. “And it was like, ‘Oh, my God, people can actually make their living doing this? Got it! This is what I’m doing.’”

Later, as a student at Frankfort High School, Wolfe became president of the Drama Club. But more to the point, he was given the opportunity to direct several student productions. Then he enrolled at Kentucky State University, but left after a year because “you could only have a minor in theater there. Also, I could predict what the next four years were going to be, and anytime you can predict something, it’s time to leave.”

So he left, for Pomona College in Claremont, California, where, as an acting and design major, he found the more challenging environment—and the freedom—he was looking for. The faculty at Pomona, he says, “would aim not to tell you what theater is, but to ask the question: What is theater?” Not surprisingly, it was at Pomona that Wolfe tapped some deeper creative wellspring and wrote his first play, *Up for Grabs*, for which he won an American College Theater Festival award.

In 1979 Wolfe moved from Los Angeles to New York, where he “spent about three or four years in total obscurity and poverty.” He took a job teaching at City College and worked on a master’s degree in fine arts at NYU. While he was in school, he met Ira Weisman of Playwrights Horizon, who helped Wolfe mount a play he’d written.

That play, *Paradise*, bombed. But its production led to the opportunity to do another play Wolfe had written, *The Colored Museum*. It opened in 1986 at the Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey and was an immediate critical and popular success. *The Colored Museum* was subsequently staged in New York and London and at regional theaters across the country; PBS produced a version for television.

Following the success of *The Colored Museum*, Wolfe wrote the libretto for the Duke Ellington musical *Queenie Pie* and, in 1990, directed an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *The Caucasian Circle*. Also in 1990, he directed *Spunk*, which he adapted from three short stories by Harlem Renaissance author Zora Neale Hurston.

Then in 1992, *Jelly’s Last Jam*, which Wolfe wrote and directed, opened on Broadway. *New York Times* theater critic Frank Rich wrote: “Anyone who cares about the future of the American musical will want to see and welcome *Jelly’s Last Jam*.” It was, he added, “the most thrilling American play in years.” Later the same year, Wolfe was tapped to direct the New York production of Tony Kushner’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Angels in America*, for which Wolfe won a Tony Award.

In March of 1993, George C. Wolfe was elevated to one of the most prestigious positions in New York theater when he was named producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival and the Joseph Papp Public Theater, the position he holds today. To attract new and diverse audiences, he has scheduled a wide variety of works; during the 1995 season alone, Wolfe scheduled 13 productions. The documentary catches Wolfe at work directing *The Tempest* for the summer Shakespeare series in Central Park and putting together a new musical with Savion Glover—*Bring In Da Noise, Bring In Da Funk*. *Noise* opened to rave reviews and moved quickly to Broadway. In 1996, it brought Wolfe his second Tony for directing.

## Program Director:

PAUL WAGNER

Paul Wagner also directed the Ed McClanahan program for *Signature*.

Of directing a program on Wolfe, Wagner writes:

"George C. Wolfe can be intimidating. And making a film about George C. Wolfe can be intimidating. He is brilliant, sophisticated, and, as the Broadway producer Margo Lion points out, 'sufficiently arrogant.'

"After several trips to New York in the summer of 1995 to interview George and many of his colleagues, I think we had the makings of a solid, intelligent biographical documentary. But it was not until the winter of that year, when we filmed George and got to know him in his hometown of Frankfort, Kentucky, that we were privy to another, much deeper, perspective.

"Of course, most of the film is devoted to George's meteoric career on the New York stage. But the 'Kentucky section' of the film is the heart and soul of the story, and I have tried to ensure that this local perspective informs the rest of the film. So, when it came time to assemble and edit the interviews and scenes into a final film, it was my sense of George as 'just' a local kid that emboldened me to look at him, not as simply a remote celebrity to be honored with boring testimonials to his success, but as an artist and a man, struggling like all of us to create a body of work and a life of which he can be proud.

"During the production of the film, I was struck by the fact that most of George's colleagues in New York did not even know where he had grown up. To them he is a seminal writer, a Tony Award-winning director, a major force on the New York cultural scene. We had to return to Frankfort to understand that he is also an old friend from the neighborhood, a shy 4th grader, a beloved son."

## MAJOR WORKS

*The Colored Museum*, George C. Wolfe's 1986 breakthrough work, is a one-act play of 11 mostly unrelated, biting satirical vignettes (or "exhibits"), each of which explodes a cliché about black life or a convention of black theater. One segment, called "The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play," is a send-up of plays from the *A Raisin in the Sun* school. In another skit, "Symbiosis," a man literally trashes symbols of his black heritage—a copy of Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, a Sly and the Family Stone album—hoping that in the process he will become less ethnic, more generic.

Taken together, the "exhibits" of *The Colored Museum* constituted a counterattack against the would-be guardians of black culture, and it didn't go unnoticed. Some black critics were angered by Wolfe's willingness to parade the stereotypes, even if he had done so in order to re-examine them and, ultimately, subvert them. Some black actors refused to audition for the play, and a group of black writers tried to organize a boycott. But *The Colored Museum* was embraced by more mainstream critics and audiences alike. Later the same year it moved to the Public Theater in New York. And in 1991 PBS produced a version for television, which Wolfe co-directed.

Like *The Colored Museum*, Wolfe's next play, *Spunk*, played at the Crossroads Theatre before moving to the Public Theater in 1990. It premiered, however, in Los Angeles, at the Mark Taper Forum. Wolfe adapted *Spunk* from three short stories by Zora Neale Hurston—"Sweat," "Story in Harlem Slang," and "The Gilded Six-Bits"—and won an Obie for his direction. Frank Rich of the *New York Times* wrote that "the true spunk of *Spunk* belongs to Mr. Wolfe, who has gallantly met Zora Neale Hurston in the theatre on her own uncompromising terms and, better still, has found the imaginative means to make good on his half of so challenging a collaboration."

