



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

**CHRISTEL DEHAAN**  
STUDENT MATINEE PROGRAM

at the Indiana Repertory Theatre

# AUGUST WILSON'S JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

DIRECTED BY  
TIMOTHY DOUGLAS

## STUDY GUIDE

January 27 - February 22 | OneAmerica Financial Stage

Artwork Design by Jake Lebowitz. Photos by Zach Rosing.

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# AUGUST WILSON'S

# JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE



## Content Spotlight

Contains profanity including the “n” word, references to sexual relations out of wedlock and drunkenness, discussions of slavery and slave catching, Christian theology and Black American ethnoreligious traditions and practices.

## a journey of self-discovery

This powerful story from a beloved Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright is an American masterpiece. At a Pittsburgh boarding house in 1911, descendants of the formerly enslaved have come North seeking new jobs, new lives, and new beginnings. In this story of spiritual and emotional resurrection, Herald Loomis arrives in search of his lost wife. Haunted by the past, he must regain a sense of his own heritage and identity.

Recommended for students in grades 9-12

The performance will last approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes, including one 15-minute intermission.

## INSIDE

Planning Your Visit .....	1
Parking.....	2
Indiana State Standards.....	4
Synopsis.....	5
August Wilson.....	6
Playwright’s Note.....	8
The Hill District .....	9
August Wilson’s Twentieth Century.....	10
Pittsburgh and Its Steel Mills.....	12
Who is Joe Turner.....	13
The Blues and Juba.....	14
Christianity.....	15
Hoodoo.....	16
Money in 1911.....	17
Interactive Civil Rights Timeline.....	18
Evolution of a Name.....	20
Discussion Questions .....	21
Writing Prompts .....	22
Activities .....	22
Resources .....	23
Glossary .....	24

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# PLANNING YOUR VISIT



**You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:**

Leave mobile phones, cameras, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home or turned off.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink are allowed in the lobby areas only during student matinees. Concessions are sold for \$1 in shows that have an intermission.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show, or during intermission.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call; this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

# STUDENT MATINEE ARRIVAL & PARKING INFORMATION

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## ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

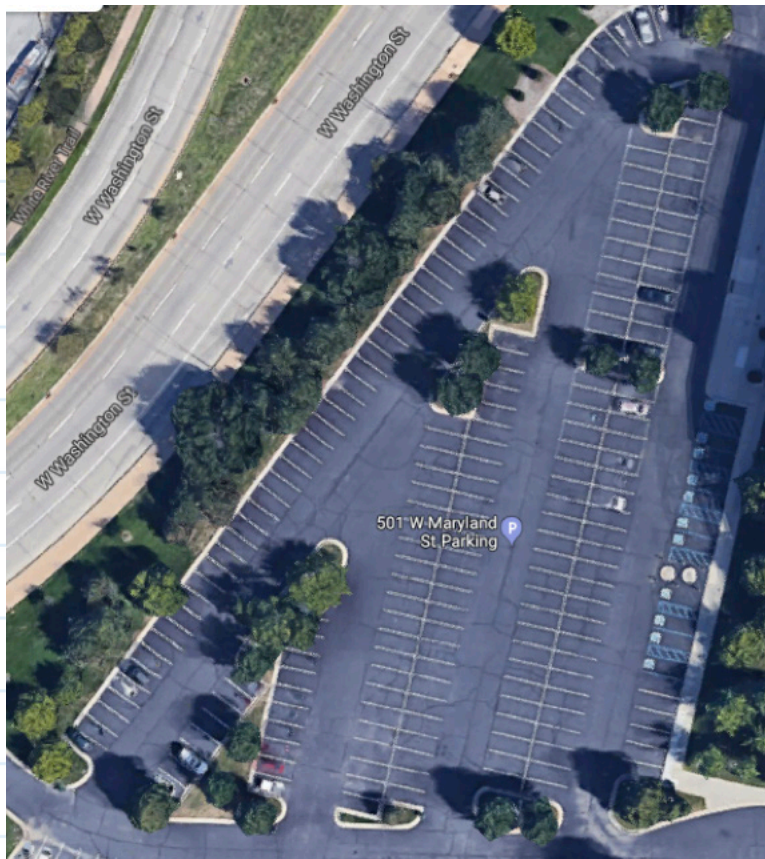
- IRT is located one-half block west of Circle Centre Mall on Washington St., between north bound Illinois St. and southbound Capitol Ave.
- The physical address of IRT is 140 W. Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204.
- Buses should unload and load directly in front of the theatre. (Do not block the entrance to Embassy Suites garage.) Please plan to arrive 20-30 minutes before your performance is scheduled to begin.
- You will be greeted at the curb by an IRT Staff Member and directed to the correct entrance.
- For shows on the Janet Allen Stage, students and teachers will take the stairs to the 4th floor.
- The teacher named on the reservation should check in with the IRT Education staff member stationed in the lobby.
- Your group will be ushered to your assigned seats.
- Students and chaperones should follow instructions of all IRT Staff for your safety.

## LATE ARRIVAL

- If you believe that you are going to be late, please contact the IRT House Manager, Katy Thompson at 317.916.4803. Provide them with a phone number and the name of the school so that Education staff may be in contact with you.
- You can contact IRT Education ([education@irtlive.com](mailto:education@irtlive.com)) with non-emergency information on the day of the show.

## PARKING

- Buses may park for free at Victory Field unless they are having an event - we will inform you if that is the case. The House Manager will give you a parking pass for each bus when you arrive at the theatre. It should be displayed in the windshield.
- Continue east on Washington St. past the JW Marriott and turn left across Maryland St. into the Victory Field lot.
- **PLEASE NOTE that Victory Field no longer has public restroom spaces available. We apologize for any inconvenience.**
- See the map on the next page for full details.
- Additional parking options are located on the next page.
- **While IRT will make every effort to communicate parking information in advance, it is the responsibility of schools and drivers to make alternate arrangements.**



## VICTORY FIELD PARKING MAP

Victory Field parking lot is located on the West side of the stadium. From IRT, continue west on Washington Street past the JW Marriott. Turn left on Schumacher Way, and cross Maryland Street into the Victory Field lot.

Some busses may need to double park in the lot. The image is of the Victory Field parking lot.

