

Primary Characters

Young Bertha / Young Sr. Thea Bowman—Sings and Dances

- Age Range: 18 - 25 (African American)
- Description: The teenage and early-adult version of Thea Bowman. Intelligent, idealistic, and fiery, she dreams of becoming a nun and dedicating her life to teaching. Her journey captures the challenges of faith, identity, and race as she grows into her vocation.
- Role Function: Represents Thea's formative years and spiritual calling.

Little Birdie—Sings and Dances

- Age Range: 8 - 10 (African American)
- Description: The youngest version of Thea, full of imagination and musical energy. Nicknamed "Birdie" because she's always singing. Innocent yet bold, she begins to sense her God-given purpose.
- Role Function: Symbol of childlike faith and divine calling.

Dr. Theon Bowman—Sings

- Age Range: 50s - 60s (African American)
- Description: Thea's father—Canton's first Black physician. A man of integrity, discipline, and deep faith. He symbolizes protection, education, and quiet pride amid segregation.
- Role Function: Represents dignity and the striving of African-American professionals during the Jim Crow era.

Mrs. Mary Esther Bowman—Sings

- Age Range: 40s - 50s (African American)
- Description: Thea's mother, a refined Southern schoolteacher. Loving but firm, she teaches Thea self-respect and the value of education, faith, and restraint in the face of racism.
- Role Function: Embodies maternal wisdom, gentility, and strength.

Little Flonzie Brown (Wright)—Sings and Dances

- Age Range: 8 - 10 (African American)
- Description: Thea's best childhood friend. Lively, loyal, and outspoken, she later becomes a civil-rights leader. In youth, she's the "safe place" for Thea's early struggles with identity.
- Role Function: Companion and mirror to Thea's youthful faith and resilience.

Young Flonzie Brown (Wright)—Sings

- Age Range: 18 - 25 (African American)
- Description: A lively, confident 13-year-old Pentecostal girl from Canton, Mississippi. She's quick-witted, outspoken, and deeply loyal to her best friend, Bertha ("Little Birdie"). Her humor and honesty reveal wisdom beyond her years.

- Role Function: Serves as Bertha’s closest friend and grounding influence. Represents youthful courage, faith, and the early spark of justice that will grow into lifelong activism.

Adult Flonzie Brown (Wright)—Acts Only

- Age Range: 40s (African American)
- Description: A confident, spirited woman in her forties—still bold, funny, and faith-filled. Now a respected civil rights leader, she carries herself with the same fire and grace that defined her youth.
- Role Function: Thea’s lifelong friend and moral mirror. Through her memories and wisdom, she reveals how their shared faith and courage shaped two parallel callings—Thea’s in the Church and her own in the fight for justice.

Miz Lula Mae Johnson—Acts and Sings

- Age Range: 50s - late 60s (African American)
- Description: Choir director at the local Baptist church in Canton. A powerful presence who recognizes Little Birdie’s gift for song.
- Role Function: Encourages Thea’s musical roots and faith expression through Gospel tradition.

Mrs. Quinn—Acts and Sings

- Age Range: 60s - 70s (African American)
- Description: Elderly neighbor interviewed in the “television interludes.” Offers humorous, affectionate recollections of “Birdie” and her gift of song.
- Role Function: Community voice and oral historian anchoring Thea’s legacy in memory.

Five mothers (30s - 40s, African American)—Act, Sing and Dance

The five mothers appear in “We’ll Take the Chalk and Skip the Chapel.” They represent differing parental attitudes toward Catholic education in the segregated South. They appear again in Act II as parents of children in a neighboring school.

- **Mrs. Washington:** Practical, proud, community-minded mother seeking opportunity for her child.
- **Mrs. Fletcher:** Cheerful, witty, and somewhat skeptical—adds comic rhythm.
- **Mrs. Delaney:** Grateful and outspoken supporter of education, though wary of conversion.
- **Mrs. Greene:** Spirited skeptic who distrusts Catholic influence yet wants the best schooling.
- **Mrs. Rivera:** Latina mother, humorous storyteller who bridges cultures with warmth and candor.

