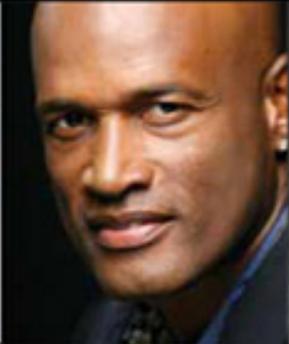




the
Huntington

LIMELIGHT





When August Wilson succumbed to liver cancer at the age of sixty, he died a proud, successful man — a self-made man who left a legacy that will not soon be forgotten. He set himself a challenge equivalent to climbing a great mountain: he would, he declared, write ten plays, each one set in a different decade of the 20th century, chronicling the history of the African-American experience in this country. When he died, he had reached the summit of that mountain.

Born Frederick August Kittel on April 27, 1945, he was the son of Daisy Wilson, whose mother had walked to Pittsburgh from North Carolina after Emancipation. His father was Frederick Kittel, a German baker who wasn't present in the family's cold-water flat on Bedford Avenue in Pittsburgh's Hill District. Wilson grew up in an African-American cultural environment; he had very little contact with his father over the course of his life, and shed his father's name at twenty.

Wilson's mother taught him to read at age four, and he quickly became a voracious reader. He was a regular at the Hill District branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and said in a speech at the 100th anniversary of that library, "Labor historians do not speak well of Andrew Carnegie, but he will forever be for me that man who made it possible for me to be standing here today. I wore out my library card and cried when I lost it."



Children at play in Moorehead Parklet; A street corner in Pittsburgh's Hill District (1950).
Photos: Arnold Eage

The Carnegie Library did more than supplement his education — it provided it. When he was a fifteen-year-old student at Gladstone High School, his teacher threw out a twenty-page report he had written on Napoleon, believing falsely that he had not done the work himself. Disgusted, he left school and never returned. Rather than admit to his mother what had happened, Wilson began spending his days at the main branch of the Carnegie Library in Oakland where he created his own educational curriculum and grappled with the great writers at his own pace. He remains the only person ever to be awarded a high school diploma by the Carnegie Library.

To come of age in the Hill District in the 1960s was to grow up in a neighborhood on the decline, but still clinging to life. Wilson's substitute fathers were the men hanging out in grocery stores and diners and chatting on street corners, telling stories and singing songs. Wilson basked in this verbal culture, and it became a part of him. On April 1, 1965, using twenty dollars his sister had given him to write a term paper for her, August Wilson bought his first typewriter and declared himself a poet. He connected with other young black writers, and in 1968, he co-founded the Black Horizon Theater in Pittsburgh with Rob Penney. He began writing plays around this time, but did not seriously devote himself to drama until 1978 when, at the suggestion of director Claude Purdy, he moved to St. Paul, Minnesota and wrote the original, one-act version of *Jitney*. The play was a huge success, both in the Twin Cities and in Pittsburgh at the fledgling Allegheny Repertory Theatre. Wilson's career as a playwright had begun in earnest.

In 1983, Wilson submitted his first full-length play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, to the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference, and was accepted. At the O'Neill, the play was championed by Lloyd Richards, the artistic director of the Yale Repertory Theatre and of the O'Neill Playwrights Conference. Richards immediately snapped up the rights, directing it himself at Yale Rep the next year in a smash production featuring Theresa Merritt as Ma Rainey and a young Charles S. Dutton in his breakout role as Levee. The play transferred to Broadway in 1984, and Wilson began to attract national attention. Wilson and Richards followed up with *Fences*, starring James Earl Jones and Marv Alice in 1987. winning Wilson his

with *Fences*, starring James Earl Jones and Mary Alice in 1987, winning Wilson his first Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play.



August Wilson.
Photo: Michael Romanos

Flush with these successes, Wilson moved to Seattle in 1990 and continued to write the plays of his cycle. Along with his longtime producer Ben Mordecai (who had been the managing director of Yale Rep) and his directors — Richards, then Marion McClinton, and finally Kenny Leon — Wilson created a method of production and rewriting that used American regional theatres as a testing ground for his plays. At theatres like the Huntington Theatre Company, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Centerstage in Baltimore, Chicago’s Goodman Theatre, Pittsburgh Public Theater, and many others, Wilson would produce the premieres of his plays, but those premieres served only as first drafts. He and his team would move from theatre to theatre, from city to city, almost as if they were re-creating their own version of the 19th century vaudeville circuit. The plays would be honed and refined all over the country before finally arriving on Broadway. With his prodigious talent August Wilson created something of a cottage industry and many African-American actors, directors, and designers across the country give him credit for keeping them working, and working on material close to their own experiences.

Success followed success and, one by one, Wilson told the stories of each decade of the 20th century. He won his second Pulitzer Prize for *The Piano Lesson* in 1990 and wrote the screenplay for a TV movie of the play, which starred Alfre Woodard. For many years he worked to transform *Fences* into a feature film, but Hollywood could not fulfill his one demand: that the film be directed by an African-American director. He was frustrated by this failure and, in 1996, took out his frustration during the keynote address at the Theatre Communications Group Conference in a speech entitled "The Ground On Which I Stand." This speech excoriated the American theatre community for segregating the work of African-American artists and “ghettoizing” their plays — creating the “black play” slot. He called on African-American theatre artists to create their own parallel institutions for the production of their work. The speech was condemned by critic Robert Brustein in *The New Republic*, who accused Wilson of cultural separatism and championed the idea of

Republic, who accused Wilson of cultural separatism and championed the idea of color-blind and race-neutral casting in theatre. In 1997, Wilson and Brustein met at a public debate on the issue at New York's Town Hall. While both scored points, neither walked away a decisive victor, but the debate itself reignited the idea that the theatre could be a place where the great questions of society could be addressed passionately and productively.

Meanwhile, Wilson's work continued, and the cycle neared completion. When *Radio Golf* opened at the Yale Rep in May 2005, it marked the completion of a great life's work, but Wilson already knew he was not long for this world. After the Yale production and a subsequent production in Los Angeles, Wilson secluded himself in Seattle to complete his revisions on the play. After a short hospitalization, he died on October 2, 2005, standing atop a theatrical mountain that he had both conceived and scaled.