Thank you,  
Indianapolis Indians and  
Indiana Repertory Theatre

## ADDITIONAL PARKING OPTIONS

In the event that Victory Field is unavailable for free parking, here are some other potential options. **While IRT will make every effort to communicate parking info in advance, it is the responsibility of schools and drivers to make alternate arrangements.**

**402 Kentucky Avenue:** This is an overflow lot for Victory Field and will be available to buses if the Victory Field Lot is full.

**White River State Park:** Paid surface parking is located on Washington Street, across from Victory Field. May require advance notice; event rates may apply. (*Approximately .6 mi from IRT.*)



**Indianapolis Zoo:** Paid parking is available on Washington Street, west of White River State Park. First come, first served. (*Approximately 1.2 mi from IRT.*)



**Downtown Indy:** Explore all available parking options at the Downtown Indy website. Buses are welcome to utilize street parking if all used spaces are paid.

## CAR AND VAN PARKING OPTIONS

### COURT STREET PARKING

**OPTION 1:** Ask a theatre employee for a parking voucher that will reduce your parking fee to \$12 for up to 6hrs.

**OPTION 2:** A select number of reserved spaces in the Court Street Garage may also be purchased for \$5. These spaces must be reserved and paid for more than 24 hours in advance.

Scan here to pay for a reserved space for the date of your student matinee:



**DIRECTIONS:** When you arrive at the garage, let the parking attendant know that you are there to see an IRT show and are picking up a pre-paid validation sticker at the Theatre. If a parking attendant is not present, press the call button to notify the customer service representative that you are parking to attend the IRT. **Find a spot on level 5S in the reserved IRT spots.** Before the show starts, give the Education Team your name, and they will provide you with a validation sticker to use when exiting the garage.

## ADDRESS COURT STREET GARAGE:

### WASHINGTON STREET ENTRANCE

**Court Street Garage (next to Embassy Suites):** 110 West Washington Street

Entrance on W. Washington St. headed west (turn right into garage). From Washington Street, you will turn right after Tony's and just before the IRT's marquee onto the Embassy Suites ramp.

### CAPITOL STREET ENTRANCE

**Court Street Garage:** 33 North Capitol Avenue

Entrance on Capitol Avenue heading south (turn left into garage). From Capitol Avenue, you will turn left into the garage where the big red "PARKING" sign is. If you've passed Avis Car Rental, you've gone too far.

***There is no parking available at the Circle Center Red Garage at this time.***

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

IndyGo's Red and Purple Line, the city's rapid bus transit system, connects Broad Ripple, Fountain Square, and the City of Lawrence to the heart of downtown and other neighborhoods in Indianapolis. With buses running every 10-20 minutes and a stop directly next to the IRT on Capitol Avenue, the Red and Purple Lines provide another convenient option for your transportation to the Theatre.

**To plan your trip or for more information about the Red Line and other nearby routes, visit [IndyGo.net](http://IndyGo.net) or call IndyGo Customer Service at 317.635.3344.**

# INDIANA STATE STANDARDS

**Seeing a performance at Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text.**

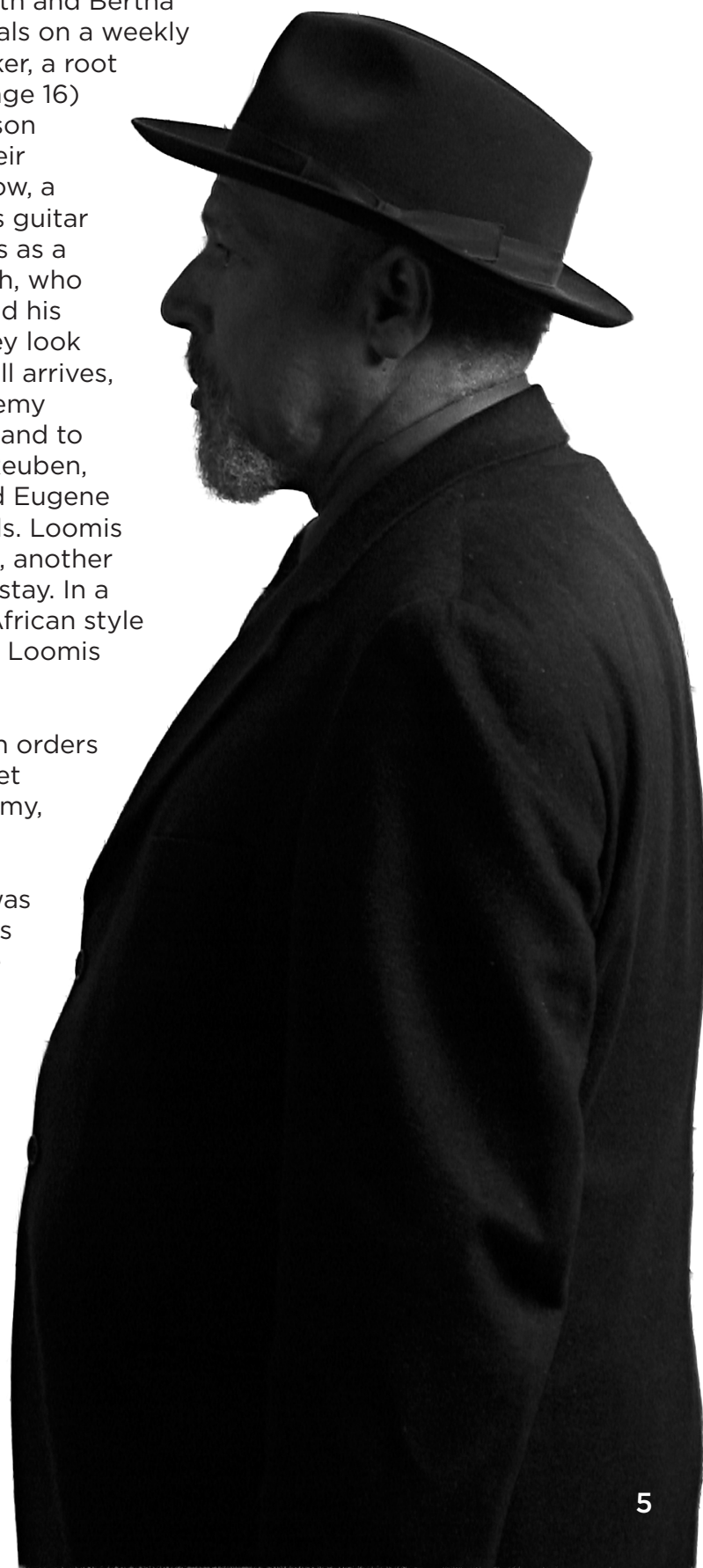
**Some key education standards to consider on your trip can be found by scanning this QR Code:**