In April of 1992, *Jelly's Last Jam* opened on Broadway, catapulting Wolfe from the arty margins of the New York theater scene into its commercial mainstream. It was the first musical Wolfe had written and directed, and it was a critical success as well as a box-office smash. *Jelly's Last Jam* was nominated for 11 Tony Awards and won three.

The play chronicles the life of Jelly Roll Morton, the legendary New Orleans jazz musician. But while *Jelly* is ostensibly a rollicking musical, complete with high-octane choreography and a pounding boogie-woogie score, it is also a dark and troubling portrait of Morton. It characterizes the innovative band leader as a self-absorbed egomaniac and a black racist who loathed—and, while "passing" for white, even denied—his own African heritage.

Wolfe says he portrayed Morton as a racist not because he was—which is not to say he wasn't, either—but because it served the purpose of his play, which was to explore a kind of black consciousness that spurns black culture. But once again some black critics attacked Wolfe for appropriating an icon of African-American culture and turning it to his own purposes, while barely acknowledging Morton's singular musical gifts.

Although Wolfe was not the author of the next play he directed, it would be his biggest—and riskiest—production to date. Largely on the strength of his direction of *Jelly's Last Jam*, in 1992 Wolfe was selected to direct the Broadway production of *Millennium Approaches*, the first part of Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning epic, *Angels in America*.

It was risky for Wolfe because no African-American had ever directed a Broadway play written by a white playwright. But in many respects, Wolfe was ideally suited for *Angels in America*. Kushner's play occupies the fantastical regions of American myths and archetypes, which Wolfe had previously explored in *The Colored Museum*, *Spunk*, and *Jelly's Last Jam*. And, on a visual level, the daring, imaginative

direction for which Wolfe was known would perfectly complement Kushner's "Gay Fantasia on National Themes," as his play was subtitled.

*Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* opened on Broadway in the spring of 1993. It was a huge critical and popular success, and Wolfe won a Tony for his direction. That fall, Wolfe also directed *Perestroika*, the second half of *Angels*, which was similarly successful. One critic praised the "crystalline lucidity" of Wolfe's direction and described *Perestroika* as being "set at once in New York City in ... 1986 and on a timeless, celestial threshold of revelation."

Conceived and directed by Wolfe, *Bring In Da Noise, Bring In Da Funk* opened at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in November of 1995. In this revue chronicling the history of blacks in America through the development of tap dancing as an expressive act, Wolfe once again managed to personalize the most unlikely material. Most of the dance numbers are expressions of growth, portraying a movement away from the tightly circumscribed and toward freedom and self-determination—which could just as well describe Wolfe's own maturation as an artist. Writing in the *New York Times*, Ben Brantley said that in *Bring In Da Noise*, "tapping becomes as expressive of sorrow, exasperation and fierce anger as of freewheeling joy."

## GEORGE C. WOLFE: IN HIS OWN WORDS

"A lot of people think my arrogance is because of what I've accomplished in my career, but it's not," says Wolfe. "It's based on where I'm from and the fact that I was an adored child."

Wolfe is a controversial figure. As he and others reveal in the documentary, *The Colored Museum* was not universally admired, and certainly did not bring unanimous praise from the African-American community. "Black people acting like white people's version of black people—that's a certain kind of madness," says Wolfe. "I didn't invent black satire because it existed in Richard Pryor and every other faction, but in black theater, it wasn't a common phenomenon."

He doesn't skirt controversy at the Public either. He wants it to be a "theater of inclusion."

"I want to have the kind of plays in the Public where the whole building becomes a giant snapshot of where America is," he said in an interview for the *New York Times* in April 1995. "I pride myself on being available to as many people's stories as I possibly can."

"As a person of color, I was trained from very early on to see *Leave It to Beaver*, *Gilligan's Island*, or *Hamlet* and look beyond the specifics of it—whether it be silly white people on an island, or a family living in Nowheres, or a Danish person—to leap past the specifics and find the human truths that have to do with me. I'm interested: Is the reverse possible? Can people who are not of color leap past the specifics of who these people are and get inside the dynamic of who they are as individuals?"

As a playwright, Wolfe obviously writes for the ear as well. "I love language, but I write language for the theater because I love the totalness of it," he says.





## WRITING IDEAS



1. George C. Wolfe has shown us in his plays how ridiculous our stereotypes of one another are. Write a scene for two or three characters in which it becomes obvious how silly a particular stereotype is. Use humor and hyperbole to help make the point.
2. Wolfe has often been praised for his staging. His sets are meant to convey very particular emotions—by the objects he selects, by their arrangement, and by the way they are lit. Think of a place where something happened that produced strong feelings in you, and then write a description of that place that will reproduce those same feelings in someone else. What time of day was it? Were there certain smells in the air? What sounds could you hear? Remember: Don't mention those feelings by name.
3. George Wolfe has written: "Every time I return home, my parents know that I'm plotting to abscond with some prized family possession. Two Christmases ago, it was my grandfather's coat. Last spring it was one of my great-grandmother's quilts.... I can use all the ancestral protection I can get." What does he mean by "ancestral protection"? Are there family hand-me-downs or heirlooms that you feel so strongly about that you'd like to own them yourself? Why? Write a couple of paragraphs in which you try to explain your attachment to these objects.
4. Growing up in the segregated South was very important for him, Wolfe says, because it "forced me to develop an inner strength that has served me well." Think of a time when you overcame an obstacle

that once seemed insurmountable. Did overcoming it help you "develop an inner strength"? Write a scene for several characters that depicts your predicament and illustrates how you grew by confronting and overcoming it.