— Kyle W. Brenton



John Earl Jelks, Phylicia Rashad, and LisaGay Hamilton in *Gem of the Ocean* (2004-2005). Photo by T. Charles Erickson

August Wilson's 20th century begins with a knock at the door. Citizen Barlow has come north from Alabama to Pittsburgh in search of a better life, but has found nothing but discrimination, inequality, and racism. He is a good man, but the world in which he lives has nurtured within him a rage, and his rage led him to theft — he stole a bucket of nails from the mill. An innocent man has died for that crime, and in *Gem of the Ocean* (set in 1904; completed in 2004) Citizen Barlow comes to 1839 Wylie Avenue, the home of Aunt Ester, for redemption. Aunt Ester, whose memory stretches back

home of Aunt Ester, for redemption. Aunt Ester, whose memory stretches back nearly 300 years to the arrival of African slaves on this continent, is a spiritual healer. It is within her power to take Citizen to the City of Bones, a ghostly metropolis



Bo Rucker and Kimberleigh Burroughs in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1986-1987).
Photo: Gerry Goodstein

beneath the Atlantic Ocean, where his soul can be cleansed of guilt. But that journey could be put in jeopardy if Caesar Wilks, the black lawman who uses his authority like a cudgel, continues his rampage of evictions in the neighborhood. It may ultimately be beyond even Aunt Ester's power to calm Caesar's rage.

Seven years later, the migration of African-Americans northward continues apace. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (set in 1911; completed in 1988), Seth and Bertha Holly operate a boarding house that serves as a temporary home to those who are trying to find a new beginning. Their oddest tenant is Bynum, a shaman whose song has the power to bind people to new destinies, and to each other. Into the boarding house wanders Herald Loomis, a man with a dark and violent past who is in search of his wife, torn from him before he left the South. When the residents of the house engage in their Sunday night "juba" ritual — an ecstatic dance with African roots, led by Bynum — Loomis is overtaken by the Holy Ghost and experiences a terrifying vision of the Atlantic transforming into a sea of bones that surge inexorably toward America.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (set in 1927; completed in 1984) presents a very different vision of African-American life. In a Chicago recording studio, a group of musicians await the arrival of the great blues songstress Ma Rainey. Ma is a notoriously difficult performer who uses her unique talent as leverage to create a comfortable life for herself. The newest member of her band, Levee, is a trumpet player who nurtures a fire, both for a new kind of music and a new kind of life. Levee rejects Ma's accommodations to the racist music industry and demands what he sees as his due. The situation, tense from the beginning, finally erupts into violence as, through Levee, a new kind of world is born.



Lou Myers and Starletta DuPois in *The Piano Lesson* (1987-1988).
Photo: Gerry Goodstein

Michele Shay, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, and Viola Davis in *Seven Guitars* (1995-1996).
Photo: Joan Marcus

Nine years later, back in Pittsburgh, *The Piano Lesson* (set in 1936; completed in 1990; winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama) asks the vital question: what is to be

done with the past? When the Charles family migrated north, they brought with them their most prized possession: a piano with the history of their family intricately carved by one of their ancestors. Berniece keeps the piano in her home, but will not play it. Her brother, Boy Willie, has a different plan. He has a chance to buy back the land their family worked as slaves, but the only way he can get the money is to sell the piano, which Berniece will never allow. The weight of the past sits heavily on the entire Charles family, and as the conflict between the siblings escalates, a ghostly visitation forces Berniece to play the piano once more, in an act of exorcism.

"Who killed Floyd Barton?" is the question that animates *Seven Guitars* (set in 1948; completed in 1996). Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton is going to be the next big thing. His hot new song is being played on every radio in the Hill District, and once he's gotten his guitar out of the pawn shop, he's headed to Chicago to record a follow-up. But sometimes life gets in the way of plans — the money he is owed evaporates and his guitar seems farther away than ever. When he is forced to turn to theft, he meets an untimely end at the hands of the unlikeliest of characters: Hedley, an old man who, in a tuberculosis-induced delirium, mistakes Floyd for a man he believes owed his father money. Hedley brutally slashes Floyd across the throat, tragically cutting short a promising life.

Fences (set in 1957; completed in 1987; winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama) contains perhaps Wilson's most tragic figure: Troy Maxson. Troy was a titan of the Negro Baseball Leagues, who, after spending time in jail, couldn't put the pieces of his life back together. Turned away from the major



Al White, Ella Joyce, and Ed Hall in
Two Trains Running (1990-1991)

family — his loving wife Rose, high-school-aged son Cory, brain-damaged brother Gabriel, and Lyons, a grown son from a previous relationship. Crushed under the weight of his responsibilities, Troy turns to another woman for comfort, and when she dies in childbirth, he brings home a daughter who is now left to Rose to raise. At the same time, Cory is recruited for college football, but Troy cannot bring himself to allow Cory to play — a mixture of stubbornness, envy, and fear leads Troy to sabotage his own son's future.

Urban renewal and the demolishing of the Lower Hill loom over *Two Trains Running* (set in 1969; completed in 1992). The building that houses Memphis Lee's lunch counter is about to be bought out by the city, but Memphis refuses to settle for a modest buyout — he wants \$25,000 from the city. Hambone, a mentally damaged man who haunts the restaurant, obsessively demands a ham he feels he earned for painting a shop owner's fence, refusing to settle for a chicken. Is Hambone a symbol of Memphis Lee's future? Meanwhile Sterling Johnson has been released from prison, and is torn between two courses: should he go to the Black Power rally that's about to begin, or should he seek spiritual peace by visiting Aunt Ester and getting his soul washed? There are two trains running every day, but the question Wilson's play asks is: which one will get you where you're going?



Anthony Chisholm and Barry (Shabaka)
Henley in *Jitney* (1998-1999).
Photo: T. Charles Erickson

Regular cabs won't travel to the Hill District of the 1970s, and so the residents turn to each other. *Jitney* (set in 1977; first written in 1979, rewritten and expanded in 2000) dramatizes the lives of men hustling to make a living as jitneys — unofficial, unlicensed taxi cab drivers. When the boss Becker's son returns from prison, violence threatens to erupt. What makes this play remarkable is not the plot; *Jitney* is Wilson at his

play remarkable is not the plot; *Jitney* is Wilson at his most real — the words these men use and the stories they tell form a true slice of life.



Eugene Lee and Hassan El-Amin in *Radio Golf* (2006-2007). Photo: Eric Antoniou

Ella Joyce and Tony Todd in *King Hedley II* (1999-2000). Photo: T. Charles Erickson

Perhaps the bleakest of all of Wilson's plays is *King Hedley II* (set in 1985; completed in 2001). The title character of King — son of Ruby and

Hedley from *Seven Guitars* — has been released from prison, and now struggles to make a new life for himself. With his friend Mister (himself the son of another *Seven Guitars* character, Red Carter) King is selling stolen refrigerators, but that is no foundation for a life. And when Elmore — the one-time lover of Ruby and perhaps King's true father — arrives, King begins to learn that success may never have been a possibility for him at all. And when the news hits that Aunt Ester has died, all hope seems lost.