# THE STORY OF *JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE*

The Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1911. Seth and Bertha Holly run a boarding house, offering rooms and meals on a weekly basis. Among their current residents is Bynum Walker, a root worker (a practitioner of Hoodoo—see article on page 16) on a spiritual quest. Bynum believes that every person must find their own song in order to understand their place in the world. Another resident is Jeremy Furlow, a young man who works on a road crew and plays his guitar at night. Rutherford Selig, a peddler who also works as a People Finder, stops by to order dustpans from Seth, who makes pots and pans on the side. Herald Loomis and his young daughter Zonia are seeking a room while they look for his wife and her mother, Martha. Mattie Campbell arrives, looking to purchase a love potion from Bynum. Jeremy suggests that Mattie stay with him to save money—and to help them both cure their loneliness. Zonia meets Reuben, the boy from next door, who tells her how his friend Eugene used to sell pigeons to Bynum for his Hoodoo rituals. Loomis pays Selig to try to find his wife. Molly Cunningham, another traveler, moves into the boarding house for a short stay. In a celebratory mood, the residents enjoy a Juba—an African style call-and-response song and dance—when suddenly Loomis begins speaking in tongues and falls to the floor.

The next day, believing that Loomis was drunk, Seth orders him to leave the boarding house, but he agrees to let Loomis stay until the prepaid end of the week. Jeremy, feeling that he needs an independent woman who knows what she wants, turns away from Mattie and asks Molly to travel with him. Loomis tells how he was unjustly arrested and forced to work on Joe Turner's chain gang. He survived only by thinking of his wife and daughter. But after seven years of hard labor, he returned home to find that his wife had left and his daughter was living with her grandmother. As the play reaches its powerful conclusion, each character strives to find their individual place in the world—their own personal song.





## AUGUST WILSON PLAYWRIGHT

August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel in 1945 in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which would later be the setting for most of his plays. His father was a white German immigrant; his mother was Black. Wilson later stated that the “nurturing, the learning” of his life were “all Black ideas about the world that I learned from my mother. My mother’s a very strong woman. My female characters come in large part from my mother.”

In the late 1950s, August’s family moved to Hazelwood, a predominantly white suburb of Pittsburgh. Wilson attended Gladstone High School until 1961, when he dropped out at age fifteen. “I was bored,” he later said. “I was confused, I was disappointed in myself, and I didn’t do any work until my history teacher assigned us to write a paper on a historical personage.” Wilson chose Napoleon because he had always been fascinated with the “self-made emperor.” It was a twenty-page paper, and Wilson’s sister typed it up on a rented typewriter.

Since Wilson had previously done no work in class, his instructor found it hard to believe that it was his own work. He wrote both an A+ and then an F on the paper. If Wilson couldn’t prove that the paper was his own, he would receive the failing grade. “Unless you call everybody in here and have all the people prove they wrote them, even the ones that went and copied out of the encyclopedia word for word, I don’t feel I should have to prove anything,” replied Wilson. He took

the failing grade, tore up the paper, threw it in his teacher’s wastebasket, and walked out of school.

“The next morning, I got up and played basketball right underneath the principal’s window. As I look back on it, I see I wanted him to come and say, ‘Why aren’t you in school?’ so I could tell someone. And he never came out.” Rather than tell his mother he had dropped out, Wilson spent every school day at the public library, reading some 300 books over the next four years. His reading eventually led him to pursue a career as a writer.

Wilson spent years “hanging out on street corners, following old men around, working odd jobs.” Then he discovered a place called Pat’s Cigar Store in Pittsburgh. “It was the same place that Claude McKay mentioned in his book *Home to Harlem*. When I found out about that, I said, ‘This is part of history,’ and I ran down there to where all the old men in the community would congregate.”

Wilson channeled his early literary efforts into poetry, saving his nickels for a \$20 used typewriter when he was 19. Around that same time, he bought a recording of blues singer Bessie Smith, and hearing this music for the first time changed his life. Later he wrote that hearing Smith’s voice led to an “awakening.” He began to see himself as a messenger, a link in the chain of African American culture, and he assumed the responsibility of passing stories and ideas from the past to the future. The idea of the blues as a vessel for the African American experience is one that appears



frequently in Wilson's work, along with a given character searching for his song—his own personal legacy and his path in life.

In 1968, Wilson co-founded Pittsburgh's Black Horizon Theatre Company. He began writing one-act plays during the height of the Black Power Movement as a way "to politicize the community and raise consciousness." He always maintained that the "one thing that has best served me as a playwright is my background in poetry." His move to Minnesota in the early 1970s served as a catalyst, permitting both the colloquial voices of his youth and his burgeoning skills as a dramatist to flourish at a remove from their geographical source.

Wilson did not think of himself as a playwright, however, until he received his first writing grant in the late 1970s. "I walked in," he remembered of his first encounter at the Playwright's Center, "and there were sixteen playwrights. It was the first time I had dinner with other playwrights. It was the first time I began to think of myself as one."

It was this grant that allowed Wilson to rework a one-act about a blues recording session into what became the full-length *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. The play caught the attention of Lloyd Richards, artistic director of the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center and dean of the Yale School of Drama. Richards directed *Ma Rainey* and many of Wilson's subsequent dramas. When *Ma Rainey* ran on Broadway for ten months in 1984, it was the first

profitable Broadway play by a black writer since Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1959. Wilson's successful career opened doors for many other talented writers.

Around this time, Wilson conceived of a truly grand-scale project: **The American Century Cycle**. He would write ten plays, one for each decade of the twentieth century, each focusing on a particular issue that challenged the African American community at that time. Over the next 20 years, Wilson faced this challenge at the stand-up desk in his basement, where he wrote and rewrote each play in longhand on legal pads. Along the way he won two Pulitzer Prizes, for *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*. Wilson finished his cycle with two plays focused on the beginning of the century—*Gem of the Ocean*—and the end of the century—*Radio Golf*.

Wilson died of liver cancer in 2005. Two weeks after his death, Broadway's Virginia Theatre in New York City was renamed the August Wilson Theatre, becoming the first Broadway theatre to be named for an African American. Today August Wilson is considered one of the greatest American playwrights of our time.



# FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT AUGUST WILSON



It is August in Pittsburgh, 1911. The sun falls out of heaven like a stone. The fires of the steel mill rage with a combined sense of industry and progress. Barges loaded with coal and iron ore trudge up the river to the mill towns that dot the Monongahela and return with fresh, hard, gleaming steel. The city flexes its muscles. Men throw countless bridges across the rivers, lay roads, and carve tunnels through the hills sprouting with houses.

From the deep and the near South the sons and daughters of newly freed African slaves wander into the city. Isolated, cut off from memory, having forgotten the names of the gods and only guessing at their faces, they arrive dazed and stunned, their heart kicking in their chest with a song worth singing. They arrive carrying Bibles and guitars, their pockets lined with dust and fresh hope, marked men and women seeking to scrape from the narrow, crooked cobbles

and the fiery blasts of the coke furnace a way of bludgeoning and shaping the malleable parts of themselves into a new identity as free men of definite and sincere worth.

Foreigners in a strange land, they carry as part and parcel of their baggage a long line of separation and dispersement which informs their sensibilities and marks their conduct as they search for ways to reconnect, to reassemble, to give clear and luminous meaning to the song which is both a wail and a whirl of joy.

*Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket (Pittsburgh Memories)*  
by Romaire Beardon,  
collage, 1978,  
often cited by playwright August Wilson  
as an inspiration for  
Joe Turner's *Come and Gone*.

# THE HILL DISTRICT



The Hill District, where August Wilson was born and where most of his plays are set, including *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, is a sprawling 650 acres that looks across Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was the first district in the city to develop outside the walls of the original Fort Pitt. Originally farmland owned by William Penn's grandson, the area became the first planned residential neighborhood in Pittsburgh in 1840, attracting wealthy professionals. In the 1870s, African Americans and European immigrants began to settle in the Hill District, attracted by job opportunities in the steel industry.

By the 1930s, the residents of the Hill District were mostly African American, Jewish, and Italian American. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the Hill District was one of the most energetic and powerful African American neighborhoods in the nation, flourishing as a center for business, art, and music, overflowing with clubs, businesses, and churches, and bustling with crowds both day and night. But at the same time, the district's infrastructure was crumbling.

In 1956, 1500 families—mostly Black—were displaced as their homes were razed for the construction of a new Civic Arena. This development separated the Hill from other neighborhoods, leading to a steep decline that coincided with urban decline throughout

Pittsburgh and across the nation. Between 1950 and 1990, the Hill lost 38,000 residents and 400 businesses. Today, 40% of Hill residents live below the poverty level. Recent housing, retail, and restoration developments, however, have brought new hope to this historic area, including individual new businesses as well as larger ventures such as the mixed-use New Granada Square, the \$40-million Lower Hill Redevelopment project, and the planned revitalization of Centre Avenue. But the Hill District still struggles.



**Above:** The Hill District, 1935.

**Below:** August Wilson in the Hill District.

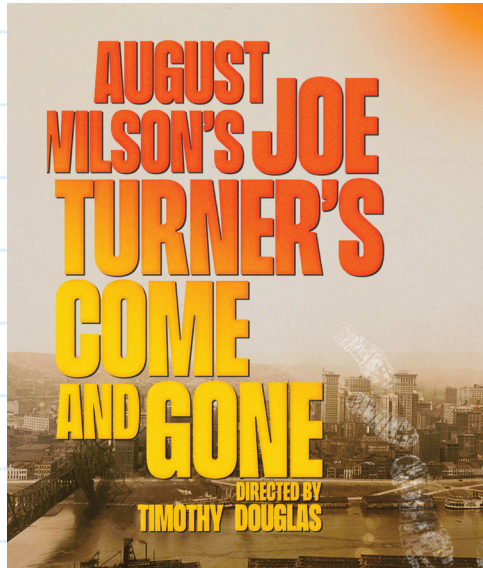
# THE AMERICAN CENTURY CYCLE BY AUGUST WILSON



## **Gem of the Ocean**

set in 1904 | (premiered 2003)—produced by the IRT in 2007

A haunting play that conjures tales of slave ships and the Black man's world after slavery.



1911 | (1986)—  
produced by the  
IRT in 2026

The children of slavery grapple with a world that won't let them forget the past.

## **Seven Guitars**

1948 | (1995)

The final days of a Pittsburgh blues guitarist, as remembered by his circle of friends.



## **Fences**

1957 | (1985)—produced by the IRT in 1996 & 2016

A father-son drama of dreams denied. Pulitzer Prize & Tony Award winner.

*Lizan Mitchell & Chris Chalk in the IRT's 2007 production of Gem of the Ocean.  
David Alan Anderson & Kim Staunton in the IRT's 2016 production of Fences.  
Glenn Turner & Carl Cofield in the IRT's 2008 production of The Piano Lesson.  
Timberlee Chanel & Shane Taylor in the IRT's 2004 production of Jitney.  
James Craven & Austene Van in the IRT's 2012 production of Radio Golf.*

## ***Ma Rainey's Black Bottom***

1927 | (1984)

A volatile trumpet player rebels against racism in a Chicago recording studio.

## ***Two Trains Running***

1968 | (1990)

The displaced and the dreamers congregate in a dilapidated restaurant scheduled for demolition.

## ***The Piano Lesson***



1936 | (1987)—produced by the IRT in 2008

A brother and sister battle over a family heirloom, a link to their past. Pulitzer Prize winner.

## ***King Hedley II***

1985 | (1999)

An ex-con attempts to get his life back on track despite the despair that surrounds him.

## ***Jitney***



1977 | (1979, 1996)—  
produced by the IRT  
in 2004

The owner of a jitney cab company squares off against his son, newly released from prison.

## ***Radio Golf***



1997 | (2005)—  
produced by the  
IRT in 2012

A successful middle-class entrepreneur tries to reconcile the present with the past.

# PITTSBURGH & ITS STEEL MILLS

Pittsburgh is the second largest city in Pennsylvania, after Philadelphia. The area was originally populated by the Shawnee and Lenape peoples. In 1759 the British built Fort Pitt; Pittsburgh was incorporated in 1794.

The first steel mill in Pittsburgh was founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1875, quickly becoming the largest steel producer in the world. The region surrounding the city contains an abundance of iron ore, a critical component in the production of steel. The area also has a rich supply of coal, providing stable fuel for steel furnaces and producing excellent coke, another vital component in the steelmaking process. The confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers in Pittsburgh provided convenient access for bringing in these natural resources and then shipping out the final product. By the turn of the 20th century, Pittsburgh was home to dozens of steel mills that employed 150 thousand people. In 1911, at the time of the play, the city was producing more than 25 million tons of steel annually—more than 60% of America's total steel output.

