

August Wilson's Pittsburgh

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Overview

Pittsburgh has produced many talented individuals from politicians, artists, athletes, and yes, writers. The area has more than excelled in the number of award winning and groundbreaking writers. In my work for this unit, I discovered more than 150+ published authors from the Pittsburgh region. Pittsburgh can claim noted children's authors, hot bestsellers, earth moving naturalist writers, iconic comic book writers/artists, history writers—who have made history, and on and on. The Pittsburgh area is resplendent with people able to tell a story that can make the world stop and listen. Foremost among such talented company, August Wilson's work has special significance.

Wilson's work stands out not only among Pittsburgh authors, but also against other playwrights in the United States. He was able to capture the social history of African American Pittsburghers, and thus the black community overall, from 1911 into the 1990s through nine of his ten plays (Note: The play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set in Chicago, not Pittsburgh). Wilson gave the gift of placing the black community and giving it a voice in history in times when blacks were continually uprooted and marginalized.

This eight week high school English Language Arts unit will deal with three of his works—*Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Fences*, and *The Piano Lesson*. Through allegory, the plays show the life, needs, desires, and thoughts in the Pittsburgh black community from 1911 through 1964. Besides having the setting of Pittsburgh in common, the plays share Wilson's political ideology of the need for the black community to retain their culture and be proud of their past. This is why this unit will examine different political philosophies of black leaders such as Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey. The unit also looks at the social history of the Pittsburgh African American community through readings by Mindy Fullilove and Larry Glasco. Together, these pieces will afford students deeper analysis of the plays and work as a comparison from what was occurring nationally to locally. More importantly, students

will be able to understand the impact of the past on the present in the Pittsburgh black community.

Rationale

For this unit, I chose to use only three of the ten Broadway plays that August Wilson wrote, and they are not the three normally grouped in the majority of publications and curriculum units, such as the Pittsburgh Public Schools' eleventh grade English Language Arts curriculum. I wanted the plays used in this unit to be set in Pittsburgh. Thus, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* was out. Instead, I have chosen to use *The Piano Lesson*. The criteria I used in selecting the plays were:

- The plays must be set in Pittsburgh to allow the unit to be a "Pittsburgh unit." One that shows a pride in our city for students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.
- Allow students to see how history impacted local life in Pittsburgh's black community.
- Provides a micro view of the national black community influence.
- The plays needed to flow into each other. The works for the unit are set at 20 year intervals, and thus represent the decades of—1910, 1930, and the late 1950s to early 1960s.
- Need to have the non-fiction pieces in the units reflected in the plays.

An extra boon is the number of awards and recognitions the three plays have garnered.

Note: The list does not include cast member awards.

- *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*—New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for Best Play, 1988 and Tony Award nomination for Best Play in 1988
- *The Piano Lesson*—Drama Desk Award for Best Outstanding Play, 1990; New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for Best Play, 1990; Tony Award nomination for Best Play in 1990; and Pulitzer Prize in 1990
- *Fences*—Drama Desk Award for Best Outstanding Play, 1987; New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for Best Play, 1987; Tony Award for Best Play, 1987; and Pulitzer Prize in 1987

As you can note from the above listing, the plays, while covering specific spans of time, were not written in chronological order. The Broadway productions of the plays are: *Fences*—1987, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*—1988, and *The Piano Lesson*—1990. Yet the plays' setting periods are: *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*—1911, *The Piano Lesson*—1936, and *Fences*—1957. Wilson accomplished his goal of writing a play characterizing each decade of the 1900s.

Another point I would like to make is that the unit is written using a constructivist educational philosophy and following the University of Pittsburgh's Education Department Institute for Learning's lesson approach. As a Pittsburgh Public School

curriculum writer for the twelfth grade English Language Arts curriculum, I have been writing units and teaching using their formula and guidance over the past school year, and it seemed natural to write the unit with these influences.

While the unit centers on Wilson's three plays, there are non-fiction essays, a speech, and Internet sites key to the unit as well. The additional materials will allow students to understand the social history and apply it to the society in the plays. The unit will have the students reading, responding in their Reader/Writer's Notebooks (R/WN), summarizing (which can be assigned as various PSSA portfolio entries), responding to questions in writing, and participating in pairs/trios and whole class discussions. The unit culminates with students creating their own one act play.

Background for Teaching

The overarching theme for the unit is:

How can literature enable an individual's story to showcase the social history of a time period?

The unit's overarching questions are:

What tools can a writer use to help them capture history?
Can one man's story be the story of many?

The unit's culminating project is for students to create their own one act play. They can use any historical, social, or political event in any time period to capture and show a common man/woman struggling to adapt.

The following is a brief synopsis of the pieces used in the unit as they relate to the overarching theme.

Laurence Glasco's "Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh"

Glasco's essay, which is available in Samuel P. Hays's collection of social history essays on Pittsburgh titled, *City at the Point*, is key to the unit. Glasco's essay provides the history of Pittsburgh's black community starting from the 1850s and ending in the late 1980s. This particular essay was enlightening to me, a lifelong Pittsburgher, who thought I knew the city's history. The majority of Glasco's points are clearly present in Wilson's plays. Points to stress from the essay:

- The double burden of Pittsburgh's black community—economic and geographic. The economic burden was black men being unable find work, and if they did find work, it was in low-paying menial jobs. Black women having to work due to husbands, fathers, and brothers not able to earn enough to support their families. This would cause a split in the family structure. The geographic burden, a fairly unique situation to Pittsburgh, in which due to the terrain of the city the black

community was, and still is, splintered meaning that the black community is really seven communities that seldom solidify. This has severely curtailed the political and economic power of the Pittsburgh black community.

- The decline of the steel and coal industries in the Pittsburgh area began much earlier than the 1970s, therefore the black community suffered economically even more.
- The Pittsburgh Public Schools and black education—while city schools were desegregated much earlier than other United States cities, blacks were shuttled into poor educational environments and black teachers could not be hired even though the city’s universities were producing quality black educators.
- Even through all the hardships, the black community created a rich and thriving social life which included theatre, clubs, social organizations, music, orchestras, and sports. The city would become known as the “Crossroads of the World” (Glasco 76).
- The devastation of the rich social life created by the blacks due to the city’s Urban Renewal Project and the building of the Civic Arena.

Booker T. Washington’s 1895 “Atlanta Exposition Address”

For some classrooms, you may wish to have students review a biography of Washington before having them read his speech, but in others, all students will need is to access prior knowledge through an oral recounting of his life. Either way, this should be done when assigning the reading.

Washington’s address or speech also referred to as the “Atlanta Compromise” and “Cast Down Your Buckets” Speech succinctly represents his ideology of how African Americans should react to the racist atmosphere in the United States. Washington’s belief is that in order to counteract racism, African Americans must first help themselves. He illustrates his point through an allegorical anecdote of a ship signaling others for water even though it is anchored in a stream of fresh water (the Amazon River, which calls to mind Africa—distant homeland to his race with its rich, ancient heritage). He also feels that if African Americans set an example of hard work, humbleness, and upright character, racism would eventually dissolve. Washington does not advocate any organized effort to win civil rights for African Americans.

Other key points in his address are his belief that African Americans have made their home now in the South due to their forced labor there under slavery, their high population numbers, and the historical dependence on the South for their labor. He feels that it is wrong for African Americans to try to impose a halt to racism or attempt to push their way into higher positions by demanding equality, better jobs, or political power. Washington espouses that only by African Americans learning farming and other trades can they prove that they are worthy of equality.

W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Of Booker T. Washington*

As with the Washington speech, you may wish to have students review a brief biography on Du Bois or have the students recall what they remember before assigning it. The essay can be retrieved from the “History Matters” website or by searching the terms “Du Bois and Washington.”

Du Bois’s essay is powerful and masterly executed. He expounds on his belief that following Washington’s philosophy of compliance, industry, and example has not worked and has resulted in seriously hurting African Americans. Du Bois believes that it is time for African Americans to rise up and take whatever action is necessary to achieve racial equality. He presents this all without besmearing Washington. A tactic worth discussing with students is why Du Bois would need to, and want to, be careful in his criticism of Washington.

