



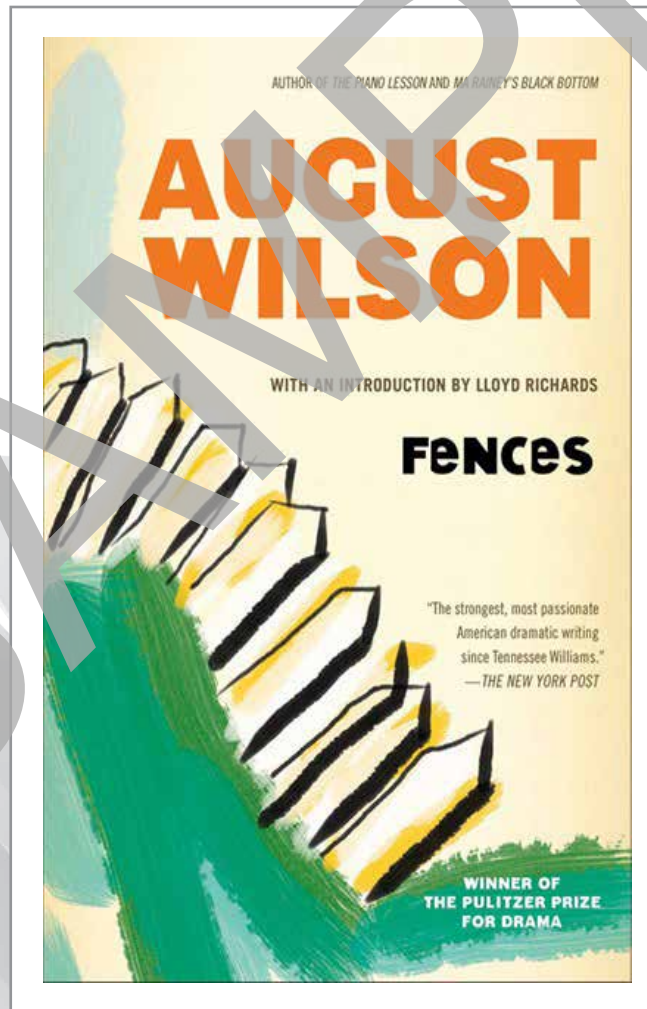
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Fences

August Wilson



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Fences

August Wilson

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Analysis, compare/contrast, brainstorm, research

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions, application, connotation/denotation, synonym/antonym, part of speech

Writing

Poetry, script, monologue, journal

Literary Elements

Metaphor, simile, allusion, personification, symbolism, foreshadowing, irony, tone, characterization, setting, theme, genre, mood, paradox

Comprehension

Cause/effect, predicting, inference, plot development, thematic development, conflict resolution

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, monologue, script performance, reports

Across the Curriculum

Music—ballad; Art—diorama, collage; Current Events—magazine/newspaper articles; Drama—performance; History—baseball and/or football, Civil Rights movement, racial integration

Genre: drama

Setting: small dirt yard and porch in front of the Maxson house in an urban American industrial city (possibly Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania); 1957, 1965

Themes: family, love, forgiveness, coming-of-age, responsibility, illusion vs. feasibility, death, disappointment, rejection

Mood: reflective, regretful, humorous, turbulent

Tone: often pessimistic, though ends on an optimistic note

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. society

About the Playwright

Personal: Frederick August Kittel (August Wilson) was born April 27, 1945, in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was the fourth of six children born to a German immigrant baker and an African-American house cleaner Daisy Wilson. His father and mother separated when Wilson was five, and his mother and siblings lived in a two-room apartment above a grocery store in an economically depressed neighborhood made up primarily of black Americans and Jewish and Italian immigrants. He changed his name to August Wilson in 1965 to honor his mother.

When Wilson was a teenager, his mother married David Bedford, and the family moved to a predominantly white neighborhood where they encountered racial hostility. Wilson, as the only black student at Central Catholic High School in 1959, endured threats and abuse, which ultimately caused him to leave the school. After brief stints in a vocational high school and later in Gladstone High School, he dropped out of school in the ninth grade. He educated himself through reading, and the Carnegie Library eventually awarded him a degree because of his extensive use of the facilities.

Wilson died October 2, 2005, in Seattle, Washington. He is survived by his third wife, Constanza Romero, their daughter, Azula Carmen, and a daughter from a previous marriage, Sakina Ansari.

Career: Wilson wanted to become a writer but joined the United States Army in 1962. He left after one year and worked at odd jobs for a few years. He and a friend, Rob Penny, co-founded the Black Horizon Theater in Pittsburgh in 1968. His first play, *Recycling*, marked the beginning of his career as a playwright. His plays reflect the struggles of African Americans, and his "Pittsburgh Cycle," consisting of ten plays each set in a different decade, chronicle the African-American experience during the twentieth century. In addition to *Fences*, his most famous plays include *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and *The Piano Lesson*. In addition to his career as a playwright, Wilson wrote educational scripts for the Science Museum of Minnesota in the late 1970s. He helped start the Kuntu Writers Workshop, which brought African-American writers together and assisted them in getting their work published and produced.

Honors: Wilson received several awards for his plays. Those that relate to *Fences* include Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play (1987), New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play (1987), Pulitzer Prize for Drama (1987), and Tony Award for Best Play (1987). Shortly before his death, he received the Freedom of Speech Award at the U.S. Comedy Arts Festival (2004) and Make Shift Award at the U.S. Confederation of Play Writers (2005). Two weeks after his death, the Virginia Theatre in the New York Broadway theatre district was renamed the August Wilson Theatre, becoming the first Broadway theatre with the name of an African American.