A number of smaller Pennsylvania mill towns are mentioned in the play, including Rankin, Little Washington, Braddock, Johnstown, Blawknex, and Clairton, as well as Wheeling, West Virginia. Men who worked in the mills had very hard, physical jobs with twelve-hour workdays and very little pay—around \$2 a day to support a family. Women were constantly trying to keep the house and laundry clean despite the smokey, dirty air and foul water—which also wreaked havoc on everyone's health.

By 1911, Pittsburgh was the nation's eighth-largest city, with a population of 540,000. Black residents numbered 30,000—about 5%. Because Pennsylvania had been established as a free state after the Revolution, enslaved African Americans had sought freedom there, and the Underground Railroad had been active in the city. But at the time of the play, steel was produced almost exclusively by white workers. Although the steel mills hired large numbers of immigrants, they hired few African Americans, and only in low-paying unskilled jobs.



# WHO IS JOE TURNER?

The traditional song “Joe Turner Blues” was inspired by a man named Joe Turney in the late 19th century. He was the brother of Peter Turney, governor of Tennessee from 1893 to 1897. Through his political ties, Joe Turney was given the responsibility of taking Black prisoners from Memphis to the Tennessee State Penitentiary in Nashville. In his 1996 book *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, Leon F. Litwack writes: “Most of the prisoners had been rounded up for minor infractions, often when police raided a craps game set up by an informer; after a perfunctory court appearance, the Black men were removed, usually the same day, and turned over to Turney. He was reputed to have handcuffed eighty prisoners to forty links of chain. When a man turned up missing that night in the community, the word quickly spread, ‘They tell me Joe Turner’s come and gone.’ Family members were left to mourn the missing.”

The men labored on chain gangs or were “leased” out as convicts to labor in mines or sawmills, or to lay railroad tracks or build levees or roads. In the decades following the Civil War, this convict lease system served as a way to re-enslave Black men who had only recently been freed through Emancipation.

**Like most folk songs, “Joe Turner Blues” has been sung in many different forms. This version comes from Jerry Silverman’s anthology *Folk Blues*, first published in 1958.**

**Listen to a version of the song here:**



## **“Joe Turner Blues”**

They tell me Joe Turner’s come and gone  
They tell me Joe Turner’s come and gone (Oh, Lordy)  
Got my man and gone.

He come with forty links of chain  
He come with forty links of chain (Oh, Lordy)  
Got my man and gone.

They tell me Joe Turner’s come and gone  
They tell me Joe Turner’s come and gone (Oh, Lordy)  
Done left me here to sing this song.

Come like he never come before,  
Come like he never come before (Oh, Lordy)  
Got my man and gone.

# THE BLUES

August Wilson often cited blues music as a primal source of inspiration for all of his plays. The blues is a secular folk music developed by African Americans in the early 20th century in the South. While it certainly draws from the tradition of spirituals, it has its own distinctive characteristics. The musical mood is usually one of melancholy, and the lyrics tend to focus on themes of hardship and resilience. The typical blues structure uses a three-line verse, where the second line repeats the first, and the third line develops the theme or concludes the thought. The blues is known for its “blue” notes, flattened or otherwise bent pitches and slightly twisted chords that create a distinctively earthy sound. While the blues are rooted in rural soil, it has expanded over the years to reflect urban sensibilities as well. Among the most famous early blues artists are W. C. Handy, B. B. King, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, and Billie Holiday.

In a 1945 article for *Antioch Review* called “Richard Wright’s Blues,” Ralph Ellison, author of *Invisible Man*, wrote, “The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.... They at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self.”

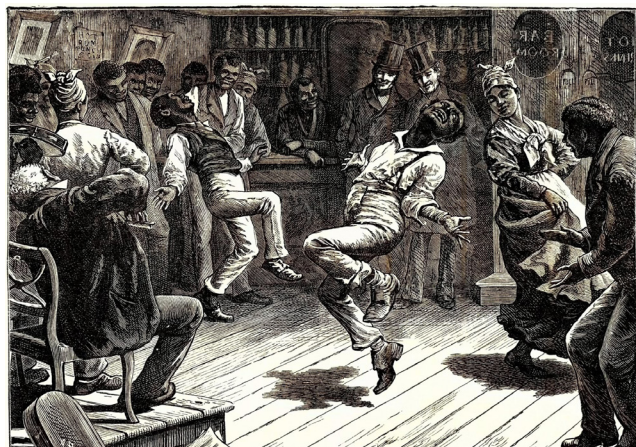


# JUBA

The Juba dance involves stomping as well as slapping and patting one’s own arms, legs, chest, and cheeks. Juba was originally brought to the southern United States by enslaved peoples from the Kongo. It became an African American plantation dance performed by enslaved people during gatherings when rhythm instruments were forbidden due to fear of secret codes hidden in the drumming (although the sounds made with the body in Juba were used to convey the same information).

**Photo Grid, from left to right:** B. B. King, Billie Holiday, Robert Johnson, and W. C. Handy.

**Left:** Illustration from Charles Dickens’s *American Notes*, 1842. Reproduction. New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division.



# CHRISTIANITY

*There are many references to the Christian faith throughout Joe Turner's Come and Gone.*

The phrase “**baptized with the blood of the Lamb**” refers to the spiritual cleansing and redemption that Christians believe comes through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, often associated with baptism. The blood of the Lamb is a symbolic representation of Jesus’s death, shedding his blood to atone for the sins of the world.

A **deacon** is an officer in a Christian church whose duties vary from denomination to denomination.

**Holy Ghost** | Most Christian denominations believe the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, to be the third Person of the Trinity, a triune god manifested as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove during his baptism, and at the Last Supper, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples after his departure.

**Jeremiah** is an Old Testament prophet, particularly known for his warnings of impending divine judgment due to the Kingdom of Judah’s idolatry and social injustices.

In the biblical book of **Jonah**, God commands Jonah to go to Ninevah and preach against wickedness, but Jonah instead tries to hide from God and sets sail for Tarshish. A great storm arises, and Jonah is cast overboard and swallowed by a whale. For three days inside the whale he prays for forgiveness. When he is finally cast ashore, he goes to Ninevah and preaches as originally commanded.