An important point about Du Bois’s essay is he begins by recounting the surprised effect Washington’s ideology had on the South and North, and then African Americans. He states, “It startled the nation to hear a Negro advocating such a programme after many decades of bitter complaint; it startled and won the applause of the South, it interested and won the admiration of the North; and after a confused murmur of protest, it silenced if it did not convert the Negroes themselves.” Du Bois proceeds to note how Washington’s beliefs are representative of the old thought in asking African Americans to give up political power, the demand for civil rights, and higher education for African Americans.

Du Bois believes that Washington’s philosophy has seriously hurt African Americans because African Americans still do not have the vote, there are now laws allowing them to be treated as inferior people, and education money is drying up. He then asks how can over nine million men make any economic advancement in such a position. Du Bois does not blame all Southerners for the past and continued ill-treatment of African Americans, but he does blame those who are ignorant, fear the competition of African Americans in the workplace and in education, or try to withhold the rise of African Americans.

The essay increasingly becomes more strident and critical of politicians for their role in propagating racism and Washington’s views. Du Bois does not outright debunk Washington, but writes that Washington’s policies promote racism and ill-treatment of African Americans while saying “that the South is justified in its present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro’s degradation.” He adds that the North can not buy its way out of guilt. Finally, Du Bois concludes by calling all African Americans to stand together and oppose such treatment, and demand equal rights. His ending line is the opening line of the Declaration of Independence, ““We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Mindy Thompson Fullilove’s *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*

I was, as the expression goes, “blown away by this work.” Fullilove documents what happens when a community is ripped from its habitat. She likens it to when a person goes into shock from an injury. The individual’s body reacts by shutting down non-essential parts such as circulation to fingers and feet, and if no intervention occurs, the trend continues into hands, arms, etc. The body reacts this way in order to protect essential organs such as the heart, brain, and lungs. However, if no intervention occurs, the person will die. Fullilove believes that the same happens to someone ripped from their home. A trauma takes place that is just as deadly because the individual’s entire “mazeway” their pattern of movement and way of life (Fullilove 11) has been severed. They are effectively “root shocked” (Ibid.). While a severe injury may heal as if nothing had taken place, the lingering effects will always be present in the individual’s memory. With root shock, the injury/displacement will forever leave a scar for the individual immediately affected and their subsequent generations (Fullilove 12).

Over 1/3 of Fullilove’s book is about the displacement of the people in the “Sugartop” section of the Hill District during the Urban Renewal’s demolition and rebuilding of it for the Mellon Arena (formerly Civic Arena). Fullilove’s work is accessible to high school students, and should engage many students to dig deeper into what Pittsburgh looked like at the time of each of the Wilson’s plays in this unit. This would also make a great extension or alternate culminating project as well.

If you are unable to purchase Fullilove’s work or would like an abbreviated version, the Websites “Root Shock” at <http://www.Root Shock.org/index.html> and “Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter” (http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Simms_fullilove.htm) are excellent sources for the information. They can be accessed by having students look at some of the ways Root Shock is being addressed by cities, towns, and local citizens through “New Urbanist” architectural planning. The website “The New Urbanism: An alternative to Modern, Automobile-oriented Planning and Development” available at <http://www.newurbannews.com/AboutNewUrbanism.html> has a wealth of information.

Another dimension to Fullilove’s book is the pictures, diagrams, and other artwork of Pittsburgh in it. The following are the most important and can also be found on the web. They are:

- Carlos F. Peterson’s “At Freedom Corner” also available on the “Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter” site--
http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Simms_fullilove.htm
- The Teenie Harris Collection available at
<http://www.pittsburghartistregistry.org/content/portfolio.php?view=worksample&id=847&a=cfpta> (also has a timeline of Harris’s life). Look for the links to the timeline and catalog of his Pittsburgh photographs available through Carnegie Museum are in the upper right corner of the page. The link to his collection at Carnegie can be directly accessed at <http://www.cmoa.org/searchcollections/>

Other artwork to consider using in class:

- Carlos F. Peterson’s “Artist Portfolio” on the Pittsburgh Artist Registry
<http://www.pittsburghartistregistry.org/content/portfolio.php?view=worksample&id=847&a=cfpta>
- Many of Jacob Lawrence’s paintings and murals including his “Great Migration” series as well as biographies and interviews can be accessed through links at http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/lawrence_jacob.html

August Wilson

I recommend allowing students to explore Dr. Michael Downing’s site on August Wilson (<http://www.augustwilson.net/>). There are many newspaper articles, listings of his plays with various information, and transcripts of interviews. I would combine students’ independent Internet search of this site with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette’s file site of articles written regarding Wilson’s life and the production of his plays in the Pittsburgh area (<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/03001/497623>). To keep students accountable, a worksheet can be given to them. The worksheet can simply ask the students to explore three different links and to: one—list three items they found the most significant in each link and two—summarize the information. If time, students can report on their Internet search results through an informal presentation.

Wilson’s Influences—Generally Termed the “Four Bs.”

August Wilson wrote, “In terms of influence on my work, I have what I call my four B’s: Romare Bearden; Imamu Amiri Baraka; Jorge Luis Borges, an Argentinean short story writer; and the biggest B of all—the blues” (Elkins 3). Mark Williams Rocha in an essay titled “August Wilson and the Four B’s,” believes that Wilson easily credits the influences of Bearden, Baraka, Borges, and the blues because of gratitude, respect, and his habit of trying to teach.

Bearden’s influence on Wilson is readily apparent as Wilson’s muse was directly inspired by at least three of Bearden’s collages. Bearden also lived in Pittsburgh, and in the 1960s and 1970s produced the collage series that so heavily influenced Wilson. When Bearden started the series, he invited other artists to come and work with him, but none came (Rocha 10). Wilson came across Bearden’s work in *The Prevalence of Ritual*, which contains the entire collage series. He said, “[*The Prevalence of Ritual*] lay open on the table...I looked. What for me had been so difficult, Bearden made seem so simple, so easy. What I saw was black life presented on its own terms, on a grand and epic scale, with all its richness and fullness, in a language that was vibrant and which, made attendant to everyday life, ennobled it, affirmed its value, and exalted its presence...I was looking at myself in ways I hadn’t thought of before and have never ceased to think of since” (Rocha 10-11). Bearden helped Wilson see relationships and positioning of black life in bits and pieces to make a whole. Wilson was able to see a new creation of black life in its own sphere, and not through any other lens. For more information on Bearden and his works, go to his official website at <http://www.beardenfoundation.org/index2.shtml>

Imamu Amiri Baraka is a poet, playwright, and music critic as well as a highly controversial figure. Rocha cites several points to show how influential Baraka has been to Wilson. He notes that they are close in age, each had a “year of crossroads” in 1965 soon after Malcolm X’s death, and both identified with the philosophy of Black Nationalism (4-5). Black Nationalism has two tenets. The first is pride in being black, and the second is a varying degree from complete to distinct independence in social, cultural, and economic affairs. Baraka’s work is often controversial and stinging racial, sexist, and anti-Semitic. On the other hand, Wilson’s work is groundbreaking, honest, and accepted by the vast majority. Baraka’s plays, particularly *Dutchmen*, were produced before Wilson’s, so obviously Wilson knew of them. For more information on Baraka, his official website is at <http://www.amiribaraka.com/bio.html>

Rocha believes that the biggest “B” in Wilson’s writing is the blues (8). Many of Wilson’s lines have been considered to be musical as well as poetic. An example is in *The Piano Lesson* when Boy Willie says, “Walk in there. Tip my hat. Lay my money down on the table. Get my deed and walk on out. This time I get to keep all the cotton. Hire me some men to work it for me. Gin my cotton. Get my seed” (Wilson 10-11). Lines seem to sing, just like in every play in the Pittsburgh play cycle, characters sing, need to find their song, and heal through song. The blues hold a special significance to Wilson, and in his mind to blacks. Wilson said, “I think that what’s contained in the blues is the African American’s response to the world. We are not a people with a long history of writing things out; it’s been an oral tradition” (Rocha 9). What better extension of the blues than to continue the musical quality into drama as the blues, and thus music, came to be a common expression of self for African Americans when no other outlet was permitted. Music allowed African Americans a voice and a common language with which to communicate. For more information on Wilson and the blues, there is an NPR story titled, “Intersections: August Wilson, Writing to the Blues” as well as several other stories available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1700922>