5. Different cultures have taken very different approaches to drama, and George Wolfe says that he's drawn upon those differences to make something new. Split your class into three or four groups and have each group study a different kind of drama (for instance, Japanese Kabuki theater, Indonesian shadow puppet plays, or classical Greek drama). Then have each group report back to the class about what they learned. Try to include examples in your report, either by acting out a scene, demonstrating a unique style of stage makeup, or constructing an unusual prop.

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 —Patrick Stewart

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# LEE SMITH



## PROGRAM SYNOPSIS

Growing up in the Appalachian mountains of southwestern Virginia, 9-year-old Lee Smith was already writing—and selling, for a nickel apiece—stories about her neighbors in the coal boomtown of Grundy, Virginia and the nearby isolated “hollers.” Since 1968, she has published nine novels, including *Fair and Tender Ladies*, *Oral History*, and *Saving Grace*, as well as two collections of short stories, and has received eight major writing awards. The sense of place infusing her novels reveals her insight into and empathy for the people and culture of Appalachia. This portrait examines her upbringing and its influence on her work and explores her development as a novelist and engaging storyteller, her approach to the process of writing, and her experience and significance as a teacher and mentor of “new” writers both young and old.

### Part 1

The program opens with a review of the “facts” of Lee Smith’s life, including a list of her books. In the first section, “Voice,” Smith reminisces about her childhood in the mountains as she tours Grundy, Virginia, her hometown. She felt like a “privileged observer,” she says, when watching folks in her father’s Ben Franklin store; the stories and voices she heard there would later find their way into her books.

One friend, scholar Lucinda MacKethan, describes Smith as a “speakerly writer” with a “strong sense of the oral,” a sense clearly evident in Smith’s readings from *Cakewalk* and *Oral History*. After a discussion of the “precariousness of life” and the changing role of women in the mountains, the segment concludes with Smith in front of the Grundy movie theater, “the repository of glamour,” talking about her early infatuation with the movies.

The biographical second segment, “Place,” focuses on Smith and her childhood in the mountains and explores her early need to “get

away” as well as her later need to return to her roots as she recognized that this “was my material.” Featured readings are from *Black Mountain Breakdown*, *The Devil’s Dream* (intercut with the Raleigh Ensemble Players performing a theatrical version of the same excerpt), and *Oral History*. This segment also includes comments by Hal Crowther, her husband; scholar Fred Hobson; and her children.

### Part 2

In “Teacher,” young writers in Chapel Hill and older adults such as Lou Crabtree and Florida Slone talk about Lee Smith the teacher. Crabtree, who didn’t start writing until late in life, says she didn’t know she was a writer until Lee brought it out of her and, nodding her head in disbelief, remarks on a resemblance some people have noticed between her and Ivy Rowe, the central character of *Fair and Tender Ladies*. Smith, in her turn, says she learns as much from her students as they from her. This section features Crabtree reading one of her poems, “Salvation,” and Smith reading an excerpt from *Fair and Tender Ladies*.

The final section, “Company,” focuses on Lee Smith as a Southern writer and examines the influences of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O’Connor on her work. It includes two readings from *Saving Grace* as well as a concluding reading from *Oral History*. This section also includes comments by scholars Fred Hobson and Lucinda MacKethan and Smith’s editor at Algonquin Press, Shannon Ravenel.



“ [Smith deals with] questions of sin and salvation in a way that invokes the spirit of Flannery O'Connor. ”

home narrative voice” that allowed her to write about the kind of people she’d known back home in Grundy, “without writing down to them.” She would expand on this more colloquial voice in all of her subsequent work.

Shortly after the publication of *Black Mountain Breakdown*, Smith published *Cakewalk* (1981), her first collection of short stories. It was also about this time that her marriage broke up, and she accepted a teaching job at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, where she lives today. In 1983 her fifth novel, *Oral History*, became a Book-of-the-Month Club featured selection, exposing Smith for the first time to a wide national audience. Then in 1985 she published *Family Linen* and married journalist Hal Crowther, to whom she dedicated the new book.

Since then, Smith has published *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988) and *Me and My Baby View the Eclipse* (1990), her second book of short stories. In 1992 she published *The Devil’s Dream*, a generational saga about a family of country musicians; in 1995 her ninth novel, *Saving Grace*; and in 1996 the novella *The Christmas Letters*, her 11th work of fiction.

## MAJOR WORKS

*Black Mountain Breakdown* was Lee Smith’s fourth novel, but it was her first set in the mountains of Appalachia—in Black Rock, a fictional coal-mining town very much like Grundy. It is the story of Crystal Spengler’s fall from innocence, as well as an object lesson in the perils of passivity—a turn of disposition, Smith says, to which many Southern women are particularly susceptible.

The novel traces the arc of Crystal’s evolution from a romantic, daydreaming girl of 12 to an hysterically catatonic woman of 32. *Black Mountain Breakdown* was not only a much darker book than Smith’s previous novels, but also a more mature novel; one critic praised her for “new dimensions in vision as well as new stylistic and technical mastery.”