The **Jordan River** forms part of the eastern border of Israel. The Jordan is a frequent symbol in folk, gospel, and spiritual music, as well as in poetic and literary works. Because in the Old Testament the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, crossing the Jordan has come to symbolize passing from slavery into freedom.

“**The Lord is my shepherd ...**” | Psalm 23 in the Bible, perhaps the best known of the Psalms, is quoted in its entirety in the play. The book of Psalms is an anthology of Hebrew religious hymns.



**Pentecost** is a Christian holiday that commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles of Jesus, as described in the Bible in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2: 1-31).

**Speaking in tongues** is an activity or practice in which people utter words or speech-like sounds, often thought by believers to be languages unknown to the speaker. In some cases, as part of religious practice, some believe this to be a divine language unknown to the speaker.

**tongues of fire** | In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible, the disciples of Jesus “were all together in one place” on the “day of Pentecost,” seven weeks after the Resurrection. There was a “mighty rushing wind” (a common symbol for the Holy Spirit) and “tongues as of fire” appeared above each disciple’s head. They were “filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

# HOODOO

In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Seth Holly, the owner of a Philadelphia boarding house, expresses concerns about certain practices of his boarder Bynum Walker: lining up pennies across the threshold, planting “weeds” and burying pigeons in the garden, and sprinkling salt “all over the place.” Playwright August Wilson describes Bynum as a “conjure man, or root worker.” In Black culture, root workers are practitioners of Hoodoo.

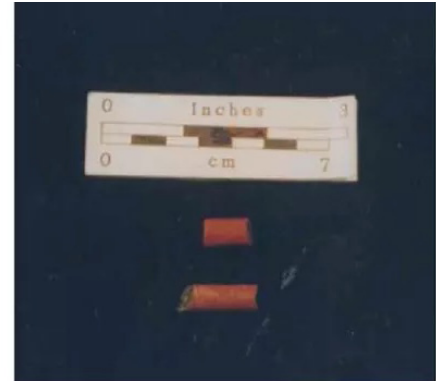
“A folk-magic system born in Africa and raised in the American South, Hoodoo was practiced by enslaved people and their descendants,” playwright Katori Hall writes in a 2009 article for the *Lincoln Center Theater Review*. “Despite the torturous Middle Passage, and the systematic oppression of their spirits and their culture, Africans managed to pass down the rituals, recipes, and secrets of their ancestors cloaked in the culture and magic of Hoodoo. This magic fused with the mysticism of the Native American culture, mutating and growing into a powerful belief system that utilized herbs, roots, body fluids, animals, and minerals, along with charms and amulets, that recreated the magic of their motherland.”

Hoodoo should not be confused with voodoo, a derogatory term derived from Vodou, a religion that developed among enslaved people in Hispaniola in the 1700s. Vodou incorporates elements of different belief systems, including West African traditions, Caribbean indigenous beliefs, and Catholicism. Hoodoo is considered less a religion, and more a belief in magic.

In the play, Mattie buys a charm from Bynum to try to bring back a long lost love; but when Bynum learns that this man is now bound to another woman, he gives Mattie a bag of roots that he says will bring her good luck instead. “This belief that all human beings have a hand in their own destinies was a magical concept to a people who lived in a world where they had no control,” says Hall. “where they could be bought and sold at a moment’s notice, snatched away from their loved ones in the deep blue of the night. No wonder love charms were such a powerful resource for these often brokenhearted people.”

As formerly enslaved people began to move away from the South after the Civil War, many

abandoned the practices of Hoodoo, which came to be considered rural and old-fashioned in the cities of the North. Seth’s skepticism about Bynum’s activities is an example of such attitudes. Yet even today, there are people who believe in superstitions about sprinkling salts, and there are places where one can still purchase Hoodoo potions and powders—not only in New Orleans, but even in Indianapolis.



**Top & Middle:** Artifacts from West Africa discovered at White Haven, Connecticut, during archaeological digs at the site in the 1990s.  
**Below:** “An Obeah Practitioner at Work, Trinidad, 1836.”

# MONEY IN 1911

*Money is a frequent topic between the characters of Joe Turner's Come and Gone. According to the Consumer Price Index, \$1 in 1911 is worth about \$35 today. A few examples from the play:*

Selig pays Seth **20¢ per dustpan**, worth about **\$7.00 each today**.

Selig's fee as a **People Finder is \$1**, worth about **\$35 today**.

Seth's weekly charge of **\$2 for a week of room and board** is worth about **\$70 today**.

Jeremy's **construction job pays him \$8 per week**, worth about **\$280 today**.

## PRICES IN 1911

### FOOD

CHOPPED BEEF: 8¢ / POUND  
CHUCK ROAST: 10¢ / POUND  
CHICKEN: 18¢ / POUND  
HAM: 15¢ / POUND  
BACON: 15¢ / POUND  
MILK: 33¢ / GALLON  
BUTTER: 31¢ / POUND  
CHEESE: 17¢ / POUND  
EGGS: 23¢ / DOZEN  
BREAD: 5¢ / LOAF  
FLOUR: 3¢ / POUND  
SUGAR: 6¢ / POUND  
SALT: 8¢ / POUND  
COFFEE: 11¢ / POUND  
POTATOES: 55¢ / HALF BUSHEL  
CORN: 8¢ / CAN  
PEAS: 12¢ / CAN  
ORANGES: 19¢ / DOZEN

### CLOTHING

MEN'S SUIT: \$13-\$20  
MEN'S SHIRT: 50¢ - \$1.50  
SILK NECKTIE: 65¢  
MEN'S OVERCOAT: \$15  
SHOES (MEN'S & WOMEN'S):  
\$2 - \$4  
WOMEN'S DRESS: \$6  
WOMEN'S SUIT: \$11  
PURSE: \$1 - & \$3.50  
WOMEN'S RAINCOAT: \$7

### ETC.

MEDIAN PRICE FOR  
A HOUSE WAS **\$3,000**  
MEDIAN PRICE FOR A CAR WAS  
**\$2,200**, BUT A MODEL T WAS  
ONLY **\$780**.  
AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE  
WAS **22¢**, ADDING UP TO **\$450**  
PER YEAR.

# INTERACTIVE CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

When we hear the term Civil Rights, many of us often think exclusively of African Americans. But Civil Rights is a broad term that covers people of all races, genders, & sexualities.