The final “B” influence is the Argentinean writer, Jorge Luis Borges. Borges’s influence is best described as the art of storytelling (Rocha 13). Wilson has said, “With Borges you’ve got all these wires carrying electrical impulses, but they don’t all connect up. When you encounter one of those little breaks, I think he wants you to stop and say, ‘Now wait a second, how does that connect?’ That’s why so many of his stories are about writing stories, like [‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’]” (Ibid.). The art of storytelling transcends into what Mary Lusk Friedman calls a “Borgesean Paradigm” which has the formula of a protagonist on a journey due to a problem. The protagonist’s journey becomes more and more unreal and restrictive emotionally and physically until they are trapped. The experience is enlightening, but also destructive to the protagonist (Ibid.). This formula is apparent in Wilson’s work. It is also one that can be likened to Aristotle’s definition of a tragic hero. In the early days of Wilson’s career, he listed Aristotle as one of the few playwrights he read (Rocha 4). For more information on Borges look at the “Books and Writers” website-- <http://www.kinjasto.sci.fi/jborges.htm>

Analysis of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

This is my favorite August Wilson play, and repeatedly in my research I came across reports that Wilson felt the same about it. Unfortunately, *Joe Turner* has not received the academic attention of the other two plays in this unit. However, the play is very accessible. The theme of root shock to the individual and to his generations is obvious in the work. The individual—Herald Loomis, represents all blacks who were enslaved and brutally taken from their homelands. There are other characters in the play who have or are experiencing root shock as well. They are: Rutherford Selig, Molly Cunningham, Jeremy Furlow, Mattie Campbell, and Martha Loomis Pentecost.

Wilson's inspiration for the play was a Romare Bearden collage titled *Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket* and can be viewed at the several websites including "Chicken Bones: For Literary and Artistic African American Themes" at http://www.nathanielturner.com/images/New_Folder2/romarebearden.jpg What spiked Wilson's creativity was the man sitting at the table looking dejectedly at his hands in his lap. Another of Bearden's works, *Miss Bertha and Mr. Seth*, supplied the names of the Hollys.

Joe Turner incorporates elements of realism, the supernatural, and spiritual. Many critics believe that the play "rewrites the Christian conversion narrative to incorporate traditional African notions of salvation and sacredness" (Bloom 47). Wilson combines the two to create a faith that is responsive to the brutal history of African Americans. A history that can not, and should not, be forgotten as it must be built upon in order to go forward. This brutal past is something that Wilson feels should never cause shame to African Americans.

Realism can be readily detected in the play. In the "Setting" section, Wilson dates the play as taking place in Pittsburgh in 1911. He paints a picture of the city as a thriving industrial hub with steel sprouting from its mills as well as it being used to build the city and other cities across the United States. Jobs are plentiful and workers, particularly black workers, are flocking to the city. The black workers are coming to seek jobs and a place. They have been displaced or root shocked by their slavery past, causing them to increasingly flee from the South. Unknowingly, their flight is causing a second wave of root shock.

The entire play takes place at the Holly's boarding house—a place of refuge and a sense of what a home could be for many of the Hollys' boarders. Interestingly, Seth Holly is the only character in the play born of Northern free parents (Bloom 51), and has not been uprooted. Seth is also the least tolerant of Herald Loomis's traumatic condition—a condition caused by the displacement of himself, his family, and his ancestors.

Every character in *Joe Turner*, while allegorical, is very real. We see more than one facet of them, but only a few are dynamic. Certainly Bynum and Herald Loomis are dynamic—meaning they change, but others such as Jeremy Furlow and Molly Cunningham are caught searching for something that they cannot articulate. Although it

is apparent Jeremy and Molly are looking for a place and identity of their own; they refuse to take responsibility for themselves and their culture. Also Rutherford Selig (whose first name calls to mind President Rutherford B. Hayes, who removed the federal troops from the South ending the Reconstruction Days which had allowed Southern blacks a considerable amount of freedom for the first time, and subsequently opened the door for Jim Crow laws) is the sole white man in the play. Selig has ironically taken on the side job of finding people, where once his ancestors took part in transporting African slaves to America. His character is still caught in the market of trafficking people. The character of Rutherford Selig also appears in Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*.

In the beginning of Act I, Scene v, the Hollys, Bynum, Jeremy, Mattie, Molly, and Zonia are caught in a spontaneous Juba by Loomis. Loomis is appalled by their actions, and immediately orders them to stop. Mary Bogumil in her essay "the Cultural and Etymological Origins of the Juba" notes that the Juba was from the African word "giouba" which was a "sacred polyrhythmic African step dance whose secular origins trace back to South Carolina and the West Indies, where the word referred to both a mixture of leftovers consumed by plantation slaves and a song that they created to prepare them psychologically to eat... 'slop'" (61-62). The dance was a "reenactment of a mental breakdown... a dance whose choreography consisted of the clapping of hands, the patting of knees and thighs, the striking of feet on the floor, and the singing of a refrain in which the word *juba* was repeated, a refrain that acted as an incantation to the Holy Ghost or an invocation to manifest a transcendent being" (62). The timing of Loomis entering while the others were performing the dance is a perfect set-up for him to breakdown and begin the journey of freeing himself, and African Americans, into accepting their past and completing their journey into a new life.

Elements of the supernatural are present from the very beginning of the play. The play begins with Seth and Bertha watching Bynum perform voodoo in the backyard. They take it as a matter of course, and Seth even finds humor in it. Seth, the grounded Northerner, is ridiculing the old ways of the Southern black and his African heritage; yet, he seems fascinated by it.

Bynum is not the only one delving into the supernatural. Bertha, according to Missy Dehn Kubitschek in her essay "On Bertha's and Bynum's Shamanis" is also a shaman or spiritual worker (55). Kubitschek feels that there is a gender bias in that Bynum can help only Herald Loomis, and Bertha can only aid Mattie. Bynum seems to already know what he must do in order to help Loomis as well as what Loomis has gone through. He can sing the Joe Turner song where Loomis cannot, and help Loomis purge himself of what he has kept hidden in the "call-and-response" style of African Americans, which is a spontaneous verbal address by the speaker followed by a reply by the listener (55-56). The style is used in public settings to informal ones. Bertha's aid is more of the elder helping the adolescent through discussion, advice, and comfort.

To Kubitschek, "male and female shamans in *Joe Turner* share rituals and ritual space: African American spirituality does not assume or enforce separate, unequal spheres" (56). The kitchen is equally used by Bynum and Bertha as a place to perform their work

as Kubitschek notes, but I find a bias as only Bynum uses the backyard. Bertha, like the majority of woman, is confined to the house. Kubitschek notes one deviation that she believes is only afforded black males and is certainly not normal for a European male, which is that Bynum could give of himself in order to “bind” or bring together others (57). This giving of oneself is a trait typically reserved for women. Men are stereotyped as being emotionally introverted.

Loomis’s character is healed through the supernatural converging with the spiritual into a unique blending of Christianity and African rites. He metamorphoses into the “Shiny Man” that Bynum has been seeking. Sandra G. Shannon states that, “The Shiny Man is the African alternative to what August Wilson calls ‘the white man’s God’” (60). A God, which to the African Americans, has been “insufficient” (Ibid.). Bynum is able to create a tie between Africa (the past) and American (the present) for blacks. His search for the tie and Loomis’s search for identity runs concurrently and merges as they help to create a past acknowledging slavery and giving it the status of treating it as something to be proud of surviving versus something shameful (Shannon 60-61). It is an acknowledgment of the past, in order to go forward.

