



Lesson: Modern Tragedy: Fences by August Wilson

Grade: 12

Subject: English + Language Arts

July 14, 2012

As part of a semester of studying tragedy from the Greeks to the Moderns, twelfth grade AP English Literature and Composition students will read August Wilson's *Fences*. Resources from the Library of Congress will help the students discover the meaning of Wilson's text. Upon completion of the play the students will have a greater understanding of tragedy and the common man, as Arthur Miller so eloquently describes in an essay of that name, and make direct comparisons of Wilson's *Fences* to Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

Overview

Student Objectives

List the bulleted goals/objectives behind your lesson plan

Students will:

- Use primary sources to become acquainted with the color barrier in baseball
- Be able to appreciate the internal conflicts facing the main character Troy Maxson
- Identify the classic tragic elements in this Twentieth Century play
- Identify issues that are universally tragic, not just ones related to race
- Explain the baseball metaphors Wilson incorporates in the dialogue
- Understand theatre artist's use primary sources to realize conceptual interpretations of dramatic text

Grade level

12th Grade Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition

Curriculum area

Example: Language Arts

English/Language Arts

Materials

1. August Wilson. *Fences*.
2. Sources listed on Library of Congress bibliography – end of this document
3. Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, Kansas City, MO
[web museum](http://www.nlbm.com/s/index.cfm) visit at -<http://www.nlbm.com/s/index.cfm>
4. *NYTimes* article "Dodgers Purchase Robinson, First Negro in Modern Major League Baseball," Friday, April 16, 1947
<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0410.html#article>



5. Transcript of Library of Congress interview with Branch Ricky – why and how Rickey broke the color line in baseball

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/robinson/davis.html>

6. Speech by Branch Rickey for the "One Hundred Percent Wrong Club" banquet,

Atlanta, Georgia, January 20, 1956. Broadcast on WERD 860 AM radio.

-describes the problems he felt he faced in the 1940s, when he decided to integrate major league baseball. He also discusses events that influenced his decision and factors that he thinks will reduce racial prejudice

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/robinson/branch.html>



Standards

Learning Standards by State

Explain in bullet points how each of the Objectives align with state learning standards

Common Core Standards for Reading Literature, Reading Informational Text, Writing, Speaking and Listening Grades 11,12:

- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem. Objective – using primary sources
- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. Objective – class discussions about how primary sources inform understanding of the play
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. Objective-analyzing/comparing the YouTube acting demonstrations of the play
- Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed). Objective – students create their own interpretations of author’s characters and themes
- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. Objective completed when reading independently the remainder of the play
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. Objective – completing written assessment



Procedures/Resources

Recommended time frame

Forty-five minute in-class sessions

overview

Example: 6 sessions: 1 30-min group intro / 5 30-min computer-based activity sessions / 1 30-min group wrap-up

List the procedure and resources for—bullet points with resource links for each sessions:

Session One:

Background on August Wilson and his plays – McCarter Theatre teaching resource handouts
 “About August Wilson”
<http://www.mccarter.org/Education/gemoftheocean/12.html>

“August Wilson’s Cycle-African-Americans in the 20th Century”
<http://www.mccarter.org/Education/gemoftheocean/14.html>

DVD from school library

Session Two:

Essential Question to Open Unit:
What are the issues of racial segregation in baseball?
 --what were the Negro Leagues?
 --who was Branch Rickey?
 --what can we glean from our sources about the significance of these issues?

Teaching objective: Students will analyze primary sources in order to understand the background of Troy’s conflict.

Procedure: Pass out laptops. Students work in pairs to review all primary sources (photos and manuscripts) listed under materials in the lesson plan. The text of the play will be read after sessions two and three. Together students will make notes in response to the primary sources:

Guiding questions for photo notes:
 Describe what you see. What’s happening? What is the context and audience of the photo? What do you wonder about? Conclusions?

Guiding questions for manuscripts, articles, and web museum visit:
 What does the text say? Who is the intended audience? What do we learn and wonder about?