Her next novel, *Oral History* (1983), remains one of her most ambitious. She uses multiple points of view to tell the story of the Cantrell family, a story that spans the better part of a century. The Cantrells are a mountain family who inhabit the hills and environs of Hoot Owl Holler. Jennifer, a citified descendant of the Cantrells, arrives to record an “oral history” of her family for a college course, and all the old stories unscroll. But *Oral History* is finally the story of Dory, a lovely and enigmatic woman who the many narrators attempt—through the telling of her story—to understand. In the end, however, Dory remains a mystery.

Smith says that’s because “no matter who’s telling the story, it is always the teller’s tale, and you never finally know exactly the way it was. I guess I see some sort of central mystery at the center of the past, of any past, that you can’t, no matter what a good attempt you make at understanding how it was, you never can quite get at it.” On this basis, and in reference to *Oral History*, a reviewer for the *Village Voice* wrote that “you could make comparisons to Faulkner and Carson McCullers, to *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Wuthering Heights*.”

*Family Linen* (1985), another multi-generational mystery, continued and expanded upon some of the themes and techniques Smith began working with in *Oral History*. This time around, though, the mystery is a more conventional one, at least on its surface: Did Sybill Hess long ago witness the murder of her father, or is it a trick of memory? Did her mother really take an axe to him and dump his body in a backyard well? To answer these questions, Smith again uses multiple points of view; but, of course, instead of clearing up the matter, *Family Linen's* irreconcilable narratives succeed only in raising more—and more profound—questions.

Among her most devoted readers, *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988) is probably Smith's most beloved book; Smith says she knows of at least four babies named for the novel's indomitable heroine, Ivy Rowe. This epistolary novel chronicles the life of Ivy, a tenacious mountain woman who remains cussedly dedicated to the ideal of perseverance, despite the many formidable obstacles she faces. It is considered by many to be Smith's most fully realized and artistically successful work. In 1995, a reviewer wrote that in *Fair and Tender Ladies*, Smith seemed to be "working toward [an] elemental and profound grasp of emotions and storytelling."

In 1990 Lee Smith won a Lyndhurst Prize to study country music, and her research resulted in *The Devil's Dream* (1992), yet another multi-generational family saga. The story of the musical Bailey family (loosely based, Smith says, on the legendary Carter family), it plumbs nearly a century's worth of history to tell the story of the family's most successful descendant, Katie Cocker, whose career flourishes once she hits Nashville.

But *The Devil's Dream* is really concerned with the problem of success, which, for Katie—as well as for other country musicians and perhaps for all of us—carries within it the genesis of failure. "What you want, of course, is to be successful," Smith says. "You're always singing

of home, but you're never home. And there's something about that—I think I feel like that about a lot of things, this intense ambivalence."

*Saving Grace* (1995) is the story of Florida Grace Shepherd, the 11th child of a traveling evangelist who takes up serpents and gulps strychnine to confirm his faith. But her father's religion terrifies Grace, who says, "I loved Daddy and Momma, but I did not love Jesus"—and that's only one of the many kinds of exile she endures. Like other of Smith's heroines, Grace is cut off not just from Jesus but from herself, too, and every decision she makes, everything she yearns for, comes to seem like a betrayal of one sort or another. One reviewer wrote that *Saving Grace* deals with "questions of sin and salvation in a way that invokes the spirit of Flannery O'Connor."

Smith's most recent work, *The Christmas Letters* (1996), returns to the epistolary style of *Fair and Tender Ladies*. The novella opens with Birdie Pickett writing to her mother and sister about life on a North Carolina farm in 1944. In parts 2 and 3, Birdie's daughter and granddaughter continue the letter-writing tradition that spans and links the three generations. The focus shifts from Birdie to her daughter Mary and her life as a new mother, later as a woman whose marriage has turned sour, and finally as a Peace Corps volunteer.



# Program Director:

TOM THURMAN

“Lee Smith” was directed by Tom Thurman, a native of Christiansburg, Kentucky who received his B.A. from Centre College and his M.A. from the University of Kentucky. He has taught English and film studies at Tulane University, the University of New Orleans, and Berea College. *Across the Border*, his documentary profile of character actor Warren Oates, has been screened at more than 30 film festivals worldwide, including festivals in London, Munich, Sydney, and Washington, D.C.’s Kennedy Center; won the “Best Documentary” prize at the 1992 New Orleans Film Festival; and received positive reviews in *Variety* and *Premiere*. *Guilty as Charged*, his portrait of Southern novelist Harry Crews, was screened widely at festivals in Europe and Asia, including the Singapore and Bombay International Film Festivals.

About the “Lee Smith” documentary, Thurman writes:

“Sense of place” is a term that is thrown about very casually, yet Lee gave me the perfect vehicle for exploring the connections between environment and art in some depth. She’s a girl from the mountains of Virginia, after all, and she’s more than willing to acknowledge the relationship between her upbringing and her fiction. In order to live her own life she had to get away from Grundy, and in order to write truthfully she had to return there in her work. Like most artists’, her life and work mix memory and desire, and since she cannot return to a place that no longer exists, she creates it with pen and paper. That’s something from which we can all learn.

“Having Lee Smith as a subject also allowed me the perfect opportunity to explode so many myths, however unfair or inaccurate, we still have about writers. No one can accuse Lee Smith of being isolated, distant, detached, or inaccessible. That dog won’t hunt. The depth and complexity of her work is easy to forget when faced with her warm, almost bubbly exterior, and it is that unusual combination that I think the viewers will find intriguing and is something I tried to capture.”