When Loomis washes himself with his own blood in Act II, Scene v, he is reenacting the sacrificial lamb imagery of the Christian faith, yet he combines it with the African rites of the warrior. He cries out as he slashes himself, “I don’t need nobody to bleed for me! I can bleed for myself” (93). Then he continues with, “You want blood? Blood make you clean? You clean with blood?” (Ibid.). Loomis has become the victim and savior—sacrificing himself while saving himself through his ceremonial baptism of his own blood and saving all other African Americans at the same time. This is also when Loomis exclaims he has found his song and is able to walk again because of it. A note in the play states, “Having found his song, the song of self-sufficiency...” (Ibid.) Loomis is able to now control his own destiny. He is no longer at anyone else’s mercy, and he has fulfilled the meaning of his name—Herald. Herald Loomis can now proclaim the message to African Americans that they have a place and a history to be proud.

The weighing down of Loomis, the man, is from losing himself and his place, but Loomis’s plight is also representative of the generations of Africans cruelly uprooted and never given the opportunity to be human again let alone find their place. He also represents the thousands who died in the middle passage—en route to America, and either died on board or jumped to a watery grave versus life as slaves. They are the bones that Loomis sees in Act I, Scene v, and with Bynum’s help is able to allow them to come to shore. They have completed the journey. Wilson said of this scene, “My favorite part is the story of the bones. I felt so complete after I wrote it. I had taken the bones of the Africans who were thrown overboard during the Middle Passage and symbolically resurrected them. I had marched them across the water and upon the land and connected them with the Africans who are in America now. I said to myself then, “If I die tomorrow, I have fulfilled myself as an artist” (Herrington 93). In keeping to the task he would bestow on Loomis, Wilson gave him the name *Herald*, which is to proclaim important news or to be a harbinger of something to come.

Final notes—Joe Turner was actually Joe Turney, the brother of the governor of Tennessee. Joe Turney ran a chain gang in the early 20th century that would pay the jail fines of African American men, and in exchange force them into labor for long periods of time. The practice was declared illegal in the early 20th century, but many places in the South practiced it until the late 1950s. One of the first blues tunes recorded was, “Joe Turner Blues” recorded by W.C. Handy around 1915 concerning the practice. The lyrics can be found on “MTV’s” website under “Nat King Cole/Lyrics/Joe Turner Blues at http://www.mtv.com/lyrics/cole_nat_king/joe_turner_blues/3953989/lyrics.jhtml

Analysis of *The Piano Lesson*

The Piano Lesson was inspired by a Bearden collage of the same name. The collage can be viewed on The National Gallery of Art website at www.nga.gov/feature/bearden/170-130.htm. Shannon in *The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson* states that the collage implanted in Wilson’s mind the questions “What do you do with your legacy, and how do you best put it to use?” (146). These questions hang over almost every character in the play. Berniece wants to hold on to the past, but hide it; Boy Willie realizes it is important, but wants to trade it for his dream; and Doaker, Avery, and Boy Willie acknowledge its existence, but do not know what to do with it.

Two metaphors run strongly throughout the play. The first is the warrior image, which is also present in *Fences*. Boy Willie is the epitome of this image in the play. He arrives pre-dawn, the traditional time in which great Greek battles took place (Bogumil 74). Boy Willie will wage war with his sister, Doaker, and anyone else who stands in the way of his goal. He is the lone warrior seeking his destiny. The other metaphor is of a train taking people to places; particularly African Americans to what they hoped were better lives and freedom. While the image of the Underground Railroad can be associated with this metaphor, it extends further to the Great Migration where trains were a common way for Southern African Americans to travel to the North and West searching for place, identity, and a better way of life.

Another image Wilson uses in this play and in *Fences* is the watermelon. Boy Willie’s immediate mission in coming to the North is to sell a truckload of watermelon. In *Fences*, the play opens with Troy Maxson exaggerating a tale about a black man not telling a white man that he was carrying a watermelon under his coat. Peter Wolfe in his book *August Wilson*, writes that “By using the stereotype of the black watermelon peddler to misdirect his customers’ attention, he revives in the Wilson canon the mischievous, unpredictable deity of African myth known as the trickster. Watermelons are bound up with blackness in America, if not in the easy, mindless way many believe (96). Wilson is playing with a stereotype or caricature, and in both instances hinting that Boy Willie and Troy Maxson are not to be taken at their word.

The symbolic core of the play is the piano inscribed by Berniece’s and Boy Willie’s grandfather, Boy Charles, with haunting images of what could only be just part of what their ancestors had to endure due to their enslavement. Boy Charles’s wife, named Berniece as well, and son, also called Boy Charles, were traded for the piano so that their

master, Richard Sutter, could give it to his wife, Ophelia. The name Ophelia triggers Hamlet's Ophelia with her spiraling madness, and it holds up to the reference as Ophelia Sutter becomes despondent over the loss of Berniece and Boy Charles. This is when Richard Sutter has the elder Boy Charles carve Berniece's and Boy Charles's images on the piano as a comfort to Ophelia. Instead, to Richard Sutter's dismay, Boy Charles carves the history of his parents and his own family being traded on the piano. Perversely, Ophelia Sutter is appeased by it and continues to play the piano until her death.

Surely, the Charles's family has paid the price for the piano. They paid with their flesh—that of Grandmother Berniece and her son, Boy Charles, who were forever separated from their husband and father because they were sold to another master. They pay as well with their blood—Boy Charles and his brothers steal the piano from the Sutters. Later fleeing from a white vigilantly group, Boy Charles is burned alive inside a train car (a place symbolizing freedom).

Interestingly, when Boy Willie wrestles with the Sutter's ghost in Act II, Scene v, a train whistle is heard. This is also when Berniece realizes that the only way to appease Sutter's ghost is for her to not hide from the past, which is the past of slavery and segregation. She takes on an allegorical image for all African Americans. Their past must be given a rightful place in history and not be considered shameful. The train whistle harkens the transformation taking place in Berniece. She essentially has been freed and set on the road to being healed. Berniece realizes that she must not try to hide her, and her ancestors' past. Their time and history must come to the forefront. This quiets Sutter's ghost, but Sutter's ghost does not disappear forever. His ghost has become a sentinel in the event someone would try to sell the piano (symbolic image) or hide the past again. He is given the role as he is the last of the Sutter family in the South. The rest of his family has moved out of the South and no longer cares for the land or old way of life; only he is left to atone for past sins. The Sutter and Charles families are bound not by blood, but by history. Also Boy Willie is transformed in the scene as he no longer will be passive in his history. He realizes that his heritage is not something that can be traded for money or a dream, but can understand the importance of holding on to the past and an identity.

Parchman Farm, which is repeatedly mentioned in the play, was a Mississippi prison which spanned "2,000 acres and 46 square miles in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, 90 miles south of Memphis...Parchman's inmates had to work in blazing heat. Despite this constraint, failure to meet production quotas would incur punishments like torture, starvation, and being forced to eat contaminated food" (Wolfe 97). Boy Willie and Lymon Jackson talk of having been at Parchman Farm for stealing wood. Lymon was shot as well during their capture. They are not the only members of the Charles family to have brushes with the law. Boy Willie reveals that Doaker was there, too (Act 1, Scene 2). Also Doaker and Boy Willie helped Boy Charles steal the piano from the Sutters. Boy Willie's lifestyle of gambling also puts him close to the violent and criminal side of life. And Berniece's husband, Crawley, was shot and killed while helping Boy Willie and Lymon with the wood. The play exemplifies what Shannon believes is a syndrome

that befalls many black men. She states, “The majority of the black men...are marginal members of a society that has squeezed them out of its workforce. Consequently they resort to moneymaking schemes such as selling watermelons, hauling (and stealing wood), or participating in other questionable employment for quick profit (153). They constantly are running close to the edge of what is legal as little else is open to them. Berniece knows this and that is part of the reason she asks Boy Willie three times where he got the truck (Act I, Scene i). Only Doaker and Avery have been able to break the cycle, and hold good, respectable jobs. Yet each can not have a good relationship with a woman. Doaker’s wife left him, and Avery is unable to persuade Berniece to marry him.