Act One, Scene Three

Troy and Cory clash over Cory's giving up an after school job to play football and over purchasing a TV. Troy refuses to see a college recruiter who wants to recruit Cory, but agrees to pay half the price of a TV if Cory will pay the other half. Their argument about football reveals Troy's bitterness over having failed to achieve baseball stardom.

Vocabulary
recruiter
tarred
follow-through
hesitant
methodical

Vernacular
"got to take the crookeds with the straights" (p. 37)
"carry a sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard...give you lint from my pockets...my sweat and my blood" (p. 40)

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the conversation between Rose and Cory, and analyze how this, plus Troy's arrival, advances the plot. *(When Cory returns from football practice, Rose tells him that Troy is upset with him for leaving without doing his chores. Their dialogue reveals that Troy has procrastinated about building the fence for four or five weeks. Troy, who has supposedly returned from Taylors' where he watched the game, has no idea what the score is and says he doesn't care about the game. This may indicate he was elsewhere, possibly seeing Alberta. Troy makes sexual advances toward Rose to mask his guilt over Alberta. When Rose does not respond to him, he takes out his frustration on Cory, berating him for not doing his chores. This scenario sets the stage for the ensuing conflict between Troy and Cory and for Troy's disclosure of his frustration with his life.)*
2. Examine the interaction between Troy and Cory in regard to buying a TV. How is Troy's response surprising? What does their discussion about TV and the status of Major League Baseball say about each character? *(Cory asks Troy about buying a TV so they can watch baseball games, etc. When Troy learns that a TV will cost about \$200, he informs Cory that they need a new roof far more than they need a TV. Troy thinks a roof is more important than a TV [practicality], but Cory has the opposite opinion [pleasure]. In a rare attempt to compromise with Cory, Troy offers to pay half the money if Cory can earn the other half. This greatly differs from Troy's usual self-righteous and imposing attitude. In their dialogue about baseball, Cory reveals his rationality about the level of equality between black and white players, whereas Troy reveals his bias against white players and his bitterness over his missed opportunity. Their dialogue about Major League Baseball reveals a common "generation gap," with Troy living in the past and Cory ready to move into the future.)*
3. Analyze the significance of Troy's conversation with Cory about sports and Cory's desire to play football. *(Cory tells Troy about the recruiter's impending visit and lets him know that he will work at the A&P only on weekends until football season is over. Troy exerts his authority by saying he will not give his permission for Cory to be recruited for college football and insisting that Cory get his regular job back. Troy's tirade reveals that he does not trust the white recruiter to give a black boy a chance and that his goal for Cory is to finish high school and get a better job than hauling garbage. He refuses to see how important football is to Cory and insists that he has "got to take the crookeds with the straights" [p. 37], i.e., as in baseball, he must learn to deal with disappointments as well as fulfillment of his dreams. Ultimately, Troy's reaction reveals his belief that, because he never had a chance at sports, Cory will never have a chance.)*

- Discuss Rose's attempt to reason with Troy about Cory's playing football, and analyze Troy's reaction. (*Rose tells Troy that Cory's desire to play football stems from his desire to be like him. Troy, however, doesn't want his son to be like him and believes Cory will be rejected in sports just as he was. Troy cannot face the truth that he was too old to play in the Major League and continues to blame his failure on racial prejudice. When Rose tries to tell Troy how much Cory needs his approval, Troy insists that Cory must learn to make his own way. Troy's final speech in this scene reveals how he views his life: heavy responsibilities, dull routine, emotional and physical depletion.*)
- Prediction:** Will Troy allow Cory to continue to play football?

Supplementary Activities

- Working with a partner, choose a section of the play to perform for the class.
- Working in a small group, research one of the following baseball players (as assigned by your teacher), and present an oral report to the class, including information about the teams the man played for and the impact he had on baseball: (a) Roberto Clemente (b) Hank Aaron (c) Wes Covington (d) Satchel Paige (e) Sandy Koufax (f) Warren Spahn (g) Lew Burdette.

Act One, Scene Four

Troy has been promoted from loading garbage cans to driving the truck. Troy and Bono provide insight into their individual personas by discussing their backgrounds and revealing information about their fathers. Troy criticizes Lyons' desire to become a jazz musician.

Vocabulary	Vernacular
seniority rogues Armageddon irrespective uncompromising	"Searching out the New Land" (p. 50) "walking blues" (p. 51) "long time before I could cut it [the world] down to where I could handle it" (p. 53)

Discussion Questions

- Discuss the dialogue between Rose and Cory, and explain the situation in which both characters find themselves. (*Cory continues to defy his father by neglecting his chores to play football. He feels football is a great opportunity and that his father is holding him back. Rose, who is caught in the middle between father and son, tries to protect Cory from Troy's anger by insisting that he clean his room. Their dialogue reveals increasing tension between father and son.*)
- What do Troy and Bono discuss after work, and how does this discussion affect how Troy treats Rose? (*Troy's visit to the Commissioner's office to discuss his complaint about job favoritism of whites over blacks results in a promotion to truck driver, rather than his being fired as Mr. Rand thought would happen. Bono again refers to Alberta and Troy again tries to bypass the discussion. Troy's bravado over his promotion extends to his domineering treatment of Rose, telling her she must come when he calls. He wants to control his household and be free to do as he pleases.*)