Irony abounds in the final play of the cycle, *Radio Golf* (set in 1997; completed in 2005). Harmond Wilks seems to have surpassed all of the hurdles that stood in the way of his forbears. A successful businessman and developer, he will soon be a candidate for mayor of Pittsburgh. But even as he tries to turn his back on the past and demolish 1839 Wylie Avenue, the one-time home of Aunt Ester, the past comes walking into his office in the person of Old Joe who has a mysterious connection both to Aunt Ester and to Harmond. Intricately tied to the characters of *Gem of the Ocean*, this final play of the cycle, and of August Wilson's life, once more examines the question of how African-Americans are to regard their past — is it something to be used, something to be cherished, or something best forgotten?

— Kyle W. Brenton

Photos from Huntington Theatre Company Productions





Through August Wilson’s 20th-century cycle of plays, the playwright exposes sides of African-American experience seldom seen in mainstream theatre or popular culture. With this production of *Fences*, the Huntington will have presented nine of his plays.

| Play | Decade | Season |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------------|
| <i>Gem of the Ocean</i> | 1900s | 2004-2005 |
| <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i> | 1910s | 1986-1987 |
| <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i> | 1920s | <i>upcoming</i> |
| <i>The Piano Lesson</i> | 1930s | 1987-1988 |
| <i>Seven Guitars</i> | 1940s | 1995-1996 |
| <i>Fences</i> | 1950s | 2009-2010 |
| <i>Two Trains Running</i> | 1960s | 1990-1991 |
| <i>Jitney</i> | 1970s | 1998-1999 |
| <i>King Hedley II</i> | 1980s | 1999-2000 |
| <i>Radio Golf</i> | 1990s | 2006-2007 |



John Earl Jelks, Phylicia Rashad, and LisaGay Hamilton in *Gem of the Ocean* (2004-2005).
Photo: T. Charles Erickson



Bo Rucker and Kimberleigh Burroughs in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1986-1987).
Photo: Gerry Goodstein



Lou Myers and Starletta DuPois in *The Piano Lesson* (1987-1988). Photo: Gerry Goodstein



Michele Shay, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, and Viola Davis in *Seven Guitars* (1995-1996). Photo: Joan Marcus



Al White, Ella Joyce, and Ed Hall in *Two Trains Running* (1990-1991).



Anthony Chisholm and Barry (Shabaka) Henley in *Jitney* (1998-1999). Photo: T. Charles Erickson



Ella Joyce and Tony Todd in *King Hedley II* (1999-2000). Photo: T. Charles Erickson



Eugene Lee and Hassan El-Amin in *Radio Golf* (2006-2007). Photo: Eric Antoniou



Jackie Robinson

"**M**usic and sports are the only avenues that are open for full participation of blacks without any further qualifications. You just have to be good," playwright August Wilson said in an interview regarding his 1987 play *Fences*. Wilson sets his play in the 1950s, and imagines a garbage man, Troy Maxson, who yearned to play Major League baseball. Wilson gives him a batting average that would be the envy of any player, but he's been forgotten; his only time on the field was playing in the Negro Leagues, a system of segregated teams that often played in major league ballparks while white teams were on the road.

The rise of legendary ballplayer Jackie Robinson to the Major League's Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 is remembered as a success story of peaceful integration. Prior to his signing to the Dodgers, Robinson had been a college football star and played a single season for the Negro League's Kansas City Monarchs before being selected for his combination of natural prowess for the game and his strength of character. Robinson would experience frequent discrimination during spring training in the South where black players were as often locked out of the exhibition games at baseball parks as they were the hotels, restaurants, and stores that served their fellow teammates. But Robinson made it to opening day in Brooklyn; one newspaper headline on the day of his debut read "Jim Crow Dies at Second."

"Jackie Robinson was the first. Folks had to wait for Jackie Robinson," Rose, Troy's wife, reminds him in *Fences*. With Troy's story, Wilson reminds us of the men who saw their dreams deferred because of discrimination. Troy's imagines his glory on the porch of his shabby home on the outskirts of town, bought with his brother's disability payments. Dispossessed of the tools to provide for his own family, Troy's response to his son Cory's request to quit his steady job for a chance at a college

response to his son Cory's request to quit his steady job for a chance at a college football scholarship echoes the scars of a generation: "If you got a white fellow sitting on the bench...you can bet your last dollar he can't play! The colored guy got to be twice as good before he get on the team. That's why I don't want you getting tied up in them sports."

Through their conflict, August Wilson explores the potential for exploitation that is inherent in sports and the internal cost of external pressure. For the family who is touched by the issues at the play's core, societal prejudice becomes part of the legacy. "We're all like our parents," the playwright has said of the clash between father and son. "The things we're taught early in life, how we respond to the world, our sense of morality — we get everything from them. Cory is Troy's son. How can he be Troy's son without sharing his values?" With *Fences*, Wilson asks us to imagine how Troy's children will find their own way in a new world, discovering new values for their generation and new ways to level the playing field.

— Charles Haugland



"By 1957, the hard-won victories of European immigrants had solidified the industrial might of America. War had been confronted and won with new energies that used loyalty and patriotism as its fuel. Life was rich, full, and flourishing. The Milwaukee Braves won the World Series, and the hot winds of change that would make the sixties a turbulent, racing, dangerous, and provocative decade had not



May 17, 1957: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his "Give Us the Ballot" speech. Photo: Paul Schutzer



September 9, 1957: President Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act.

unwritten. With *Fences*, **1957** — a seminal year in history with events that presaged the era. Here's a look at that year:

"Stand up for justice," Martin Luther King, Jr. told the crowd at the Lincoln Memorial on **May 17**. King was at the time known mainly for his role in the Montgomery bus boycott. He spoke many times that year, but his "Give Us the Ballot" speech was perhaps the most influential as he asked members of Congress to ensure the voting rights of African-Americans. To his fellow activists, he said: "I realize that it will cause restless nights sometime. It might cause losing a job; it will cause suffering and sacrifice. It might even cause physical death for some. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children from a permanent life of psychological death, then nothing can be more Christian."

On **September 9th**, President Eisenhower signed the bill King and many others had fought to pass. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was the first bill of its kind since 1875. Vice President Richard Nixon wrote in a letter to King: "My only regret is that I have been unable to do more than I have. Progress is understandably slow in this field, but we at least can be sure that we are moving steadily and surely ahead." Though the act's effectiveness had been limited by an amendment inserted by Southern senators, which required a local jury trial for any offenders of the law, the bill set off a wave of stronger legislation in the sessions to follow.

Playwright August Wilson made his legacy by writing ten plays about the African-American experience, each set in a different decade of the twentieth century. In them, he records, or in many

cases imagines, history that went otherwise Wilson takes us to in black American across the nation coming civil rights major events in



September 23, 1957: The "Little Rock Nine" enter Central High School. Photo: George Silk

Later that same month, nine students desegregated Little Rock's Central High School, an act ordered three years earlier when the Supreme Court



Hank Aaron at bat, 1957

decided *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Riots broke out in the weeks that **September 23rd**. That hit by Milwaukee Braves' clinched the team their franchise history. Aaron CIO News in his

followed, including on same day, a home run player Hank Aaron first pennant title in quotes a Wisconsin's autobiography:

"Milwaukee's dusky Hank

Aaron blasted the Braves into the World Series only a few hours after an insane mob of white supremacists took the Stars and Stripes in Little Rock and tramped it to the ground in front of Central High School...The cheers that are lifted to Negro ballplayers only dramatize the stupidity of the jeers that are directed at those few Negro kids trying to get a good education for themselves in Little Rock."