Was Sutter killed by a person (Boy Willie) or ghosts? This is an interesting question for which the play does not provide a definite answer. Boy Willie jokes in Act I, Scene i, that Sutter weighed over 300 pounds, and in fact, in Act II, Scene 4 it seems as if Sutter is sitting on the piano so that Boy Willie and Lymon can not move it when earlier they could. Boy Willie addresses the murder of Sutter in his angry confrontation with Berniece in Act I, Scene ii, when he admits that he “done a little bit of stealing here and there, but I ain’t never killed nobody. I can’t be speaking for nobody else. You all got to speak for yourself, but I ain’t never killed nobody” (52). Boy Willie does not need to address Berniece’s rant on the issue, but he does. He does so not because of guilt, but because he is not guilty. Also Sutter does not single out any one person in the play. He only appears anytime someone tries to move the piano. Since it is always Boy Willie trying to move the piano, Sutter should only appear to him, but Sutter does not. Additional support for the belief that Boy Willie did not kill Sutter is other than possibly making a deal in advance for the land with Sutter’s brother, Boy Willie would not have killed Sutter because he would not have had any clear benefit in doing so. And as Wolfe points out, Boy Willie might have made a deal with Sutter’s brother, but given the times, do you think the brother could be trusted to hold the deal for Boy Willie (98) or have been suspicious if his brother suddenly died? Also do you think Boy Willie would have easily trusted Sutter’s brother, a white man from a family who consistently treated blacks, and particularly Boy Willie’s family, horribly?

Berniece’s character is difficult to easily package. She is a matriarchal figure, hard-worker, and suffering. Her love for her deceased husband, Crawley, is still apparent. She is unable to go forward in life. Obviously, Berniece and Avery have been intimate as she allows him to visit as she is about to bathe (Wolfe 98), but she continues to reject his marriage proposals. She almost succumbs to Lymon’s advances, but when he gives her the perfume and tells Berniece that he bought it for Dolly, Berniece shuts down. The scene shows that Berniece is clearly not swooning for Avery even though Avery is a good choice, and he is in love with her. Whether Berniece’s transformation at the end of the play will allow her to accept that Crawley is gone and enter into a full relationship with Avery is not clear.

Boy Willie adds an interesting note to the play as he is planning to go back to the South. Bogumil says “This is significant, for it marks a potential turning point in the fortunes of black people. Up to now, their search for their true identities—while ending in Africa—had been accompanied by journeys to the North, away from the farms and families. For

the first time a character suggests the South as a place for them to pursue their destinies as free men and women” (79). This change shows that African Americans were beginning to realize that the South had become a home to them. Uprooting themselves to the North or West for opportunity was not a good answer as it only robbed them of what they had made already. What they had were not riches, but they had family, friends, and a place where their roots were. They could, as Booker T. Washington said, “Cast down their buckets” to help themselves.

Analysis of *Fences*

Three extended metaphors ground this play—fences, baseball, and death. Of the three, the image of a fence is multi-faceted.

The first image of a fence in the play is the physical one Rose wants Troy to erect around their property. As Bono notes in Act I, Scene i, a fence can keep people out and people in. In this case, Rose wants to keep her man and her family intact. She has, though, already lost as Bono in this same scene chastises Troy for buying drinks for “the Alberta gal.” Troy has already strayed in his marriage, and a fence is not going to keep him in. Also Cory is about to graduate high school, and his relationship with Troy is becoming increasingly problematic. Cory, too, will no longer be able to be contained inside the fence or house. His vicarious position is even more apparent as Cory does not have a decent bed in which to sleep, a further indication that he is only a temporary resident.

The other symbols of a fence in the play are “both real and metaphorical, both defenses and obstructions...they are the fences that enclose mental hospitals; they are the boundaries of graveyards but also of heaven (entered by St. Peter’s gate). More importantly, they are family responsibilities and divisions between generations. They are *not* the white picket fences in the front yards of American Dream homes. Instead they are racial barriers keeping blacks, even great hitters who can slam balls over any ballpark fence, from realizing their potential (Birdwell 36). The malleability of the fence imagery into so many different meanings is masterful, but there is one more that can not be left out—Troy’s fence around himself. Troy embarks on a course in which he loses his wife, mistress, brother, son, and best friend. His inability to let his failed dream of becoming a baseball player, of his aging, of understanding love, isolates him to where death is his only option.

Everything in life revolves around baseball to Troy. John Timpane in “On Pre- and Post-War Athletics” believes that the imagery of baseball represents “the troubled changes of 1957” (39). He feels that the majority of the play’s actions take place before the 1957 World Series in which for the first time a black player, and not from New York, dominated the series and brought home the win to the Milwaukee Braves. The player was Hank Aaron, who Troy dismisses by saying, “Hank Aaron ain’t nobody. That’s what you supposed to do. That’s how you supposed to play the game. Ain’t nothing to it. It’s just a matter of timing...getting the right follow-through. Hell, I can hit forty-three home runs right now” (Wilson 34). Troy believes even at 53, he can outplay anyone. His fixation also shows how stuck he is in the past. He cannot go beyond his

glory days of playing baseball, and his belief that he was cheated out of playing professionally.

Death becomes a character in the play, because Troy makes it so. While *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and *The Piano Lesson* are also haunted by the specter, no one else but Troy sees Death or personifies it. As Pamela Jean Monaco states in her essay, "Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost: From the Local to the Mythical in August Wilson," Death's "presence never is experienced by the audience. Death personified is first introduced in the opening scene when Troy tells of Death coming for him when he was ill with pneumonia. Troy weaves a tale of his battle with Death, who is dressed like a Ku Klux Klansman. Troy wins the battle, but is haunted by the figure of Death.

The other two instances of Death, as a character, occur when Troy is alone on stage. Each time Troy, in a rage, suddenly conjures up Death and tries to command or control it. Troy puts on a show of bravado, when actually he is in emotional anguish. Troy has just lost someone he loves and can not find a way to deal with it. The first time is after Alberta dies (Act II, Scene ii), and the second time is when his relationship with Cory is destroyed (Act II, Scene iv).

Throughout the majority of the play, Troy's and Rose's relationship, and thus their family, remains intact (Shannon 101). Even after their marital troubles, Troy stays with his legal family, and never physically or financially abandons it. This is what Shannon describes as a reversal of a "stereotype found in portrayals of the black family: the conspicuously absent father" (Ibid.). She also states that Troy "plays a dominant role in the family drama, not as a looming memory but as a powerfully present force... [Troy does not have] the walking blues" (Ibid.) While Shannon writes that Troy's mother did have the "walking blues," she also notes that Troy's mother had eleven children and "an intolerably mean husband" (Ibid.) Troy's mother's leaving could possibly be attributed more to her trying to survive or escape abuse than simply having wandering feet.

Troy's character and presences commands the play. In my seminar group, some of the teachers hated him for his actions and others understood that he was a mighty (remember his last name—Maxson) (Wolfe 42), but flawed man. Wolfe in his essay, "Peter Wolfe on the Strength of Troy" notes that Troy acts more like a tragic hero (think Macbeth), who is assailed by the Furies or fate (Wolfe 43). Wolfe makes the connection of Troy's first name with the legendary city of Troy from the Iliad, which was also the center of the Trojan battle (Ibid.) The Trojan battle is approximated to have occurred around the 12th or 13th century B.C. and was due to the Trojan Prince Paris stealing the King of Sparta Menelaus's wife, Helen. An ironic reference as it is Troy Maxson who steals from his wife to go to another woman.

Without a doubt, Troy can be considered a hero. He begins life with few pluses having been abandoned by his mother at the age of eight and left with his abusive father. Troy kills a man and is sentenced to fifteen years of prison. When he is released, he marries, holds a steady job, raises a son and still takes care of his son from his first marriage, and fights and wins a quiet battle to take a position formally reserved for white men only. He

is a warrior much like Boy Willie in *The Piano Lesson* (see section under analysis of *The Piano Lesson*), but one unable to win his battles. Another tie-in to *The Piano Lesson* is the watermelon trickster imagery in which Troy tells the tale of Mr. Rand and the watermelon (again see section in *The Piano Lesson*).