## LEE SMITH: IN HER OWN WORDS

The “Lee Smith” documentary is really the story of how Smith, like many writers, needed to get away from the small town of her childhood in order to find her way back. The mountains are beautiful, she says, “but they also pen you in.” In an op-ed article for the *New York Times*, Smith wrote, “At the time I was growing up, everybody I knew in Appalachia felt that culture was somewhere else: in Europe, in New York City or in Richmond. Culture was a long, long way from where we were.”

“I really felt like in order to be myself I had to somehow get away. But once I left, I realized that those people that I had talked to and heard their stories growing up ... were probably the best stories I would ever hear and the most interesting people I would ever meet,” she says in the documentary. In the *Times* article, Smith went further to describe those stories as “spoken in the most picturesque and precise language I would ever hear, Appalachian English.”

Smith is described as a “speakerly writer” with a strong sense of the oral. “When I’m writing, I always think of somebody speaking aloud, or reading the story aloud,” she says. “I think of listeners rather than readers, and the story as a transaction between two people—me and the reader.” Her ear for the language of her characters makes the story ring true for the reader and gives her work its authenticity.

This love of the oral tradition and Appalachia and its people (and the help of a Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Writers’ Award) brings Smith back to the mountains several weeks each year to work with the Hindman Settlement School in Hindman, Kentucky and the students attending its adult learning center. “My work in this brick building has helped me remember the enormous sense of empowerment that comes with mastering written language.”

Lou Crabtree, an older Virginia lady who

had been writing all her life but didn’t “know” she was a writer until Smith encouraged her, also reminded Smith of the importance of the writing itself. In *Fair and Tender Ladies*, Smith says, Ivy Rowe can burn her letters in the end because it’s not the letters that matter: “It’s the writing that signifies.”



## WRITING IDEAS

1. Critics have praised Lee Smith for her vivid descriptions of life in small towns of the South. Make a list of all the things you can think of that make the place where you live like no other. Avoid abstractions (“beautiful scenery,” “nice people”); be as concrete and specific as possible (“soaring palisades rise on either side of the river,” “old men sit on a bench in front of Carson’s Drug Store, laughing and gossiping”).
2. In several of her novels, Smith allows several narrators to tell the same story. Of course the story changes, depending on who’s doing the telling. Ask several family members to tell a story about your family, a story they all know well. Compare the different versions. *How* do they differ? *Why* do you think they differ? Discuss the results of this experiment in class. Then try writing the story from the various viewpoints you’ve collected.
3. The best writing comes from writing about something you love. Lee Smith grew up listening to bluegrass and country music; later she made a more formal study of the music, and the result was *The Devil’s Dream*, a novel about a family of musicians. Try writing a story that incorporates something about which you are passionate, whether it’s fishing, rollerblading, physics, or stamp collecting.

4. Lee Smith is known for her use of humor. Her very first story, written when she was a child, was about Adlai Stevenson (a politician) and Jane Russell (an actress) running away to Utah to become Mormons. Today, that would be like writing a story about Newt Gingrich and Sharon Stone running away to Tibet to become Buddhist monks. Try writing a humorous story about well-known people doing something that is extremely unlikely. Of course it will be unbelievable—but try to make it as believable as you can, too, because that's what will make it funny.
5. Try keeping a journal. Don't simply list the day's events, like listings in the *TV Guide*. Write only about the day's most important event or moment. Write about it in detail—and, again, avoid abstraction and be concrete and specific.

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“ In order to live her own life she had to get away from Grundy, and in order to write truthfully she had to return there in her work . . . [but] since she cannot return to a place that no longer exists, she creates it with pen and paper. ”

—Tom Thurman

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# BARBARA KINGSOLVER

## PROGRAM SYNOPSIS

Just as the lead character in her first novel, *The Bean Trees*, left her small Kentucky hometown for adventure out West, so did Barbara Kingsolver leave Carlisle, Kentucky to settle in Arizona, where she has written three critically acclaimed novels, a book of poetry, a collection of short stories, a nonfiction book about women involved in an Arizona mine strike, and a collection of essays. The *Washington Post* remarked on the political and social causes woven through Kingsolver's writing: "[She] writes with a specific agenda: the environment, refugees from Central and South America, the treatment of Native American women, child abuse, and the working poor." This portrait examines how these causes inform her work. "When I see something that makes me angry, my impulse is to act to change it. That's why I write the kind of books I do."

### Part 1

Kingsolver's childhood and adolescence in rural Kentucky are the focus of the first six segments—"Love and Heartbreak," "One Among Many," "Great Expectations," "Everybody Knows You," "Afrique," and "The Thing That Happens to Teenage Girls." Kingsolver, family members, and friends reminisce about these years and her budding interest in the environment, music, and writing. "One Among Many" includes a reading from "The Memory Place."

A turning point in her life, says Kingsolver, is when her family went to live in Central Africa when she was 7. In "The Thing That Happens to Teenage Girls," Kingsolver reflects on how this experience affected her as well as what it meant to be a girl growing up in the '60s.

"Far Away & Exotic" follows Kingsolver to DePauw University in Indiana. There she suffered from a syndrome she says "all Southerners suffer when they go north, which is that I was considered quaint." The segment concludes with her experiences in Europe.

"Western Auto" picks up with her return to the United States and her cross-country automobile journey to Tucson, Arizona, "following the great tradition of the settling of the American West, which was about people leaving their identities behind." In this segment, Kingsolver talks about Tucson, her early years in the West, the birth of her daughter, and her involvement in such issues as protecting the environment and protesting the country's policies toward Latin and South America. This segment also includes comments from a political refugee, Rebeca Cartes, and the reading of a poem from *Another America*.