**Scan the QR code to learn more about each moment in history.**



**1820**

**Missouri Compromise**

**1833**

**First meeting of the Antislavery Convention of American Women**  
first independent women's political organization; also inter-racial

**1857**

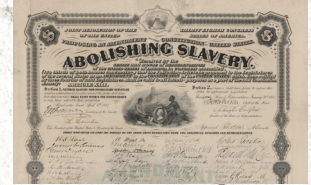


**Dred Scott decision**  
by the Supreme Court says no Blacks, whether free or not, have citizenship rights

**1863**

**Emancipation Proclamation**  
issued by President Abraham Lincoln

**1865**



**13th Amendment ratified**  
slavery abolished

**1896**

**Plessey v. Ferguson**  
separate but equal ruled constitutional

**1909**



**NAACP founded**

**1910**



**Madam C.J. Walker moves to Indianapolis**  
builds her hair care factory and training school becoming the first self-made female millionaire in the US

**1916**



**The Great Migration**

**1920**



**19th Amendment ratified**  
women get the right to vote

**1955**

**Montgomery, Alabama**  
begins year-long bus boycott

**A. Phillip Randolph**, father of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters becomes a VP of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council

**Death of Emmett Till**

**1957**

**Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) founded;**  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. elected president

**Civil Rights Act of 1957**

**Nine Black students integrate** Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas

**1960**



**Lunch counter sit-ins**  
Greensboro, Nashville, and elsewhere

**1963**

**Medgar Evers** killed on his front porch



**March on Washington**  
Dr. King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech

**1964**

**Civil Rights Act of 1964**

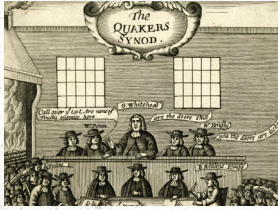
**Affirmative Action**



**Fannie Lou Hamer's** testimony at the Democratic National Convention

**16th St Baptist Church Bombing** in Birmingham, Alabama

1688



**Germantown (now Philadelphia) Protest**  
first organized protest against slavery in the American colonies

1777

**Vermont becomes first state to abolish slavery.** It also gave Black men full voting rights

1787

**Northwest Ordinance** bans slavery in the territory that will become Indiana

1790

**Petition from the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery to the First Congress**  
first abolitionist society in the US, and first time anyone petitioned the US Government to end slavery

1817

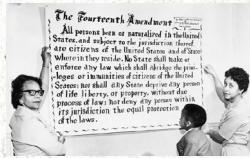


**American Colonization Society** is formed

1865-1877

**Reconstruction begins**

1868



**14<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratified** equal protection under the law

1870

**15<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratified** Black men get the right to vote

1875



**Civil Rights Act of 1875** (ruled unconstitutional in 1883)

1876

**First Jim Crow laws**

1936

**Blues legend Robert Johnson** makes his first recording

**Jesse Owens** wins at Berlin Olympics

1939



**Marian Anderson** sings at the Lincoln Memorial

1947



**Jackie Robinson** breaks the color line in Major League Baseball

1948

**President Harry Truman** desegregates the armed forces

1954



**Brown v. Board of Education** separate but equal ruled unconstitutional

1965

**Voting Rights Act** is signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson

1968

**Dr. King's Speech** "I Have Been to the Mountaintop"

**Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike**

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** assassinated



**Shirley Chisholm** is the first African-American woman elected to Congress

1960-1970

**Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement**

**Gay Rights Movement**

**Latino Civil Rights Movement**

**The Women's Rights Movement** 60s and 70s

2013

The Supreme Court guts the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, leading many state to pass restrictive voting regulations

2015

**Same-sex marriage legalized** throughout the nation

# EVOLUTION OF A NAME

The word **negro**, literally meaning “black,” was used in the 1400s by Spanish and Portuguese explorers as a simple description to refer to the Bantu peoples that they encountered in southern Africa. In the Colonial America of 1619, John Rolfe used *negars* in describing the enslaved people who were captured from West Africa and then shipped to the Virginia colony. Later American English spellings included *neger* and *neggar*. Etymologically, *negro*, *noir*, *nègre*, and *n\*\*\*\*r* ultimately derive from *nigrum*, the stem of the Latin *niger* (black).

The word *n\*\*\*\*r* was commonly used in both England and America by the seventeenth century; at that time, it was considered nothing more than an alternate pronunciation of Negro. By 1825, however, Black people and abolitionists found the word offensive and began to object to its use.

The term **colored** appeared in North America during the colonial era. The first twelve Census counts in the United States counted “colored” people; beginning in 1900 the census counted “negroes.” The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909.

Eventually, the word **negro** returned to fashion, as some began to see the word colored as generic and demeaning. The United Negro College Fund was founded in 1944.

In the 1960s, many favored the word **black**. Malcolm X and others objected to the word negro because they associated it with the long history of slavery, segregation, and discrimination that treated African Americans as second-class citizens, or worse. Martin Luther King Jr. used both negro and black.

While there was a brief vogue of **Afro-American** in the late sixties and early seventies, black continued as the favored word until the 1990s, when **African American** became popular.

In today’s diverse world, many different terms are used. Recently, there seems to be a drift away from *African American* and back to **Black**, now capitalized, when describing people, culture, art, and communities.

Some Black people today use the n-word without irony, either to neutralize the word’s impact or as a sign of solidarity. Often when a word is employed as a slur against a certain group, members of the group will use that word among themselves to rob it of its negative power. The n-word is still controversial. While it may be heard frequently in rap songs and in conversation among younger African Americans, many older African Americans are deeply offended by it. Even within generations, not everyone agrees whether the word should be used within the African American community. Society at large, however, has condemned the word as a racial slur; its use by other races against Black people demonstrates an ignorance and hatred that should not be imitated.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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## BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

1. What do you know about the Great Migration? Who did it involve? When did it take place? How did it affect those who migrated and the United States as a whole?
2. What is a sense of identity? How do you define yourself as an individual? How do you fit into the group? How do you stand out from the crowd?

## AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

1. How do the themes of faith and spirituality manifest themselves in the play? How are different characters affected in different ways by these themes? How do you see these themes affecting the world you live in today?
2. How does the play speak to the era of the Great Migration? How do the different characters reflect different aspects of this history? How do the stories of migration in the play relate to issues of immigration in our nation today?
3. Do you think of leaving your home and moving elsewhere someday, or do you imagine yourself staying in your home town? Why or why not? What might motivate you to change your mind? Where would you think of moving, and why? What would be the challenges and the opportunities of migrating?
4. In the play, Jeremy is arrested on false charges. How does his experience with the police in 1911 compare with the experience of young African American men today?
5. How did the Juba dance in the play move you, excite you, inspire you? Did it remind you of other spontaneous celebrations or rituals in your own family and/or community? Why do people want to express strong emotions with physical movement?
6. What is the significance of Herald Loomis's vision of bones walking on water? How does this image relate to the Middle Passage, the forced voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to America? (For further exploration of this topic, read August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* with its discussion of the City of Bones.) Does this imagery invoke other periods of history or myths?
7. Bynum feels that binding people together is his mission in life. Why are relationships important? What binds people together? What elements in our world today try to push people apart?
8. Selig, the only white person in the play, is an ambiguous character. As a people finder, how does he help the Black characters in the play? How might he be seen as a harmful presence? How does his family history affect your perceptions of him?
9. Read the article about Joe Turner on page 13. Within the context of the song "Joe Turner Blues," what is the meaning of the line "Joe Turner's come and gone"? How does that meaning change as the title of this play?
10. The play shows three different generations of characters. How do these different generations interact? How does this multi-generational portrait reflect the tide of African American history both before and after 1911, when the play is set?
11. Read the article about the blues on page 14, particularly the quote from Ralph Ellison about how the blues "at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit." How do you see this theme expressed in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*?
12. What is the meaning of Herald Loomis cutting himself with a knife at the end of the play? What happens to him mentally, spiritually, psychologically? How is he changed, and why? How does this transformation relate to other spiritual or supernatural moments in the play? What is the connection between Herald and Bynum's Shiny Man?

# WRITING PROMPTS

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1. Choose one of the characters in the play who rent rooms in the boarding house. Write a letter from that character to someone they left behind back home. What is their relationship to that person? How do they miss them? What was their journey to Pittsburgh? What have been their obstacles? How is their new life better than their life at home? How is it worse? How would your character tell someone back home about what happens to them during the play?
2. Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, staging, acting—as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: [education@irtlive.com](mailto:education@irtlive.com)

# ACTIVITIES

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1. How do you express yourself to others? What are important characteristics of your personal identity? How do your family history and your community affect your individual identity? Create a collage of drawings or magazine clippings that creates a visual representation of what makes you uniquely you.
2. Create a playlist of songs that express who you are. Choose not just songs that you like, but songs that you feel say something about you as a person, that represent you as an individual.
3. Look at *Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket (Pittsburgh Memories)* by Romaine Beardon on page 5. How do you think this artwork inspired August Wilson in the writing of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*? What elements of the collage do you see in the play? Create an artwork that shows aspects of your community and how individuals live there.
4. Look at the article about Pittsburgh and its mill towns on page 12. Use the list of mill towns mentioned in the play and a map to calculate how far Bynum and Selig are each walking from the Hill District to these various towns on their travels. If the men walk three miles per hour, how long does it take each of them to get to each town?

# RESOURCES

## BOOKS:

*August Wilson: A Life* by Patti Hartigan (2023)

*After August: Blues, August Wilson, and American Drama* by Patrick Maley (2019)

*The Theatre of August Wilson* by Alan Nadel (2018)

*Aunt Ester's Children Redeemed: Journeys to Freedom in August Wilson's Ten Plays of Twentieth-Century Black America* by Riley Keene Temple (2017)

*August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle: Critical Perspectives on the Plays*, edited by Sandra G. Shannon (2016)

*August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle*, edited by Alan Nadel (2010)

*The Past as Present in the Drama of August Wilson* by Harry Justin Elam (2009)

*The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson* by Christopher Bigsby (2007)

*Conversations with August Wilson*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer & Mary C. Hartig (2006)

*I Ain't Sorry for Nothin' I Done: August Wilson's Process of Playwriting* by Joan Herrington (2004)

*August Wilson: A Literary Companion* by Mary Ellen Snodgrass (2004)

*How I Learned What I Learned* by August Wilson (one-man show, premiered 2003)

*The Ground on Which I stand* by August Wilson (2001)

*Understanding August Wilson* by Mary L. Bogumil (1999)

*May all Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, edited by Alan Nadel (1993)

## WEBSITES:



August  
Wilson  
Society



August  
Wilson  
House



August  
Wilson  
Archive



Hill District  
Digital History-  
August Wilson



Hill  
District  
Digital  
History



Pittsburgh  
Hill  
District



August  
Wilson House:  
On Sacred  
Ground

## FILMS:



*The Piano Lesson*  
(Hallmark Hall of  
Fame, 1995) with  
Charles Dutton



*Fences* (2016)  
with Denzel  
Washington



*Ma Rainey's Black  
Bottom* (Netflix, 2020)  
with Viola Davis



*August Wilson: The  
Ground on Which I  
Stand* (PBS, 2015)

# GLOSSARY

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**Bounty Hunters** who tracked individuals who had escaped from slavery were paid by the plantation owners, not by the government. Since these slave catchers charged by the day and mile, many of them would travel long distances to hunt for fugitives. Slave catchers often used tracking dogs to sniff out their targets, typically bloodhounds. Under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, slave hunters could easily obtain an “Order of Removal” which approved the return of a runaway slave. However, these orders were often met with resistance from abolitionists. Selig says that “My daddy ... used to find runaway slaves for the plantation bosses.”

**Grip** | In this context, a small traveling bag.

**Haunt** | The word haunt is frequently used in the South to mean a ghost.

The **Illinois Central Railroad** was chartered in 1851. It continually expended until in 1889 its tracks reached from Chicago to New Orleans.

**Sharecropping** became widespread in the South after the Civil War. Southern plantation owners still had a great deal of land, but they no longer had enslaved people to work the land, and they had no liquid assets to pay for labor. Formerly enslaved people, with no land or other assets of their own, needed a means to support their families. Through sharecropping, large plantations were subdivided into plots that were worked by individual families in return for a share of the crops produced on that land. Sharecroppers grew cotton, tobacco, rice, sugar, and other cash crops, and received half of the parcel's output. Sharecroppers often acquired their farming tools and all other goods from the landowner they were contracted with, and in turn were often required to sell their portion of the crop back to the landowner, thus being subjected to manipulated prices for everything they bought and sold. The system was very unfair.

**Skiff** | A shallow, flat-bottomed open boat with sharp bow and square stern.