The end of the play shows a release of the past on the present and future. Throughout the play, Troy is unable to escape his brutal father. Whenever a relationship is over either due to death (Alberta) or his own actions (Cory and Rose), the specter of Death appears and haunts him. The personified death is his father as Pamela Jean Monaco notes in her essay, “Pamela Jean Monaco on the Spectre of Death” (38). However, Cory is able to escape. “Cory demonstrates that he can embrace the song of his father without becoming his father” (Ibid.) This transformation takes place when Cory is able to accept that his father had faults, but realize his worth as a man and individual. (This occurs at the end of the play when he decides to go to the funeral.) The song is represented in the play, not figuratively, but symbolically through the “Old Blue Dog” ditty that first Cory, and then Raynell and Cory sing together. Monaco states that their continuing to sing the song binds them to their father and to the others before them (Ibid.).

In what genre does the play *Fences* belong? Joseph H. Wessling in his essay “Joseph H. Wessling on the Play as Metacomedy” argues that while Troy can be seen as a tragic protagonist and comedies do not generally end with a funeral (43), Wessling sees Troy’s character as larger than that. He believes that, “Troy, for all his strengths, is flawed humanity in need of grace and forgiveness” (Ibid.) The play, like Troy, is hard to categorize. There are many comedic moments and sorrows, but Wessling credits Gerald Heard with saying, “I think the full horror of life must be depicted, but in the end there should be a comedy which is beyond both comedy and tragedy. The thing Gerald Heard calls ‘metacomedy’” (44). Wessling further explains metacomedy as “a vision that transcends the immediately comic or tragic. It is not evasive and it has room for pain, for heartache, for alienation, even for death, because it affirms the values of mercy, forgiveness, and sacrifice, which adversity calls forth...the essence, therefore, of metacomedy is hope, and *Fences* is a lesson in hope (Ibid.) Hope remains the last thing the audience is given as Cory, Rose, Gabriel, Lyons, and Raynell usher Troy into heaven. Wilson writes in *Fences* stage notes, “He [Gabriel] finishes his dance and the gates of heaven stand open as wide as God’s closet” (Act II, Scene v). Hope can also be seen in Rose’s taking in of Raynell, who can be free due to the Civil Rights Act just being enacted and is free of many of the burdens her parents had to bear. Hope is also seen in Raynell, like Cory, being able to see the song of her father, but not be haunted by it.

Objectives

Students will be able to write informal and formal summaries throughout the unit using either the ancillary texts or scenes from the plays. The summaries can be used to check students’ comprehension levels. They can also write critical or interpretative responses to literature, which are PSSA portfolio pieces, if the teacher so chooses.

Students will also be able to gain a solid understanding of the social history of Pittsburgh from the early 1900s to the 1990s. They will be able to chart historical changes, which will allow them to demonstrate this knowledge, and understand the difference between social history and history.

Students will know the elements necessary for a play script such as how dialect can create mood and help set time periods, use of stage directions, stage design, and other important elements of a play.

Students will demonstrate their command of the genre by creating their own one-act plays.

Strategies

The two forces that propel this unit are at opposite ends of the strategy spectrum. Constructivism, which has been morphed into progressivism, is pure ideology; it is grounds all my instruction. Whereas the IFL principles are concrete and have set criteria and goals. I believe they are a perfect strategy marriage.

Constructivism

Constructivism teaching has two fundamental goals. The first is to build upon students' prior knowledge and the second is to have students actively engaged in their quest for knowledge versus passive receptors. While the constructivist philosophy has become part of the progressive education movement, its founders were educationists such as John Dewey and Jean Piaget.

Some of the characteristics of a constructivist classroom are: active involvement of the learners, student-centered classroom, the teacher is a facilitator and not the fount of all knowledge, and students are encouraged to grow and learn. There is more collaboration in a classroom, and what I feel is a wonderful characteristic of the philosophy is that the teacher is not always right. This means that it is O.K. for students to see the teacher want to investigate something further or not know an answer. These are wonderful times for the entire class to search for an answer.

Simple ways to begin turning to constructivism in a classroom are having more classroom discussions, the teacher not being judgmental on responses but turning to the class, having more group work in which students report to the class, and allow for explorations whether it is with field trips or research projects.

IFL Philosophy

While the Institute for Learning's Principles can be accessed on their website (<http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/index.php?section=polcdrom>), the following is a condensation of it.

- The Principles of Learning encompasses nine basic premises, but the chief purpose is to allow for an analysis of instruction in order to provide optimal learning experiences for students. The premises are: Effort Based Learning, Clear Expectations for Students, Assessments that are Fair and Credible, Reward for Accomplishment, Academic Rigor in Curriculum, Accountable Talk, Socializing Intelligence, Self-Management of Learning, and Learning as an Apprenticeship. For more information on the DL Principles go to the University of Pittsburgh's Principles of Learning website at: [http:// ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ ifl/index.php?section=pol](http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/index.php?section=pol)

These principles are the guiding force in the creation of the lesson plans for this unit, and why the unit is centered upon them. Switching from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered one is not easy. I have found lesson planning takes much more time, but I now can say it has proven to be worthwhile.

Lesson Plans

Day One—Access prior knowledge by distributing and reading the following titular poem written by Maria Tello Phillips in her poetry collection *Ten Thousand Candles* published in 1931.

Ten Thousand Candles
 Ten thousand candles burn with constant flame
 Upon the iron altars of our town.
 Dun-colored acolytes were up and down
 The hills lighting the wicks of smoky fame,
 And one by one the dreams of dreamers came,
 So by their light, shall lusty labor crown
 True genius grimy in a rusty gown,
 A mystic figure in a metal frame.

For dreams of dreamers troop across the hills
 In step with mighty labor's lengthy stride,
 Lighting the ruddy tapers of the mills;
 And step by step mute aspirations rise
 Till mounting on cathedrals in their pride,
 Ten thousand fervent prayers move the skies.

Ask students to take a few minutes and respond in their Reader's/Writer's Notebook (R/WN) to the following questions. This poem was written around 1930 by Phillips, a Pittsburgher about the Pittsburgh workforce. Do they think this was a common experience for the majority of people in the area? What do you know about your grandparents experience/work/job/life? (By having students respond first in their R/WN versus immediately having a discussion allows students, who are not quick-on-their-feet-thinkers, the opportunity to gather their thoughts and be more likely to participate.)

Students can first share their responses in pairs or trios and then with the whole group. The teacher can record student responses on a chart labeled “Our Heritage.” After students have responded, the teacher can review the students’ responses.

Introduce unit, works, plays, and culminating project to the students. Distribute to the students copies of Laurence Glasco’s essay, “Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh” from the book *City at the Point* edited by Samuel P. Hays. Introduce reading and read aloud the opening pages 69-70. Ask students to record in their R/WN their responses to the following questions: What are the double burdens that have faced blacks in the Pittsburgh region?

After giving sufficient time (5-10 minutes) for students to complete work, have students report their responses in pairs/trios, and then in large group. Discuss any personal responses or feelings regarding Glasco’s belief of the double burden of Pittsburghers.

Assign rest of reading for homework. Have students highlight important points and quotes to be recorded in their R/WN.

Day Two—Discuss Glasco reading. Have students report in pairs/trios their important points and quotes then whole group. Note: Follow the sequence of lessons for the other plays, except use the questions I have listed for each at the end of this section.

Booktalk—Teacher distributes play *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. Read back of book cover. Ask students for their first impressions (students can record their thoughts in their R/WN before group discussion). Record on chart labeled “JT—First Impressions.” Post for future reference.

Assign parts—narrator, Seth Holly, Bertha Holly, Bynum Walker, Rutherford Selig, Jeremy Furlow, Harald Loomis, Zonia Lommis, Mattie Campbell, Reuben Mercer, Molly Cunningham, and Martha Penecost.

Read “Setting” and “The Play” sections of play. Have students record important information in their R/WN.

Note: May want to have a map of Allegheny County available for students to locate the different towns, boroughs, etc. that Selig mentions. An excellent one to use is from the Allegheny County website at: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/21/Map_of_Allegheny_County,_Pennsylvania.png/641px-Map_of_Allegheny_County,_Pennsylvania.png

Scotchbottom or Scotch Bottom was the name given to the community of Hazelwood due to the large number of Scottish living there.