In "Turning on a Dime," Kingsolver talks about her realization that she was a writer. She began as a scientific writer for the University of Arizona; moved to writing freelance features on women's issues, fine arts, and public policy; and finally published her first literary work—the story "Rose-Johnny" in the *Virginia Quarterly*.

To conclude Part 1, "32 Years & Nine Months" tells the story of the writing and publication of her first novel, *The Bean Trees*, and includes critical reaction to and a reading from the novel. The section ends with Kingsolver talking about stretching her voice in writing the book of stories *Homeland*.

### Part 2

The next two segments—"Striking Women," and "Begin with a Question"—deal with the two books that followed *Homeland*: *Holding the Line* and *Animal Dreams*. Kingsolver discusses what she writes about, the questions and issues she wants to explore in her work. The segment ends with a discussion about politics and art. Novelist Amy Tan says that "a novel is a wonderful form for somebody who's political"; Kingsolver says, "I'm a political writer. I make no bones about it."

Early in the next segment, "Messing with the Sacred," Kingsolver reads an excerpt from *Pigs in Heaven* and talks about how she approached that novel, from her use of the omni-





scient narrator to the issues surrounding the adoption of Native children. Amy Tan and her former editor, Janet Goldstein, also comment. Although Kingsolver is surprised again and again by the popularity of her novels, she and others were truly unprepared for the success of her next book, a collection of essays titled *High Tide in Tucson* that made it onto the bestseller list. In “Dropping the Mask,” Kingsolver discusses the differences between the two forms—fiction and nonfiction.

“Unexpected Gifts” begins with Kingsolver’s daughter talking about being confused with the fictional Turtle and the writer discussing fame while showing a sampling of the gifts and comments she has received from both fans and critics. This is followed by a brief look at Kingsolver as a member of a rock ’n’ roll band of fellow writers and the story of how she and her husband met. In “Back to Africa,” she talks about the new novel she’s working on, *The Poisonwood Bible*.

The program concludes with “Thriving in the Desert,” in which Kingsolver and her family reflect upon their life in Tucson and she reads a selection from *High Tide in Tucson*.

## ABOUT THE WRITER

By the time she was 8 years old, novelist, short story writer, and essayist Barbara Kingsolver had already started keeping journals. She filled “drawers and drawers” with them, and yet she never thought she’d be a writer.

“I couldn’t imagine that I would be a writer when I grew up,” Kingsolver says, “because nobody but old dead men—you know, like Charles Dickens—did that. It took me a long time to take seriously the artist in me, the writer in me.”

Kingsolver was born in Annapolis, Maryland in 1955, but was raised in Carlisle, Kentucky, a small Southern town of 1,600 people. Actually, the Kingsolvers didn’t even live in Carlisle proper, but “out in the country, in the middle of an alfalfa field.” Given that out-of-the-way setting, it’s not very surprising to learn that Kingsolver’s childhood was a rather solitary one, which she now recalls as a lonely time in her life. But she also recalls it with affection and notes that the time she spent by herself helped to stimulate an “elaborate life of the mind”—a quality that would prove useful later on.

A gawky beanpole of a girl, more interested in her intellectual life than her social life, Kingsolver found high school an especially trying time. It didn’t help that she found her school work unchallenging. “I always did feel like a fish out of water,” she says.

After high school, she left Carlisle for Depauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. She attended on a music scholarship and studied classical piano; but eventually, she says, “it kind of dawned on me that classical pianists compete for six job openings a year, and the rest of us get to play ‘Blue Moon’ in a hotel lobby.” In an attempt to be more practical, she changed her major to biology.

After graduating from Depauw, and hoping again to expand her range of experiences and options, Kingsolver left for Europe. With very little money, she traveled the continent and

“ [Barbara Kingsolver] writes with a specific agenda: the environment, refugees from Central and South America, the treatment of Native American women, child abuse, and the working poor. ”

took whatever work she could find. Mostly she worked on archaeological digs, but she did some translating, too. Her work visa eventually became more and more difficult to renew, and she knew she was going to have to figure out some new course. More or less on a whim, she decided to move to Arizona.

“I’d never seen the Southwest,” she says, “and I had this romantic notion that it would be a good place for a maverick who didn’t know what she wanted to be when she grew up. I thought I might stay for a week or two, and it’s been 13 years.”

Kingsolver worked as a laboratory assistant and later enrolled as a graduate student in biology at the University of Arizona. For a time she studied the social life of termites. She finished an M.S. degree but then, disillusioned with academia, left the Ph.D. program and took a job as a science writer for the university.

The science writing led to some freelance feature writing, and, after a time, the feature writing allowed her to quit her job as a science writer. Although she had written fiction and poetry for years, she showed her work to no one. With more time on her hands, she began writing in earnest, taking a creative writing course and struggling to find her voice. Her creative writing teacher gave her a copy of Bobbie Ann Mason’s *Shiloh and Other Stories*, which helped. Finally she screwed up enough courage to enter a short story contest—and she won. “1983. That was the year that I wrote in block letters in my journal, I AM A WRITER. And I felt this great relief, you know, that I’d found an identity that felt true and honest.”

Her first published story, “Rose-Johnny,” appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly* in 1987 (and was later collected in *Homeland*). Her first novel, *The Bean Trees*, was published in 1988. She wrote it during a period of chronic insomnia that accompanied her first pregnancy. And not coincidentally, it is about a young woman making the move from Kentucky to Arizona, trying to find her place in the world.

“It’s taken me a long while to understand, really, what I am and who I am,” Kingsolver says. “I had to realize that I’m very much formed by living in a small town, and that the things I value most have to do with community, and the ways that people know each other in a rural place, and the way they depend on each other.”