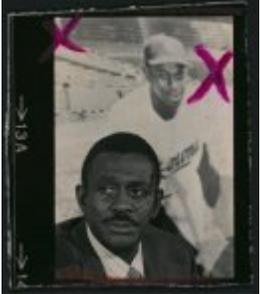
	Library of Congress resource for analyzing primary sources: http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Photos_and_Prints.pdf
Session Three:	<p>Objective: Students begin to understand the significance of the color barrier in baseball.</p> <p>Students discuss findings from the primary sources – classroom sharing Hand in notes for a classwork grade-just a check for completion.</p>
Session Four:	<p>Objective: Students will observe an actor’s interpretation of Troy’s conflict with his son and assess its relationship to the primary source material they examined. (Watch you tube video clips)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “How Come You Ain’t Never Liked Me?” (father-son conflict-Denzel Washington 2010) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBTXS42dj40 “You Ain’t Never Liked Me” (same scene James Earl Jones 1987) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_kGtQmvrVI&feature=related ** Discussion of both actors’ creation of the character, noting similarities and differences and audiences’ reaction. 2. “Fighting Death” Denzel Washington 2010 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7v4I36NTrsA 3. “I Don’t Want Him to Be Like Me” Denzel Washington 2010 (Troy’s bitterness about past discrimination) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgIHzuBm2Gk
Session Five:	<p>Objective: Students will create their own interpretations about Troy’s character as informed by their primary source research.</p> <p>Begin reading <i>Fences</i> aloud in class. Students take roles. They discover complexity of Troy’s conflict by referring to what they have learned in their review of the primary sources.</p> <p>Homework: Read rest of play at home--suggest reading aloud to self or reading with sibling or parents.</p>



Session Six:	<p>Objective: Students demonstrate understanding of both the themes of the play and the playwright’s craft by responding to an in-class essay.</p> <p>Given a set of quotations by famous historians and writers, students select one and apply it to the play in terms of either/both the African American condition or/and the universal human condition.</p>
Evaluation	
<p><i>Note the rubric which will help you evaluate/grade your students</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be evaluated using the rubric for grading AP English Literature and Composition essays.
Additional Resources	
<p><i>List any additional resources (example: websites related to lesson plan topic) that students can use for additional information and/or after class exploration</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. August Wilson homepage http://www.augustwilson.net/ 2. August Wilson Center for African Culture http://www.augustwilsoncenter.org/ 3. Theatre Review of Denzel Washington and Viola Davis in Fences 2010 http://theater.nytimes.com/2010/04/27/theater/reviews/27fences.html 4. Theatre Review of 1987 production with James Earl Jones http://theater.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=9b0de7de1f3df934a15750c0a961948260
Accommodations	
<p><i>Note any accessibility options that might be applied to address student need</i></p>	<p>Usually not necessary for this class level</p>



Primary Sources from the Library of Congress

Image Thumbnail	Description	Citation	URL
	Satchel Paige, head-and-shoulders portrait, seated in front of a portrait of himself in a baseball uniform	Gotfryd, Bernard. Satchel Paige. 1970. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington D.C. 20540 < http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006689909/ >	http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006689909/
	African American baseball players from Morris Brown College, with boy and another man standing at door, Atlanta, Georgia	African American Baseball Players from Morris College. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington D.C. 20540 http://www.loc.pnp.pp print published in Baseball Americana: Treasures from The Library of Congress/Harry Katz, et.al. New York: Smithsonian Books, 2009 < http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/95597100/ >	http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/95597100/
	Negro Marines prepare for action. Breaking a tradition of 167 years, the U.S. Marine Corps started enlisting Negroes on June 1, 1942. The first class of 1,200 Negro volunteers began their training three months later as members of the 51st Composite Defense Battalion at Montford Point, a section	Smith, Roger. Negro Marines are Teammates. 1943. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print < http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/owi20001024282/PP/ >	URL Link: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/owi2001024282/PP/ LC-USW3-022973-C (b&w film neg.)



	<p>of the 200 square mile Marine Base, Camp Lejeune, at New River, North Carolina. Evidence of the lack of racial friction may be seen in the sports program at the camp. On the baseball team Negro enlistees and white non-com officers are teammates.</p>		
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