Homework—Students read Act I, Scene i and answer the gist questions: What is happening here? How do we know (support from the text)? Who are the characters?

Day Three—Review gist questions. (Optional charting by character.) Read aloud Act I, Scene i, but before reading tell students that they will be rereading the scene to find three (3) significant moments—points to them of high information or knowledge about what is happening. They should make a T-chart in their R/WN. On the left side of the T-chart record the exact lines (which can be abbreviated) along with page number. Students can work in pairs/trios. This can be finished for homework. If time permits, have the group present their significant moments.

Homework—Students are to answer the following inquiry question in their R/WN—Think about Bynum about his “Shiny Man” and his “Binding Song,” what do you think they represent to Bynum and to Herald Loomis? Also they are to Read Act I, Scenes ii and iii, and answer the gist questions of: What happened here? Who are the characters? How do we know?

Day Four—Read Act I, Scenes ii and iii in class. Review homework—first the inquiry question, which can be charted, and then the gist questions for Act I, Scenes ii and iii. Read in class Act I, Scenes ii and iii. Have students find the significant moments and record them in their R/WN. Share in pairs/trios and then whole group discussion.

Homework--Introduce the Booker T. Washington’s reading “Atlanta Exposition Address” available on the Internet at: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/>
Students are to read the speech and answer the following questions: What is Washington’s stance for African Americans? Do you agree or disagree with his position? Why?

Day Five—(Discuss the homework questions. Again this can be in small groups and then whole class discussion. Chart the responses and keep the chart for further use in the unit. Inquiry Question—Ask students if they find any of Washington’s philosophy in the play? What about Glasco’s ideas? Support with evidence from the text. This should be done in their pairs/trios. Have a whole class discussion.

Homework--Read Act I, Scene iv. Either explain to students what a Juba Dance is or direct them to Wikipedia’s entry on it at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juba_dance Have students answer the gist questions.

Day Six—Read aloud Act I, Scene iv. Review gist questions—pairs/trios and then whole class. Have students review the chart/responses to Bynum and his “shiny man.” Ask the questions: What is Loomis seeing? What role does Bynum play in this scene? How does Loomis’ vision reflect on Bynum’s search? Why can’t Loomis walk at the end? The teacher may wish to ask a question & allow students time to record in their R/WN responses before continuing the discussion.

Homework--Students are to read W.E.B Du Bois’s reply to Washington’s address titled, “Of Booker T. Washington” available at: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/40> Students are to answer the following questions: What is Du Bois’s philosophy? How does he treat Washington in the piece? Why? Support with evidence from the text.

Day Seven—Homework Review—The class first should review their notes and the chart from the Washington reading. Whole class discussion on the homework questions. Afterwards, have the students respond to the inquiry question—Do you see evidence of

Du Bois's philosophy in the play? Pair/trio share followed by whole group discussion. Responses can be charted as Washington's were. Read aloud Act II, Scene i. Have students answer the gist questions. Respond in class.

Homework—Students are to find two significant moments in Act II, Scene i and record them in their R/WN. Also students are to read Act II, Scene ii (Note: the teacher may want to explain who Joe Turner was).

Day Eight—Homework Review—Whole group discussion. After have students respond in their R/WN to the following questions—Look closely at the characterization of Molly and Mattie. Does either one seem to adhere to Washington or Du Bois's philosophies? What about Glasco's themes? Explain and use evidence from the text. (This can be done in pairs/trios. Students respond in whole group discussion to questions. Read Act II, Scene ii and iii.

Homework—Students are to answer the gist questions for the two scenes and record two significant moments for each scene.

Day Nine—Homework Review—Have pair/trio share and then whole group discussion. Then ask students to respond in their R/WN to the following question—What do you think Bynum is referring to when he talks about a person's "song"? Support with evidence from the text. Pair/trio share and then whole group discussion. Read aloud Act II, Scene iii. Have students answer the gist questions.

Homework—Students are to find two significant moments in Act II, Scene iii and record them in their notebook.

Day Ten—Have students share the significant moments in Act II, Scene iii. Have students respond to the inquiry question—At the end of Act II, Scene iii, Loomis states he has forgotten how to touch a woman. Earlier Bynum says Loomis has lost his song. Explain what you think Loomis means by "touching a woman," and what does his song and touch have in common or don't they have anything in common? Discuss in pairs/trios and then whole group discussion. Read aloud Act II, Scene iv. Have students do the gist, discussion, significant moment, and discussion steps.

Homework—Students are to answer the following inquiry question—What adult characters in the play do you think Reuben and Zonia mirror? Or do you feel they do not mirror anyone else? Explain. Students are to read the final scene and record their initial thoughts on the ending in their R/WN.

Day Eleven—Begin by discussing students' initial thoughts about the ending of the play. Read aloud the scene. Transition into gist, discussion, significant moments, and discussion cues. Ask students to review their initial thoughts about the play's ending, and think about the discussions the class has had since then, do they feel any different? Why or why not? They should support their answers.

Homework—Students are to answer the following questions: Why does Martha feel that Loomis needs to wash in the blood of the lamb (and what lamb) in order to be free? Why does this action free him? Bynum has found his shiny man. What does this mean to Bynum?

Day Twelve—Homework Review—pair/trio share and then whole group discussion. Have students then respond to the following questions (they can write responses in their R/WN and then in pairs/trios or just in whole group discussion): What implications do you feel Bynum finding his shiny man has allegorically? When Loomis and Martha finally meet, they are so resolute in that their relationship is over. Why do you think they feel that way? Cite evidence from the text. Introduce Fullilove excerpt. Ideally use the “Introduction” through to page 30. If the text is unavailable, use editorial available on the Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter at: http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Simms_fullilove.htm. After reading, ask the basic gist questions—What is the author explaining? How do we know? (You may wish to chart this for use with the other plays.)

Homework—Have students respond in their R/WN to the following question: How does Fullilove’s syndrome of Root Shock apply to the characters in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*?

Day Thirteen—Review homework question. Can be accomplished first in pairs/trios and then whole group discussion. Transition into culminating assignment. The teacher may wish to hand out the assignment guide and scoring guide (addendum one to the unit).

Homework—Have students review at least two of the following Internet sites: Troy M. Hughes’s “Tips for Writing a Great Play” available at <http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/hughes.htm>, Jon Dorf’s “Playwright’s 101” (also has a book available) at <http://youngplaywrights101.com/>, About.com’s “Writing a Stage Play” <http://homeworktips.about.com/od/homeworktopics/a/play.htm>, and MSN Encarta “Homework Starter: Play” http://encarta.msn.com/sidebar_701544128/play.html. They are to record in their R/WN the basic elements of writing a play.

Day Fourteen—Homework Review—chart the basic elements of writing a play. Transition into *The Piano Lesson*. Review Day Two’s Lesson Plan & follow basic plan including Booktalk using back cover, recording of first thoughts in R/WN, assigning parts, reading James’s opening stanza, “Setting,” and students note taking. Read Act One, Scene i.

Homework—Students record gist information and significant moments in their R/WN on Act One, Scene i.

Continue lessons as sequenced for *Joe Turner*. Inquiry questions for Acts and Scenes are as follows.

Act One, Scene i	How does Berniece treat Boy Willie and Lymon? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. Why does Sutter’s ghost only appear to Berniece? Was Sutter’s death an accident, murder, and do you believe Boy Willie had anything to do with it?
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Scene ii	Scene ii has most of the men in the play talking about their lives, women, the ghost, work, and the South. Each shares a regret, a sadness, or fear in their lives. Explain each
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one's revelation and how it impacts on your interpretation of their character.

How does the singing add to the play and the men's characterization?

Act II, Scene i

Why do you think Sutter appeared to Doaker so soon after his death and not anyone else?

Scene ii

From this scene we see an intimacy between Avery and Berniece. What gives it away? Why did you think Berniece refuses to marry Avery? What connection do you see between Berniece's refusal to play on the piano and not telling Maretha the story of the piano? Explain.