## MAJOR WORKS

*The Bean Trees* (1988), Barbara Kingsolver’s first novel, is the story of Taylor Greer’s journey across America, from Kentucky to Arizona, and from dependence to independence and finally interdependence. That theme of connectedness—to others, to the land, and to the past—is one that Kingsolver has continued to explore in all her subsequent work.

Shortly after graduating from high school, 18-year-old Taylor leaves Kentucky in her 1955 Volkswagen Beetle, intending to “drive west until my car stopped running, and there I’d stay.” Which she does, but not without a serious complication along the way: In Oklahoma, while Taylor is away from her car, someone deposits a 2-year-old Cherokee girl in it. So now Taylor, who has so assiduously avoided teenage motherhood—unlike many of her classmates back home—is now a *de facto* mother after all.

Taylor and the little girl—who remains silent and whom Taylor names Turtle because of the way the girl clings to her—wend their way through the Southwest toward Tucson, where Taylor’s car finally gives out. And it is in Tucson that Taylor and Turtle find their place in an extended, *ad hoc* family that includes Mattie, the proprietress of Jesus Is Lord Used Tires; Lou Ann, another Kentuckian in exile, whose husband has abandoned her in Arizona; a pair of elderly women, one of whom is blind; and a Guatemalan couple who are refugees from a tragic past. What they all discover is that bound to one another, they become much more than just the sum of their parts.

# Program Director:

GUY MENDES

Guy Mendes not only directed “Barbara Kingsolver,” but is also the producer for the entire *Signature* series. About his approach to Barbara Kingsolver, Mendes says:

“Having served as producer on the first five *Signature* programs, I approached the prospect of directing the Barbara Kingsolver program with both delight and dread. I felt a certain amount of pressure to make the Kingsolver program measure up. It just had to have the warmth and grace and love for one’s homeplace so evident in ‘Bobbie Ann Mason’ and ‘Lee Smith.’ It had to have the humor and poignancy and the attention to craft that infuse ‘Ed McClanahan.’ And it had to be as provocative and politically charged as ‘George C. Wolfe’ and ‘Marsha Norman.’

“To make matters worse, my subject told me almost at the outset, two years ago, that she was tired of thinking and talking about herself (she’d just finished a book of essays on her life and work, and she had been the subject of a segment on CBS’s *Sunday Morning*). ‘My life isn’t very interesting,’ she said. She wanted to cut bait and run.

“But I persisted in my pursuit. And a year and a half and two new babies—hers and mine—later, we finally scheduled interviews in Virginia, Kentucky, and Arizona.

“I needn’t have worried; I couldn’t have asked for a more interesting subject. Like my friend and mentor Wendell Berry, Barbara Kingsolver is a person of strong principles, someone whose life and work are predicated upon a desire for peace, justice, concern for the environment, and a passionate belief that we must make the world a better place for our children. And like my old teacher, she is not simply an ideologue or polemicist, but a masterful storyteller whose words have a way of taking us out of ourselves into other worlds—which, to me, is what art is all about.

“After finally securing a mountain of tapes and transcripts to root through, I found myself in an enviable position for someone who is a photographer in his parallel private life: I had a wealth of imagery from two spectacular landscapes, the rolling verdant hills of Kentucky and the sun-washed, saguaro-studded desert valley around Tucson. Suddenly I had the chance once again to do what film and video can do that no other medium can: to tell a story in words *and* pictures.”

In *Animal Dreams* (1990), Kingsolver continued to explore the theme of our desire for both autonomy and community, which seem to be competing needs—a gain for one is a loss for the other. But, as in all of her fiction, Kingsolver seeks to find a way around that zero-sum paradigm, to reconcile the two and bring them into harmony.

Codi Noline, narrator and heroine of *Animal Dreams*, feels a deadening emptiness at the center of her life, in part because of her inability to form lasting relationships and maintain long-term commitments. It doesn’t help that her sister Hallie seems to thrive on deep and enduring commitments, with the unintended side effect of highlighting Codi’s own fecklessness. So, floundering in love as in life, alone and uncertain of where to turn, Codi heads to her tiny hometown of Grace, Arizona. There she finds the spirit of community and purpose that will give her life meaning and shape. One critic called *Animal Dreams* “an affirmation of our capacity for intimacy and heroism.”

*Pigs in Heaven* (1993) reintroduces us to Taylor Greer and her adopted daughter, Turtle, of *The Bean Trees*. This time around it’s Taylor’s right to parent Turtle—whom Taylor has adopted—that is challenged, by the Cherokee tribe to which Turtle was born. Once again the dramatic tension lies at the intersection of self-determination and communal responsibility.

In addition to her fiction, Kingsolver uses both essays (*Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*, 1989) and poetry (*Another America*, 1992) to continue her exploration of themes important to her: the misuses of power, the struggle for justice, and the need to survive with dignity. Each poem in *Another America* is based on a true incident, and most stem from her concern with the United States’ intervention into Central and South American affairs. The poems are printed in both Spanish and English.

Kingsolver’s most recent book, a collection of essays entitled *High Tide in Tucson* (1995),

enlarges on the same themes found in her fiction. For instance, in one essay she argues for extended, non-nuclear families, much like the families her fictional characters tend to gravitate toward—and much like the average American family before World War II. In others, she makes passionate pleas for the environment and for accepting our place in it, which is a secondary theme in all her fiction, too.

One reviewer wrote that Kingsolver’s style is an outgrowth of “the high-functioning brain and well-tuned gut of a whole, particular person in her own particular life, a flesh-and-blood woman wearing cowboy boots, suffering from insomnia and struggling to find the patience not to insist that her 5-year-old daughter mind all the time.”