The year 1957 is remembered now as a landmark on the journey toward civil rights, but Wilson reminds us in *Fences* how often the effects were little felt by average citizens. He approached writing a history of African-American experience by examining the culture, rather than the events of an era. "I listen to the music of the particular period that I'm working on," Wilson has said of his process. "Inside the music are clues to what is happening with the people." In the 1950s, that music was the blues, a foundation of Wilson's playwriting. "[The blues] is the greatest source of my inspiration," he says. "I see the blues as the cultural response of black America to the world that they found themselves in, and contained within the blues are the ideas and attitudes of the culture."

— Charles Haugland



Kenny Leon

This season at the Huntington, we are telling seven distinct American stories. To tease out the connections between the shows, we've asked artists from different productions to interview each other about their work. Below, playwright Lydia R. Diamond (Stick Fly) talks with Fences director Kenny Leon. This interview has been highly edited for space; please find the full interview at www.huntingtontheatre.org.



Lydia R.
Diamond

L: How did August Wilson and his work influence your early career?

K: I was an NEA Directing Fellow in 1987, at Centerstage in Baltimore. And I had the crazy idea that this was where I'd learn to be an artistic director. August had *Fences* opening on Broadway. I corralled a group of Board members and folks from Baltimore to take them to New York to see this play by this new writer, August Wilson. . . .I led a discussion on the bus. I talked about African-American stories and all that kind of stuff. Then I met August in New York, and [director] Lloyd Richards as well. Seeing *Fences*, it was the first time I felt like my grandmother and my mother's rhythms were onstage. That's so powerful . . . I was offered several jobs; one of them was associate artistic director at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, where I was living. . . .So, as my first play at Alliance, I did a production of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* when it was still in manuscript form. August came to Atlanta to be there with me throughout tech and previews. I said, "Man, give me some notes." He's like, "What? Most people don't want me to give them notes." But I did. So then, he had a manila tablet of hundreds and hundreds of notes. I said, "Well maybe, just give me two or three."

L: You opened the floodgates!

K: Then he gave me two notes, but those were the greatest notes in the world. It was the beginning of our friendship. Because of him, I always want to understand the intent of the writer. I approach the work of writers with the question of what did this writer mean. What were their intentions? I ask why did they write this, not how could I make it better. There's never a heavy hand in what I do, because I'm trying to tell the story that the writer imagined. . . .I remember August always said, "Man, I always like directors that direct, and writers who can write, and dramaturgs that dramaturg." So I always kept that in mind. But it was a beautiful relationship. It made me understand that the greatest relationship in theatre is that of the writer and the director.

L: Do you remember the notes that August gave you?

K: He said that he writes as if something is going to happen even if nothing happens. So it has to play like that, a mystery. I don't have to make sense of where everything is going at every particular time, but I always have to know that he's writing with the sense that something is going to happen.

L: Since August has passed away, how do you see his legacy taking shape?

K: I dearly miss August. The last time August was healthy was the time we spent

K: I dearly miss August. The last time August was healthy was the time we spent in Boston working on *Gem of the Ocean*. When I think of August, I think of us walking out on Huntington Avenue — starting out for a five minute conversation and talking for two hours on the way to the hotel. But it was a beautiful time with him. Since he has passed, there's a huge void in the American theatre scene. [Longtime Wilson dramaturg] Todd Kreidler and I have started the August Wilson monologue competition. We have the finals at the August Wilson Theatre on Broadway. High schools students are now competing using monologues he wrote; they're getting scholarship money and getting introduced to [his work]. It's not gender or race specific, but it has let them know about our history, a great writer, and it's letting them know about the themes August wrote about. . . .How has [August's work] affected you?

L: There's nothing more powerful than being able to see yourself onstage. For me, the thing that shaped me the most was his speech, "The Ground on Which I Stand," and the idea of your convictions being more important than your professional status. If August Wilson could be so forthright and brave and say what he thought, the least I could do is be that way, too. . . .Obviously there's an artistic void, but because I never got to work with him and I never knew him personally, I feel the political void very, very much. I feel it around some of the misunderstandings and struggles I have around being an African-American playwright and the reality of working with black directors and the way that sometimes becomes harder, depending on the venue. You know what I mean?

K: Yeah.

L: So, I miss him that way. Because I would call him now. There would be times now where I would have called and asked for his advice, and felt like I could do that.

K: He would give me guidance about how to earn the respect in this industry, and how it was different for an African-American artist. He said, as a playwright, they had to pass the Neil Simon litmus test: "If you would do this for Neil Simon, you should do this for me. Kenny, you are a Broadway director, and everything folks would do for a Broadway director they should do for you." There are many stories that are life lessons that I'll carry on and they'll continue to guide me as I'll ask what would August say right now, what would August do right now.

L: Kenny, what's it like to revisit August's early work?

K: I've done all ten plays. *Fences*, this will be the fourth time around. It's hard to direct a play more than once.

L: Why?

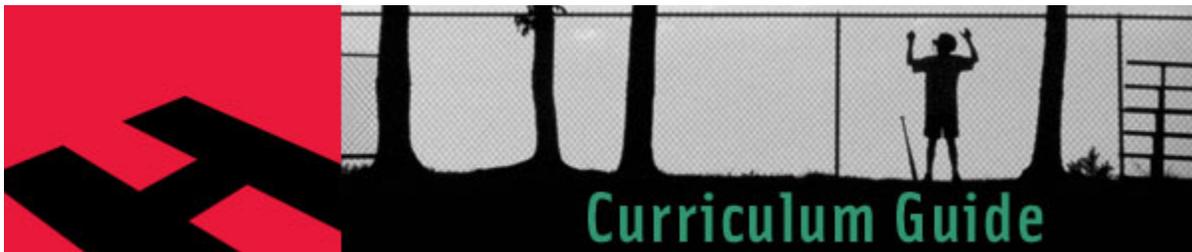
K: Because after a while, you feel you've exhausted it. I don't want to just repeat something. But with *Fences*, this hasn't been the case. It feels like a new play every time, and like I'm discovering something new every time.

L: Because you change, or because his work is so complicated, or both?

K: Both. But now, having known him, and understanding him better . . . I know more specifically what August would want. I understand his rhythm; I understand his tempo.