Scene iii

Why does Boy Willie bring Grace to Doaker's place knowing that Berniece and Maretha are there? Why does Berniece begin to fall for Lymon? What does it say about her relationship with Avery?

Scene iv

The audience hears "The sound of SUTTER's GHOST" according to the stage directions, but the actors on stage do not (dramatic irony). Why do you think the ghost is present?

Scene v

Berniece and Boy Willie argue about teaching Maretha the truth. From the truth of her place in the world to the story of the piano. Pick one of their position and defend it using support from the text. How does the song Wining Boy sings at the piano significant to the play's action? How does Berniece's playing on the piano soothe Sutter's ghost and Boy Willie suddenly acquiesces to returning home without selling the piano? Why is Boy Willie the only one to try to take on Sutter's ghost?

After finishing the play, review the philosophies of Washington and Du Bois. Ask students to chart whose beliefs each character could represent. They should use evidence from the text to support their answers.

Review Fullilove's work on Root Shock with the students. Ask them to find evidence of the Root Shock syndrome in the play. Support from the play should be used.

Before transitioning to *Fences*, have students review again the playwriting sites. They can discuss their play ideas in pairs/trios followed by whole group discussion. Continue

the discussion with asking students about any problems they feel they might encounter. Make sure students realize the standard format of a play as well. Finally, the teacher can have students prepare a story outline describing proposed setting, characters, theme, and basic plot. This can be due halfway through reading *Fences*.

Approximately Day Twenty-Two—Repeat Booktalk with *Fences* as well as rest of opening day's work. Again follow sequence of lessons—gist, discussions, significant moments, discussions, and inquiry questions. The inquiry questions for *Fences* are as follows.

- Act One, Scene i How would you characterize Troy Maxson?
Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
How does Troy describe Death? Why do you think he does this?
- Scene ii How does Troy feel about Gabriel? Does Rose feel the same? How would you characterize Gabriel?
Rose begins the scene by singing about fences? How does her song and the fence Troy and Cory are building relate to the play's title or don't they relate?
- Scene iii Look back at Act I, Scene i and compare and contrast Troy's sons, Lyons and Cory. Students are to review their characterization of Troy from Act I, Scene i, and have them add or change any differences they may feel about Troy.
- Scene iv Students can review their characterization of Cory and Lyons to see if they would add or change anything.
How does Troy feel toward his father?
- Act II, Scene i How does Alberta and Death appear the same to Troy?
Why do you think Troy tells Rose that he is going to be someone's daddy and not that he is having an affair?
Why do you think Wilson has Gabriel in the scene when Troy is telling Rose about the baby?
- Scene ii How do you think Troy takes the news of Alberta's death? How does Mr. Death figure in the scene with Troy?
- Scene iii How do you feel about Troy's plea to Rose about the baby? How do you feel about Rose's and Troy's characterization? (Students will be reviewing their prior work on Troy.)
- Scene iv How does Fullilove's Root Shock syndrome seem to be affecting Troy?
Cory's and Troy's relationship is splintered in this scene. Do you

think Cory is right in his anger at his father? Explain.
Again Troy battles Mr. Death at the end of this scene. Does there seem to be a pattern of when Troy battles with him? Explain.

Scene v

Why do you think Wilson skips seven years in the play's action and does not show Troy, who is the play's protagonist, during this time and at the end of the play?
How does Cory's finally consenting to go to Troy's funeral signal a change in him? How is this change signaled in the play?
Are there larger ramifications to the play's actions? Think historically and socially.

Have students review Washington's and Du Bois's philosophies in relationship to the play. They should also look again at Fullilove's Root Shock syndrome to see how it can relate to the second half of the play.

Transition into the students creating their own one act plays. Have them discuss the importance of dialogue to a play. Students can experiment using dialogue by pairing them, and having each pair work on a dialogue exercise. One such exercise is to provide a plot line, such as a mother and daughter discussing the daughter's curfew time. Each student is to respond as one of the characters.

Approximately Day Thirty-One—Students are to begin creating their own one-act play. See the assignment guide sheet and scoring guide (appendix one) for directions. Appendix two provides additional instructional for the playwriting activity. Estimated time—five to seven days.

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Appendix One

One-Act Play Writing Assignment

Guide Sheet

In this assignment, you will create an original one-act play set in a historical time period when change in thinking, actions, acceptance, and society was occurring. You must capture the struggle of your protagonist, either inward or outward.

The play should be written in the standard play format—dialogue must propel the entire work. Stage directions must be kept to minor movement. Written structure should be similar to the standard style which August Wilson’s works are fine examples. Remember his inclusion of an opening “Setting” section and list of characters with a brief note of their relationship to the main protagonist.

Remember to follow these simple rules:

1. Pick what interests you. Think of an incident or time in history that has fascinated you, research the moment, and research what people wore, what houses would be like (remember no electric lights or chiming clocks in the 1600s!).
1. **Dialogue** must propel the story and action of the play--not stage directions. Your dialogue must be necessary and purposeful. After you write a scene—cut out unnecessary lines and phrases. Weigh every word! Plays are ACTION!
2. Keep your **cast** small. Use no more than six characters. Write a character profile using cues such as: name, age, in school or education, job?, describe how dresses, any specific characteristics, if this is your protagonist—problem, if not protagonist—relationship to the protagonist & any obstacles character will have toward the protagonist’s problem, lives where?, is the character good or bad?
3. **Setting**—time period is important to your play—research the historical period and set your stage cheaply, but effectively. Also no fast transformations, car crashes, or spectacular spectacles. This is theatre and not television.
4. **Protagonist**—must have a conflict—a compelling problem with what is historically taking place. Finally, there must be growth in your protagonist for good or bad.
5. A **scene** must be necessary to the work. Try removing a scene, and if the play could go on smoothly without it or you can move the main reason for the scene to another, cut it.

6. **Stage directions**—are for exits, entrances, or to explain things that a character is doing.

One-Act Playwriting Scoring Guide

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Below Fair
<p>Characters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters are well defined • Protagonist changes/grows over the course of the act • Protagonist has a conflict or desire • Characters’ dialogue propel the action/play • Characters are realistic 	4-5 out of 5	3	2	1 to 0
<p>Plot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a historical context • All scenes are necessary to plot • Has a beginning, middle, and end • Has a central climax • Runs throughout the act 	4-5 out of 5	3	2	1 to 0
<p>Play Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written using proper format • Action propels the story • Stage directions written in italics and kept to a minimum • Little, if any, unnecessary words or dialogue • Dialogue is realistic 	4-5 out of 5	3	2	1 to 0

Additional comments: _____

Appendix Two

**Additional Tips for Successfully Writing
a One-Act Play**

The following are additional tips to help students succeed in the writing of their play.

1. Build thematically or historically.

Students should explore a particular time in history or an incident that interests them such as the Holocaust, Napoleon at Waterloo, Battle at Gettysburg, dedication of the Statue of Liberty, or meeting Aristotle in Ancient Greece.

They can then start with a line—something famous or they create and add another line either before or after, which means they may have to create a character to say that line.

They can also use the Who/What questioning—

Who—Amelia Earhart

What—trying to find financing in order to fly a plane non-stop across the ocean. She is about to meet with a banking committee and is writing notes on reasons why they should lend her the money.

2. After deciding the plot of the play, students should make an outline along with character descriptions. At this time, they **SHOULD KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE END OF THEIR PLAY!!!**

3. At this point, students' outlines should be checked for continuity. Does the story thread seem tight? No gaps or unnecessary stuff? This can be accomplished through a writer's workshop, the teacher reviewing the work, or both.

4. Have students start small—just an exchange of dialogue between two characters. It does not have to be work that they will keep for their play, but they have started. Generally, students are excellent at following through a plot line and adding twists to the story. The biggest problem is the end. Students are in a hurry to finish or simply get tired of the project. Have them write backwards. Start from the end they want and layer the work back. When finished, they can go forward, the material will be fresh and they can tighten or add to the script.

5. Pick the best script and have students informally present it or host a Reader's Theatre.