## BARBARA KINGSOLVER: IN HER OWN WORDS

This program opens with shots of the mountains that surround Tucson, Arizona and the animals and centuries-old cacti that make the desert their home. This is where Barbara Kingsolver lives and writes, but inevitably her years growing up in Carlisle, Kentucky find their way into her writing. In recalling how she took an early short story and turned it into a book, she says: “I took the character from Kentucky, drove her across the country to Tucson, had her accidentally pick up an orphaned baby along the way so I had a plot, and that became *The Bean Trees*, my first novel. I could set it in Tucson, but I had to tell that story about community in a voice with a Kentucky accent.”

Her memories of growing up in the rural South are a mix of good and bad. “The other important thing about rural and small-town life is that everybody knows you,” she says. “People know you better than you know yourself. You live out your days within a body of presumed common knowledge. If you ask somebody for directions, you don’t get a map, you get a story:

‘Well, you go down there to where the church burned down and you turn up and follow that road as far as the old Earlywine place and then you take that road where they used to be a store and go on down, you can’t miss it.’ Story is what holds people together, and it’s how they set themselves apart from their neighbors.”

But Kingsolver warns against romanticizing small-town life, remembering that her hometown was racially segregated in the 1960s.

“Kentucky is a place where you can’t help seeing the difference between the haves and the have-nots. It’s a place that tends to breed firebrands—but with an overlay of Southern kindness. So it’s not Abbie Hoffman and Angela Davis, it’s a more soft-spoken type, Harriette Arnow and Robert Penn Warren and Wendell Berry. I guess you could say Kentucky breeds polite firebrands.”

Whether or not Kingsolver would put herself into Arnow’s, Warren’s, or Berry’s company, she does call herself a political writer. In an address delivered at the 1993 American Booksellers Association Convention, Kingsolver talked about her view of a writer’s job:

“We have to find a way of getting across those truths that are too huge and maybe too terrible to say in simple language. Truths like, ‘If we don’t pay attention to how we’re wasting resources and fouling our habitat, our grandchildren will not get to live out their natural lives.’ Or truths like, ‘Every single minute in this country, a child dies because of poverty.’ Or, ‘If we don’t learn to listen to each other, we’ll all go to hell in a handbasket....”

“What the writer has to do is find a way to carve those enormous truths down to the size of the personal, to the size of individual reality, something that can fit inside a heart. The amazing power of fiction is that it can do that. It can create empathy. As a reader of fiction, you leave your own life for a while and allow someone else to move in, to inhabit your heart and your skin.”

Later in that same speech, Kingsolver elabo-

rated: “I believe the creation of empathy is a political act. The ability to understand and really feel for people who are different from ourselves—that’s a world-changing event. It’s the antidote to bigotry and spiritual meanness, and all the terrible things those deficiencies lead us into. That is why I feel lucky to get to do what I do: I get a little shot at changing the world.”



## WRITING IDEAS

1. Barbara Kingsolver says it’s wrong to assume that fiction is autobiography—“I think it’s selling the artist short on imagination.” On the other hand, the writer has to use what he or she knows best as a basis for fiction. Try writing about an incident that produced a strong emotional response in you. But here’s the catch: Give it a different, but believable, ending.
2. Now try writing about that same incident again. Only this time write about it from someone else’s point of view—someone who was as affected as you were by the incident, but in a very different way.
3. Barbara Kingsolver says that she was a solitary teenager, but that she “had an excellent education in wallflowerhood. You learn more about people that way.” Go sit quietly in some public place—the mall, or a bus stop downtown—and watch and listen to the people around you. Then use some of what you observed to start a story. You might start with a specific line of conversation you overheard.



“ [Kingsolver's style reflects] the high-functioning brain and well-tuned gut of a whole, particular person in her own particular life, a flesh-and-blood woman wearing cowboy boots, suffering from insomnia and struggling to find the patience not to insist that her 5-year-old daughter mind all the time. ”

4. In *The Bean Trees*, Taylor Greer tells us that she took her name from Taylorsville, a town where she ran out of gasoline. Look at the town names on a map of your state and make up several characters' names from the town names on the map (like Morehead Sharkey or Verona Crittendon). Then write a short description of each of your characters, thinking about what kind of person that name sounds like. For instance, doesn't Morehead Sharkey sound like a wiseguy, a bit of a troublemaker?
5. In *Heart of the Land*, a publication of the Nature Conservancy, Kingsolver has an essay entitled "The Memory Place," in which she advances an argument for the preservation of land that is less than pristine, even—to one degree or another—already despoiled. For her argument, she uses the example of Horse Lick Creek, which runs through Jackson County, Kentucky. Think of a place you would like to see preserved or returned to its original state. Then write a descriptive essay designed to convince someone else that the place is worth saving.
6. Kingsolver describes herself as a political writer and uses fiction as a way to explore the issues that concern her. What issues do you feel strongly about? In your journal, brainstorm ideas for a story and characters you could use to explore an issue of your choice. You could, for example, take the place you described in the previous writing suggestion and make it the setting for a story that will make your reader want to preserve it. If you decide to draft a story based on a particularly promising idea, the challenge will be to create a good story as well as make your case.

## BARBARA KINGSOLVER READING LIST

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*Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*. IRL Press, 1989. (nonfiction)  
*Homeland and Other Stories*. Harper & Row, 1989. (stories)  
*Animal Dreams*. HarperCollins, 1990. (novel)  
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