L: Hey, Kenny. Can I come and watch sometime in the rehearsal room? I feel like I would learn a lot about the play.

K: Absolutely.



This Teacher Literary and Curriculum Guide was prepared for the Huntington Theatre Company by Donna Glick, Director of Education and Community Programs at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Background and Objectives

"August Wilson gives blessings like the characters do in his plays. His writing blesses us with a spirit of exaltation and celebration. He shows us in vibrant terms that within any particular culture lay wisdom and secrets, which are universal. He raises up the strength and vitality of African-American life for all to see. In the telling of stories unique to his roots, he blesses us with the potential song of an America able to relish its multicultural essence. He challenges everyone to find their voice."

—Keren Goldberg, Los Angeles Theatre Center

Objectives

Students will:

1. Identify central themes in *Fences*, possibilities include:
 - a. Generational conflicts between fathers and sons
 - b. African-American life in the 1950s
 - c. Dreams deferred or lost.
2. Relate the play's central themes and social issues to their own lives.
3. Recognize August Wilson's contributions to and impact on American theatre.
4. Participate in hands-on activities that enhance understanding of the production.

Audience Etiquette

Because many students have not had the opportunity to view live theatre, we are including an audience etiquette section with each literary/curriculum guide. Teachers, please spend time on this subject since it will greatly enhance your students' experience at the theatre.

1. How does one respond to a live performance of a play, as opposed to when seeing a film at a local cinema? What is the best way to approach viewing a live performance of a play? What things should you look and listen for?
 2. What is the audience's role during a live performance? How do you think audience behavior can affect an actor's performance?
 3. What do you know about the theatrical rehearsal process? Have you ever participated in one as an actor, singer, director, or technical person?
 4. How do costumes, set, lights, sound, and props enhance a theatre production?
-

PREPARATION FOR *Fences*

Fathers and Sons—Intergenerational Conflict

“When you're called a nigger you look at your father because you think your father can rule the world— every kid thinks that— and then you discover that your father cannot do anything about it. So you begin to realize, oh, that's what a nigger is.”

—James Baldwin, 1970

In *Fences*, the characters of Troy and his sons Lyons and Cory are in serious conflict as father and sons. Their moral and ethical choices clash. The turbulence of their relationships mirrors their own individual struggles for personal integrity and the influences of the generations of African-Americans

personal integrity and the influences of the generations of African-Americans that they represent. Ask students to define the word *integrity* and to make a list of what they consider to be their own personal values. Ask them to interview their parents and compile another list of values. Have them compare and contrast the lists. How are they similar? How are they different? Are the two generations tolerant of each other's differences? Can parents and children still express love and respect for each other despite these differences?

August Wilson's Legacy

Research the life and work of the late August Wilson. Have students choose one aspect of Wilson's life they find particularly relevant or inspiring and write essays describing why or how this is so for them. If time permits, have students report their findings to the class. Topics to consider might include:

- Family History
 - Education (August Wilson dropped out of school. What was it about him that enabled him to become such a great writer?)
 - Development as a Playwright
 - Influence on American Theatre
 - Attitudes and Reflections on Playwriting
 - Thirteen-year collaboration with Lloyd Richards
 - Awards and Honors
-

African-American Life 1950's

Ask students to research the political, social, and historical events of the 1930's through the early 60's spanning the lives of all three generations of the characters in *Fences*. Identify important themes and social issues found in their research, looking specifically at issues of race, class, sports, and family life.

Dreams Deferred or Lost

1. Have students free write a description of what they would like to achieve in the next 10 years. Ask them to include current aspects of their lives as well as future aspects, including profession, family, quality of life, etc. Following the writing exercise, list some of the elements on the board. What elements are common to the class, and what elements are unique?

After this exercise, ask the students to consider the following questions:

- a. Have you ever wanted something so badly that you could not think of anything else?
- b. What stood between what you and what you wanted?
- c. What did you do to fulfill your wish?

2. Share Langston Hughes' poem "A Montage of a Dream Deferred". Ask students to identify the central images of the poem. After reading or viewing *Fences*, ask students how the different similes and metaphors in the poem represent the characters' various dreams and their outcomes.

Living Newspaper Performance

- Divide the class into smaller groups (4-10) around a particular period, issue or theme.
- Ask each group to then identify and cut out the most crucial and pertinent quotations and sections from their research, then compile a script using only these clippings as text. This script will be used to create a Living Newspaper Performance, similar to the ones produced by the Federal Theatre Project in the 1930s. For more information on the Federal Theatre Project and Living Newspapers, see: <http://www2.let.uu.nl/solis/ams/xroads/1theatre.htm>.
- To make the script, students need to put quotations/clippings in a particular order to create a narrative or storyline. Tell the students to be creative about the order of the clippings. During this process, they will determine characters in their story and assign spoken lines. They can identify one or two narrators or divide the lines equally amongst the members of the group. Characters can speak as a chorus, individually, or in pairs. They can echo words or vary in rhythm, pitch, and tone. They can add percussion (clapping or with instruments) or other sounds. Encourage students to be creative and ensure them that there is no "wrong" way to put this performance together.
- Next, have students identify important thematic imagery in the quotations/clippings that can be created physically through movement and/or visually through drawing or painting. A theme such as "conflict between

visually through drawing or painting. A theme such as “conflict between fathers and sons” can be made physical by asking questions like: “how does conflict between family members look different from conflict between friends or strangers?” Ask students to answer that question with their bodies, by making a *stage picture* by silently creating a physical picture or frozen tableaux as if a snapshot will be taken. Standing in a circle, have one person start the picture by entering the circle and freezing in a position. The next person enters and adds to the picture with their body and freezes. This continues until each member of the group has entered the circle.

- Ask students to then add a repeatable gesture or movement to their picture. The picture then becomes a moving, living picture that can become activated as a part of the performance, with students speaking their lines as they move.
- For visual enhancement, and depending on amount of time available, students can be asked to create/design the sets and costumes for this Living Newspaper performance. Students can paint visual responses to the issues that can be made into a signs or a PowerPoint presentation to use in performance.
- Finally, hold in class performances of these short Living Newspaper pieces, followed by a talk-back/post-performance response session. Ask students about the experience of creating a play: what was most difficult? What came most easily? What would you do differently? What did you learn by embodying the characters and objects, rather than just reading about them? How did your performance choices reveal new meanings or ideas? How did it affect your feelings about the issues?