Preacher / Michael Okonkwo—Acts and Sings

- Age Range: 60s - 70s (African American)

- Description: Charismatic male vocalist who leads “She Tried (I Will Live Until I Die)” at Sr. Thea’s funeral. Serves as narrator-singer who proclaims her life’s impact. As David Okonkwo he illuminates Sr. Thea’s epiphanic experience which led to her donning African attire as her habit.
- Role Function: Spiritual voice and bridge between eulogy and Gospel.

James – Acts, Sings, and Dances

- Age Range: 18 - 24 (African American)
- Description: A 14-year-old classmate of Young Bertha—charming, playful, and a little mischievous. He admires Bertha’s intelligence and confidence, showing early romantic interest in her with innocent teasing and admiration.
- Role Function: Adds warmth and youthful humor to school scenes. Highlights Bertha’s poise and focus amid ordinary teenage experiences, showing her growing sense of purpose and maturity.

Sr. Lina Putz, FSPA – Acts Only

- Age Range: 50s – 52 (European Descent)
- Description: A kind, practical Franciscan from Wisconsin whose gentle spirit and curiosity set her apart from her stricter peers. Traveling with Sr. Dorothy to Canton to bring young Bertha to St. Rose opens her heart to a wider world.
- Role Function: A bridge between cultures, Sr. Lina represents quiet conversion and the possibility of change within the Church—one heart learning to see with greater compassion.

Sister Agnes, FSPA – Acts Only

- Age Range: 50s - 60s (European Descent)
- Description: White Franciscan nun at St. Rose High School who discriminates against young Bertha. Stern and bigoted, she represents institutional racism within the Church.
- Role Function: Antagonist and foil to Thea’s grace and perseverance.

Sister Eleanor, FSPA – Acts Only

- Age Range: 50s - 60s (European Descent)
- Description: Another White nun, more moderate but complicit in silence.
- Role Function: Symbolizes passive tolerance and moral ambiguity within the convent.

Richard Keller – Sings and Dances

- Age Range: 8 - 10 (European Descent)
- Description: Mrs. Keller’s young son. Silent presence in dialogue but pivotal in theme—symbol of the next generation that might transcend prejudice.
- Role Function: Embodiment of hope for racial reconciliation.

Daniel Johnson-Wilmot (Little Brother) – Acts Only

- Age Range: 40s - 50s (European Descent)

- Description: A gifted, kind-hearted music professor at Viterbo University, Daniel Johnson-Wilmot shared a close, sibling-like bond with Sr. Thea Bowman, who affectionately called him her “little brother.” Their friendship, rooted in music and mutual respect, inspired colleagues and students alike .
- Role Function: Thea’s artistic and spiritual companion in academia. Through him, we see her humor, humanity, and passion for using music to uplift hearts and unite communities.

Bishop Brunini—Acts Only

- Age Range: 60s - 70s (European Descent)
- Description: A compassionate and forward-thinking bishop of Jackson, deeply committed to racial healing within the Church. In 1978, he creates the position of Consultant for Intercultural Awareness so Sr. Thea can return home to care for her parents while continuing her ministry.
- Role Function: Supportive mentor and catalyst for Thea’s mission. His vision and trust enable her to share Black Catholic spirituality and foster unity across cultural lines.

Supporting / Ensemble Roles

- 16-24–Choir Members: Function as Greek-chorus-style witnesses, grounding each scene with Spirituals, Gospel, Hip-Hop, and choral responses. —**Sing Only**
- 4–Funeral Directors / Stage Crew / Custodians—**Act Only**
- 5–Mothers (Listed by names above) and 5–Children: Double as symbolic figures of service, transformation, and continuity throughout transitions. —**Act, Sing, and Dance**
- 3–Interviewing Priests: Present in “television interludes.” Serve as Vatican investigators documenting Sr. Thea’s cause for canonization. —**Act Only**