

CAST THE CONGO CHARACTERS

CASTING FOR KING LEOPOLD'S PLAYGROUND

A new film about the real-life horror of Belgium's rule over Central Africa in the 19th century and the three courageous heroes who exposed the horror to the world and helped bring an end to colonial rule.

***Instructions:** You've been asked to assist the casting director in preparing the materials to send out to the agents who represent actors. Write a casting memo that provides guidelines to consider in selecting the actors for these three roles. Be sure to include the following:*

- *A brief description of the character and his contribution to the dramatic action*
- *A list of the character's personality traits, lifestyle, and habits*
- *A physical description of the character*

STEP ONE: Review the three descriptions of the characters provided on the next page and look at the old photos of the three men on the video.

STEP TWO: Brainstorm a list of personality characteristics, physical traits, and other information that helps to create a "snapshot" of how each character looks and acts when brought to life in the film. Write a paragraph to describe each character.

STEP THREE: Keep in mind that to be a success, movies need a combination of "star power" and "fresh faces." At least one of the three characters *must* be a well-known Hollywood actor or celebrity in order for the movie to be financially successful at the box office. Identify your three or four top choices for famous actors who might be interested in these roles.

STEP FOUR: Format your document as a business letter to the attention of Tiffany Demara, Casting Director, Four Winds Productions, Inc., 4501 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10019

Leading Characters for King Leopold's Playground:

- WILLIAM SHEPPARD
- GEORGE WASHINGTON WILLIAMS
- E. D. MOREL

UNIT 4 | ACTIVITY 4.4 (B)

CAST THE CONGO CHARACTERS
Character Chart: Historical Figures

WILLIAM SHEPPARD

<p>Born 1865 in Virginia, the son of slave; studied to become a missionary; traveled to Africa in 1890; spoke several African languages; skillful hunter; asked by his Presbyterian mission to investigate rumors of atrocities by the army of King Leopold in the region of the rubber harvests; wrote news articles about the trading companies who force men and women to work making rubber; Belgians put him on trial for libel; news of his Congo trial spreads around the world; found not guilty; dies in 1927 in America.</p>	<p><i>Description of African soldiers in the rubber harvest region:</i> On the day he reached the marauders' camp, his eye was caught by a large number of objects being smoked. The chief "conducted us to a framework of sticks under which was burning a slow fire, and there they were, the right hands, I counted them, 81 in all." The chief told Sheppard, "See! Here is our evidence. I always have to cut off the right hands of those we kill in order to show the State how many we have killed."</p>
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GEORGE WASHINGTON WILLIAMS

<p>African-American journalist; traveled to Africa in 1890; witnessed slave labor; wrote "An Open Letter to King Leopold II," a document denouncing the atrocities and promoting human rights; document's publication in newspapers triggered a world wide outcry; died from tuberculosis on return journey to England.</p>	<p><i>Description of Williams writing his "Open Letter":</i> At the Stanley Falls station on this July day, a forty-year-old man sits down in a white-hot blaze of anger. In a graceful, energetic hand, he begins writing. Perhaps he sits outside, his back against a palm trunk, perhaps he borrows the desk of the station clerk . . . The document that flows from the man's pen over the next day or two is a milestone in the literature of human rights and investigative journalism.</p>
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EDMUND DEAN MOREL

<p>British; father died when he was boy; at 15 took a job in Paris as a clerk to support his mother who was ill; spoke French; wrote business articles on African trade issues; in the late 1890s, he began working for a Liverpool shipping company doing business with Belgium; a few years after discovering the horror of Leopold's Congo, he leaves his job and begins writing about the atrocities, igniting the first international human rights movement.</p>	<p><i>Description of him discovering the truth of Leopold's Congo:</i> The year is 1897 or 1898. Try to imagine him, briskly stepping off a cross-Channel steamer, a forceful, burly man, in his mid-twenties . . . At the docks of the big port of Antwerp, he sees his company's ships arriving filled to the hatch covers with valuable cargoes of rubber and ivory. But when they cast off their hawsers to steam back to the Congo . . . what they carry is mostly army officers, firearms, and ammunition. There is no trade going on here!</p>
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SOURCE: *King Leopold's Ghost* by Adam Hochschild