Mastery Assessment

ACT I, Scene 1

1. What year, day of the week, and time of day does the play begin?
2. Troy and Bono mention a number of off-stage characters as they enter the stage: a black man described as carrying a watermelon, "Mr. Rand", and "the man from the union." Who are these characters and why do they figure prominently in Troy and Bono's opening conversation?
3. Troy has filed a complaint at his job as a garbage collector. What is that complaint?
4. What does the directive, "take it to the union" mean?
5. What is it about the conversation between Troy and Bono that could be characterized specifically as a male conversation? Are there any observations or viewpoints which suggest the late 1950s?
6. How does the conversation change when Rose, Troy's wife, enters from the house?
7. What is the disagreement between Rose and Troy regarding their son, Cory?
8. During the discussion on Troy's earlier life as a baseball player, Bono remarks, "*Ain't but two men ever played baseball as good as you. That's Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson. Them's the only two men ever hit more home runs than*

Ruth and Josh Gibson. Them's the only two men ever hit more home runs than you." Who was Josh Gibson? What other information regarding Josh Gibson is revealed by Troy?

9. What is Troy's opinion of Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player in the major leagues?
10. What subject does Troy speak about which upsets Rose?
11. How does Troy describe his confrontation with death? How does death appear to Troy?
12. Who is Lyons and what is his relationship to Troy, Rose and Cory?
13. What is the ongoing conflict between Troy and Cory?
14. Troy often expresses viewpoints or attitudes on subjects through storytelling. What viewpoint or attitude is he conveying with his story of the furniture seller?
15. What portion of the furniture story doesn't make sense? Does Rose validate all of the facts of the story?

Act I, Scene 2

16. What does Rose wish for through the words of a verse of song?
17. What does Rose mean when she says, "*That 651 hit yesterday?*"
18. What is Troy's opinion of gambling?
19. What chore is Troy expecting Cory to assist him with?
20. What information can we deduce regarding Gabriel's character upon his entrance and his conversation with Rose?
21. Why does Gabriel believe that Troy is angry with him?
22. What do we learn of Gabriel's life and experiences through the dialogue between Troy and Rose?
23. Where does Troy say he is going instead of working on building the fence?

Act I, Scene 3

24. In the beginning of this scene, Troy and Cory renew their disagreements. What do they argue about?
25. In discussing what each of them would do with \$200.00, what differences between the two become apparent? How is this discussion an example of the term "generation gap?"
26. What is Troy's opinion on Cory's involvement with football?
27. What goals does Cory appear to have for playing football?
28. As the discussion becomes more heated, what point of status does Troy insist upon adhering to?
29. Why does Cory ask his father, "*how come you ain't never liked me?*"
30. What is the purpose of Troy's lecture on how seriously he takes the responsibility of being a father, husband and brother?
31. Why is Troy steadfastly against his son Cory pursuing a career in sports?

Act I, Scene 4

32. How can a recurring conflict increase the tension as the play continues? As Scene 4 begins, what is the familiar conflict between Rose and Cory?
33. When Bono and Troy enter, what news do we learn concerning the formal complaint made by Troy at his job?
34. Who is the "Alberta gal" mentioned by Bono?
35. According to Troy, what happened at the Commissioner's office?

35. According to Troy, what happened at the Commissioner's office?
36. What is the extenuating circumstance that may affect Troy's ability to drive a truck at his job?
37. Lyons and Gabriel join the scene. What is it that both of these men desire from Troy? Are they successful in their attempts to please him, to receive his approval, his blessings?
38. What has Troy discovered about Cory working at the A&P supermarket?
39. What information about Troy's father and mother is revealed to Lyons in the final moments of Act 1? Do you think that Bono knows Troy's full background story?
40. What is Lyon's reaction to the story of the irresolvable conflict between his father and grandfather?
41. What news does Cory bring to the gathering of Troy, Rose, Bono and Gabriel?
42. Using the language of baseball, what does Troy mean when he tells Cory, "See, you in the batter's box now. You swung and you missed. That's strike one. Don't you strike out!"

Act II, Scene 1

43. What is Bono's complaint about the wood available to build the fence?
44. Is Troy completely honest about his relationship with the "Alberta gal?"
45. Tension rises between Troy and Bono. What is Bono's objective in reminding Troy of his past, including when Troy met Rose?
46. How does Troy rationalize his relationship with another woman?
47. What is the news that Troy tells Rose? What is her reaction?
48. When Gabriel arrives, how does his innocent banter place a spotlight on the painful circumstances caused by Troy's news?
49. What explanation does Troy give to Rose for having a relationship with another woman?
50. What is Rose's response to Troy as he describes how his involvement with another woman made him feel?
51. What happens when Cory enters during the argument between Troy and Rose?

Act II, Scene 2

52. How has the relationship changed between Rose and Troy in six months?
53. What information is Rose forced to tell Troy following a telephone call?
54. What is Troy's message to "Mr. Death?"

Act II, Scene 3

55. While Troy appears to be talking to the baby, sitting on his porch, what message is he hoping to share with Rose?

Act II, Scene 4

56. What do we learn about events in Cory's life after two months?
57. What do we learn has transpired in Troy and Bono's life from their conversation?
58. What are the recurring issues and themes between father and son that erupt in the confrontation between Troy and Cory?

Act II, Scene 5

59. What is the year and what event is the family preparing for in Scene 5?

59. What is the year and what event is the family preparing for in Scene 5?
60. What are the updated stories of each character?
61. What is the story that Rose tells Cory about her marriage and relationship with Troy?
62. What mistakes does she tell Cory that she made in her own life?
-

Open Response and Writing Assignments

Open Response

1. Wilson's work asserts that the only way for African Americans to gain control of their existence is to dig deeper into the past, to remember and connect the stories of Africa, slavery, the U.S. Civil War, Emancipation, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Civil Rights Movement, to the present. What stories of Troy and Rose's past are revealed in *Fences*? How have their lives been shaped by circumstances beyond their control? While *Fences* is about the African-American experience, what universal lessons any cultural family can learn from Wilson's thesis above?
2. Ask students to investigate their own heritages by interviewing an older family or community member. How were things different for them when they were growing up? How does their past affect the way this person lives their life or views the world today? What events or memories from their past are most powerful for them today? Encourage students to think about pivotal events from their own lifetime and how these events have affected them. How do the experiences of the older generation relate to their own?
3. Recall references to a *fence* in the play. What does each allusion reveal about the character or conflict at that moment in the play?
4. How has the fact that Troy never had the opportunity to play baseball in the major leagues effect his beliefs, decision-making and general outlook on life?
5. Throughout *Fences* Troy make pronouncements and tells stories testifying to his desire for fairness, for a fixed understanding of right and wrong,

to his desire for fairness, for a fixed understanding of right and wrong, focused on the belief that hard work and determination should reward any American with the hope for a good life and for success. How do actual events, past and present, contradict Troy's vision of a good life?

6. What do you think the colloquial phrase, "Go on, Troy. I ain't studying you." means?

7. How does Rose view her role in the family dynamics? When there is conflict, how does Rose react? As the play is ending, does Rose regret any decisions that she made as a mother or wife?

