



A DEVELOPMENT TREATMENT

# The Stories We Carry

*Memory, belonging, and imagination on Noepe, Martha's Vineyard.*

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Written by Nicole Yarde

50-MINUTE DOCUMENTARY

*On an island that has been Wampanoag homeland for ten thousand years and a refuge for Black America for more than a century, a small museum named for the butterfly asks what we owe the stories we inherit, and what we are still free to imagine.*

#### THE CENTRAL QUESTION

**What do we owe the stories we inherit?**

#### THE PREMISE

Inside that meeting place is a community that was nearly erased and then recovered, and a museum that has become the room where strangers learn to see one another.

#### THESIS

Through three histories that share one island (the Wampanoag people, the African American community of Oak Bluffs, and the Mariposa Museum), the film traces how stories, language, and acts of imagination are carried across generations. Rooted in continuity, refuge, and joy, it asks what a community chooses to preserve, what it refuses to lose, and what it passes forward. It lands on stewardship: the responsibility that arrives with a story once you have received it.

### The Film at a Glance

#### FORMAT

50-minute documentary

#### STAGE

Development treatment

#### BUILT FOR

The Mariposa gallery, on a loop

#### SETTING

Oak Bluffs & Aquinnah,  
Martha's Vineyard

#### THEMES

*Memory · Belonging ·  
Imagination*

#### THREE COMMUNITIES

Wampanoag People · Black Oak  
Bluffs · Mariposa Museum

#### CENTRAL QUESTION

*What do we owe the stories we  
inherit?*

# One Island, Three Inheritances

The film moves through one island and three inheritances. It opens before the island had its English name, when this was Noepe, home to the Wampanoag for ten thousand years, and stays with a culture-bearer whose language and hands carry that continuity into the present. It crosses into the nineteenth century, when a New Bedford physician leased a campground tent and a community of color took root in Oak Bluffs: the Shearer inn, the porches, the dawn swims at the Inkwell, the writers and the gatherings. Then it names the harder fact,

that the same campground pushed those families out, and that their story was nearly erased within a few decades. The last movement is recovery. Historians, families, the Aquinnah Cultural Center, and the Mariposa Museum each keep some part of the record alive, and the film settles inside the museum, where a visitor stands before a stranger's portrait and walks back onto the street seeing differently. It ends without narration, on a child taking up a brush, the inheritance passing to a hand that has not yet decided what to do with it.



*People & Places of Oak Bluffs: the recovered record of the island's first community of color, from the Shearer Cottage archive.*

# The Shape of the Film

*A cold open and three acts, fifty minutes from first light to an open door.*

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## COLD OPEN

≈ 2 MIN

### Before the Name

First light on the water, sound before speech, the cliffs and a butterfly and a child at the waterline. One line of narration poses the question the whole film answers: what do we owe the stories we inherit?

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## ACT ONE

*Memory*

≈ 14 MIN

### The First Light

We begin in abundance, not injury. Noepe as Wampanoag homeland for ten thousand years, the Moshup tradition, the Aquinnah Cliffs, a child learning the old words. Survival itself is framed as an act of imagination, carried unbroken to federal recognition in 1987. Then the second arrival, met as possibility: the first documented community of color takes root in the Oak Bluffs campground, Black and Wampanoag families a few streets apart. The act holds them as hinges where two histories meet without dissolving into one. They braid, and they remain distinct and sovereign.

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## ACT TWO

*Belonging*

≈ 18 MIN

### The Haven & the Forgetting

Again we open in joy, because joy is the reason people came: the Shearer inn, the Highlands, the Inkwell dawn swim, the Cottagers, the writers on their porches. Then the turn. By the 1880s the campground had begun pushing out its tenants of color, and the island's first documented community of color was largely erased from memory for decades. This is the film's central hinge: a refuge that was real, then deleted, then recovered in our own time, with the present pressure of cost and access named honestly.

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## ACT THREE

*Imagination*

≈ 16 MIN

### The Keeper

Recovery as an action: historians, families, the Heritage Trail, and the Aquinnah Cultural Center. Into this arrives the Mariposa Museum, named for the butterfly, which opened in Oak Bluffs in 2019. The film slows and stays inside the gallery, where the museum's real work becomes visible, larger than preservation or instruction: it is practice, the place where people learn to see one another. One encounter with a single portrait shows recognition turning into stewardship. The close is small: the culture-bearer's hands, the artist's hands, a child's hands, the brush passed forward, the open door and the water, and no voice over the top of it.

# One Question, Three Fields

## THE ONE QUESTION

| *What do we owe the stories we inherit?*

The film pursues that single question across three communities and three fields of inquiry: how a people decides what to carry forward, and what responsibility a keeper holds toward what was nearly lost. Each act is grounded in a distinct body of humanities scholarship, and the connective thread is the study of cultural memory and stewardship.

**I** ACT ONE · MEMORY  
Indigenous sovereignty, Wampanoag language revitalization, cultural continuity, and place-based knowledge.

**II** ACT TWO · BELONGING  
Black leisure, joy, and geography, refuge and exclusion in the Green Book era, public history, and the recovery of erased community memory.

**III** ACT THREE · IMAGINATION  
African diaspora visual culture, museum studies and the museum as a civic and contact space, public memory, and cultural stewardship.



# How the Film Looks & Sounds

The film is built first for the Mariposa gallery, where it runs on a loop and most viewers arrive partway through, so the act breaks are clean and self-announcing and the first ninety seconds work on image and sound alone. It is shot in available light and favors the early hours, when the water and the cliffs do the work. Natural sound comes before words throughout: tide, beach grass, a screen door, footsteps on a gallery floor, the breath before someone speaks.

Wópanâak is spoken and, with the consent of Wampanoag language partners, left untranslated, because some inheritances are meant to be witnessed before they are explained. Point of view belongs to the Visitor, an unnamed presence the camera sometimes follows and sometimes becomes, so that any viewer in the room can feel addressed.

## FOUR IMAGES RECUR AND BIND THE ACTS



### *i* First light on the water

*where each act begins*



### *ii* A single butterfly

*transformation, return*



### *iii* A pair of hands, making

*the work passed forward*



### *iv* A child at the waterline

*in a class, into the water, at the table*

## A NOTE ON TRUTH & ACCESS

Every historical detail is drawn from the documentary record. The central subjects are composites at this stage, labeled as such, to be replaced and confirmed with real, consenting participants and reviewed by Wampanoag and Black community partners before any narration is locked.

Claims that live as local lore are framed as lore. No real person's words are invented.

*What do we owe the stories we inherit?*



*The island keeps its stories the way it keeps the tide:  
returning them, generation after generation, to those  
willing to carry them forward.*

*What do we owe the stories we inherit?*

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

*BlackRewrite*

*Written by Nicole Yarde*

BLACK REWRITE