8. Playing and excelling at sports is a strand of the narrative of the Maxson family. Discuss what lessons can be learned by participating in sports. While writing this curriculum guide (August, 2009), Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy died. Throughout the period of celebrating Mr. Kennedy's life many stories told of his love for sailing, especially the competitive nature of sailing. Senator Kennedy was described as a "sailor", and not just literally, but in his life as a legislator, husband, father, uncle, and brother. Using a sports metaphor for the character of Troy, how can his life relate to the image of a batter in the batter's box, holding a bat, facing a pitcher?

9. Is Troy hypocritical as he lectures his sons on what is right and wrong and yet, is involved with a woman outside of his marriage, who becomes pregnant? This is truly a universal trait – to observe the faults in others while avoiding or denying our own transgressions. What examples of this trait are in evidence with public figures, entertainers, or in your own life?

10. How do the set and scenic design of the Huntington Theatre Company's production add to your understanding of the play? What choices did the set designer make to create a sense of time and place?

11. Blacks and other minorities were excluded from professional baseball until integration occurred in 1946. Research the Negro League and the history of prominent black baseball players such as Satchel Paige and Fleetwood Walker, as well as Jackie Robinson and other black players in the Major Leagues during the early years of integration.

12. August Wilson's character, Troy, uses the word "nigger" quite a bit as he converses with his friend, Bono and with his sons, Cory and Lyons. What

converses with his friend, Bono and with his sons, Cory and Lyons. What specific behavior, character traits or decision making often causes Troy to use that word? In America, what is the current discussion about the “N” word? What racial and sensitivity issues are raised when the word is used by blacks and non-blacks?

13. August Wilson’s plays are considered realistic-naturalistic settings where people talk, behave, move, and respond to each other in believable ways. On another level, however, his plays reverberate with mysticism, ritual, and superstition. Discuss specific moments in *Fences* where characters share their superstitions with each other, acknowledge witnessing visions, and quote and/or sing Biblical scripture. After discussing the specific references in the play, ask students to consider what purpose and power these elements have in our daily lives. When the characters in *Fences* quote the Bible, how are they using the quote? What does it tell us about the character’s faith, values, and behavior?

Writing Assignments

1. Choose a character from *Fences* and create a biographical time line of the ten most important occurrences in his or her life. Choose only ten events, which are most focal for the character, understanding that you must prioritize. One event might be traumatic; another may be something as simple as playing and winning a ball game. Each list should cover the character’s childhood and finish with the end of the play. Events can be ordered in sequence beginning with the earliest recollection or ordered by perceived significance. Draw from information from the play, research, or events that you might envision happening.
2. Write a scene that includes all of the characters from the play, which takes place in the six months between Scene One and Scene Two of Act Two.
3. Write and deliver a eulogy for Troy.
4. Choose a female character from one of Wilson’s other plays and

4. Choose a female character from one of Wilson's other plays and compare her to the character of Rose in *Fences*. What role does each of them play? How are they similar and/or different? How do their actions comply with or defy the roles women typically played during that decade in American history?
5. Choose one of the following quotes from interviews with August Wilson and write an essay describing how his artistic and cultural beliefs are revealed in *Fences*.

"The foundation of my playwriting is poetry. Not so much in terms of the language but in the concept. After writing poetry for twenty-one years, I approach a play the same way. Each play is specific, each is different, and each has its own form. But the mental process is poetic; you use metaphor and condense. I try to find a metaphor to carry the work.

"The things we are taught early in life, how to respond to the world, our sense of morality – everything, we get from our parents. Now you can take that legacy and do with it anything you want to do. It's in your hands. Cory is Troy's son. How can he be Troy's son without sharing Troy's values?"

*"I was writing about black America—the specifics of *Fences* are about black America. But there is something larger at work. A painter, when asked to comment on his work once said, 'I try to explore in terms of the life I know best those things which are common to all culture.' So while the specifics of the play are black, the commonalities of culture are larger realities in the play. You have father-son conflict, you have husband-wife conflict—all these things are universal."*

ARTS ASSESSMENT:

Five-Minute Performances

Arrange the class in small groups. Tell each group it is going to have to present the story of the play in exactly five minutes. They can use whatever methods seem appropriate—action, prose narration, mime, movement, song, background music, pictures or whatever. Point out that each group must select the most important features, events, and purposes of the play. Send the groups away for a class to discuss and practice. At the next lesson have them perform their five minute versions to the rest of the class, and then compare versions in terms of what was missing, interesting, important, surprising, in common, and emphasized. Discuss why the versions may have differed.

Still Life

This exercise is especially useful if you want to help your students to talk about relationships between characters. Ask a willing student to stand before the class in a pose which she or he thinks is in some way characteristic of one of the characters—it could be kneeling and supplicant, or head bowed and despairing, or poking a nose into someone else's affairs, or looking behind or ahead, or... The student will look no doubt hopelessly bemused and embarrassed to being; but get the rest of the class to make suggestions, either by saying something or by simple coming and moving the student to what seems a better position without speaking. Add another student character to the tableau. The way that the second student stands in relationship to the first person is significant. He or she may represent a spurning or supporting character, an enemy or a friend, or may be ambivalent or unrelated. Ask students if this tableau seems to visually support a moment from the play. Next ask small groups of students to each present a version of the same moment in the play. Try to get the students to justify what they do. Ask the

moment in the play. Try to get the students to justify what they do. Ask the other members of the class if they understand each tableau, and if they can identify particular moments, crises, characters, and groupings.

Interviewing

Have students research all they can find out about a character and then have another student interview them. The questioning could focus on biographical details; motives for action; understanding of events; life before, after or outside the action in the text; or justification for what has been done or said. The questioners could be police officers, psychiatrists, friends, interviewing other characters in the text, or lawyers (with a judge, jury, prosecutors and defenders, and a decision at the end of the class.) Different groups could interview the same character and compare results. A variation of this exercise is to get two students to prepare the same character for one particular point in the text and then have them interviewed one after the other.

Scene Study

Have students act out a scene from *Fences*. They should use props and elements of costumes, if possible. Have them consider their placement on stage, blocking (who moves where and when), gestures, vocal tone, music, and the intended emotional impact of the scene. If you have time, have the students act out the scene a second time, testing the effects of changing something about the performance, such as the tone of voice, character trait, or a vital remark. How does such a change affect the selected moment? How does pacing or posturing of an actor affect the dramatic or comic timing of the piece?

Visual Art

Visual Art

Character Collage

August Wilson credits the art of Romare Bearden as one of his major influences. Look at some of Romare Bearden's work and discuss why he chooses collage as his primary medium of expressing African American history. Have students choose one character from *Fences* and create a character collage. Students can use paper, drawings, fabric pieces, photographs, old puzzle pieces, magazine and newspaper clippings, and quotations from the play to express the character's conflicts, relationships, and emotions. Encourage students to consider texture and color when making decisions to best represent their chosen character. Have students share their work with the class without naming the character. By picking out the qualities of each collage, have the class guess which character is being expressed.

DID YOU KNOW? (*Fences*)

- **W**ilson noted in an NPR interview that his greatest influences are the 4 'B's: Writers Amiri Baraka, and Jorge Luis Borges; the artist, Romare Bearden; and the blues.

Controversial and politically charged, Amiri Baraka (born E. LeRoi Jones) and his works passionately speak out against racism, imperialism, and slavery. His play, *the Dutchman*, won an Obie Award in 1964. The most respected and well-known Black writer of his generation, Baraka spearheaded the Black Arts movement of the 1960s, a movement closely linked with the Black Power movement. Although often criticized as sexist and homophobic, the Black Arts movement cultivated many young artists and writers through the development of Black theatre groups, poetry performances and magazine publications. In an interview in 1974, Baraka stated, "I see art as a weapon, and a weapon of revolution." August Wilson helped found the Black Horizons Theatre where he

revolution.” August Wilson helped found the Black Horizons Theatre where he mounted several of Baraka’s works. **Source:** Modern American Poetry

Considered one of the foremost literary thinkers of the 20th Century, Argentine poet, essayist, and short-story writer Jorge Luis Borges’ tales of fantasy and dream worlds are classics of the 20th-century world literature. Borges’s work belittled nationalism and racism and drew on influences of many times and places. Borges wrote, “A writer—and, I believe, generally all persons—must think that whatever happens to him or her is a resource. All things have been given to us for a purpose, and an artist must feel this more intensely. All that happens to us, including our humiliations, our misfortunes, our embarrassments, all is given to us as raw material, as clay, so that we may shape our art.”

Source: The Modern Word

Romare Bearden grew up at the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Family friends Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, and W.E.B. DuBois greatly influenced Bearden’s life and work. A painter and activist, Bearden fused Harlem life and the American South in vibrant collages, gathering inspiration from African art (sculpture, textiles, masks), Japanese prints, and Chinese landscape paintings. Bearden also designed costumes and sets for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.

Source: Seattle Repertory Theatre Study Guide; Romare Bearden Foundation

The Blues greatly inspired each of the three artists above. A musical style that emerged from African rhythms and African American slave songs, the Blues gained popularity in the 1920s with singers such as Bessie Smith and Gertrude “Ma” Rainey. Many early songs of this style were not written down or recorded, but passed from one musician to another. The Blues truly defines American music, serving as the foundation for virtually every major American music form born in the 20th century, including jazz, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, and hip hop.

Source: PBS—the Blues

Handout 1: Vocabulary

Bargain

Cause

Clockwork

Commissioner

Dialogue

Duty

Effect

Illumination

Irrespective

Judgment

Methodical

Motive

Passionately

Responsibility

Ridicule

Scrutiny

Shelter

Sickle

Sequential

Vernacular

Vigilance

Handout 2: Quotations

Teachers can use the following quotations to discuss specific scenes in the play in context, or discuss the universal ideas of the quotations projected out of context, or they may use the quotations as springboards to role-playing, essay writing, creative writing or research.

TROY: Death ain't nothing. I done seen him. Done wrestled with him. You can't tell me nothing about death. Death ain't nothing but a fastball on the outside corner.

LYONS: You and me is two different people, Pop.

TROY: It's my job. It's my responsibility! You understand that? A man got to take care of his family.

TROY: I don't want him to be like me! I want him to move as far away from my life as he can get. You the only decent thing that ever happened to me.

GABRIEL: Oh, I been chasing hellhounds and waiting on the time to tell St. Peter to open the gates.

CORY: Just cause you didn't have a chance! You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all.

BONO: You's in control... that's what you tell me all the time. You responsible for what you do.

ROSE: We're not talking about baseball! We're talking about you going off to lay in bed with another woman... and then bring it home to me. That's what we're talking about. We ain't talking about no baseball.

ROSE: You always talking about what you give... and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take... and don't even know nobody's giving!

TROY: I ain't pushing nobody away. Just give me some space. That's all. Just give me some room to breathe.

give me some room to breathe.

ROSE: Whatever was between you and your daddy... the time has come to put it aside. Just take it and set it over there on the shelf and forget about it.

LESSON PLANS

Teacher's Note: Choose activities that are appropriate for your classroom period. All assignments are suggestions. Only a teacher knows his or her class well enough to determine the level and depth to which any piece of literature may be examined.

ONE-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the context and major themes of the production.

DAY ONE—Introducing the Play

1. Distribute *Mastery Assessment* for *Fences* for students to read before the performance and to review again after attending it.

Optional: Distribute *Handout 1: Vocabulary* and ask students to define each word.

2. Read the Synopsis of the play. Discuss other works students have studied with similar themes and issues.

FOUR-DAY LESSON PLAN introduces students to the production and then, after viewing the performance, asks them to think critically about what they have seen. Includes time for class discussion and individual assessment.

DAY ONE—Introducing the Play

Same as Day One above; completed before seeing the production

DAY TWO—The production

Attend the performance at the Huntington Theatre Company.

Homework: Students should answer the *Mastery Assessment* questions

DAY THREE—Follow-up Discussion

Discuss *Mastery Assessment* answers in class.

DAY FOUR—Test

Individual Assessment: Choose either several questions from the *Open Response* or two questions from *Writing Assignments* for students to answer in one class period.

Optional: Students may choose one of the *For Further Exploration* or

Optional: Students may choose one of the *For Further Exploration* or *Arts Assessment* tasks to complete for extra credit.

SEVEN-DAY LESSON PLAN completely integrates *Fences* into your schedule. Within seven school days, you can introduce the play, assign reading and vocabulary, and assess your students as individuals and in groups. Students will ideally view the play after completing *Mastery Assessment* questions.

DAY ONE—Introducing the Play

Same as Day One above.

Optional: Distribute *Handout 1: Vocabulary* due on Day Four.

Homework: Read Act One and answer corresponding *Mastery Assessment* questions.

DAY TWO—Act One

Discuss the first part of the play and answers to *Mastery Assessment* questions.

Homework: Read Act Two and corresponding *Mastery Assessment* questions.

DAY THREE—Act Two

Discuss the second half of the play and answers to *Mastery Assessment* questions.

Optional: Complete *Vocabulary* handout for homework.

DAY FOUR—Group Work

Complete a *Media Assessment* activity (you can choose one for the whole class, or split the class into groups.)

Optional: Review *Vocabulary Handout*

DAY FIVE—Attend Performance

Optional: Students may choose to complete one of the *For Further Exploration* or *Media Assessment* tasks for extra credit.

DAY SIX—Review/Preparation

Students should answer the *Open Response* questions as preparation for their test the following day.

DAY SEVEN—Test

Individual Assessment: Choose two questions from the *Writing Assignments* for students to answer in one class period.
