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# Limelight

literary guide for teachers

## AUGUST WILSON'S **Gem of the Ocean**

Directed by MARION McCLINTON



Phylicia Rashad in the Mark Taper Forum's production of *Gem of the Ocean*, 2003; photo: Craig Schwartz



the  
**Huntington**

HUNTINGTON THEATRE COMPANY  
IN RESIDENCE AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY





AUGUST WILSON'S  
**Gem of the Ocean**  
Directed by MARION McCLINTON

A Huntington Theatre Company production at the Boston University Theatre

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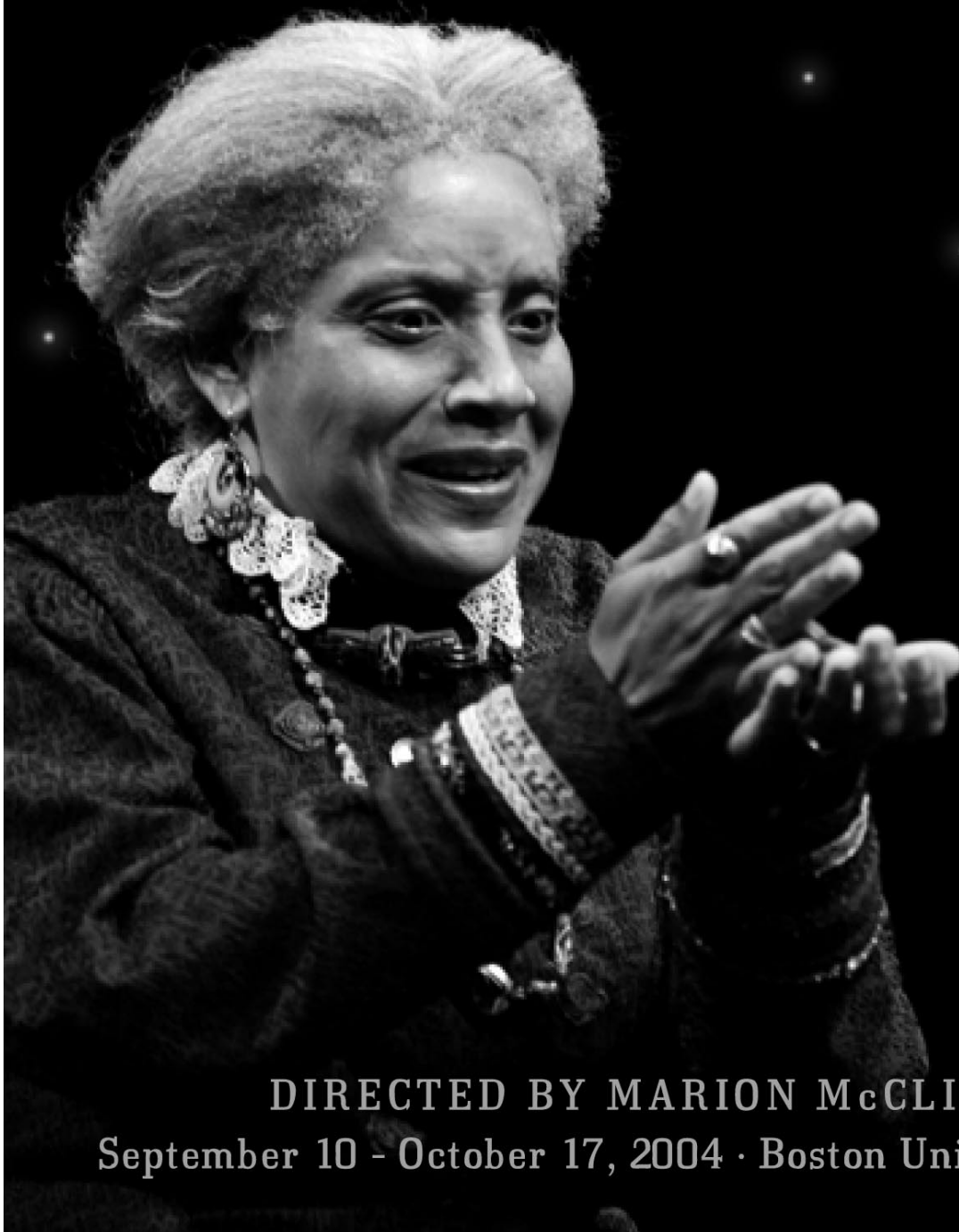
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AUGUST WILSON'S  
**Gem of the Ocean**



DIRECTED BY MARION McCLINTON

September 10 - October 17, 2004 · Boston University Theatre

## SYNOPSIS

# *Gem of the Ocean*

**T**he people say go see Aunt Ester,” says a man at the door of 1839 Wylie Avenue. Citizen Barlow, a young man with a terrible secret, hears about Aunt Ester and comes to get his soul cleansed.

Sharing Aunt Ester’s quarters are Black Mary, a wary woman “trying to find her own way,” and longtime friend Eli, who came north with Aunt Ester years before. Rutherford Selig, who sells everything from rocks to frying pans from his horse-drawn wagon, and Solly Two Kings, a veteran of the Underground Railroad, are also fixtures at the house, which serves as a rough-hewn sanctuary and repository of ancient knowledge.

Trouble brews outside Aunt Ester’s house. Caesar – Black Mary’s brother and the local constable – is evicting people in droves from his rooming house. His stubbornness and ideas about assimilation ignite a crisis at the mill, where black workers are on strike and an innocent man has died for the crime of another.

Can Aunt Ester, 285 years old and the bearer of her people’s history, conjure salvation for the desperate man seeking her aid? It will depend on Citizen Barlow’s courage, the contents of his heart, and his willingness to embark on a powerfully strange, otherworldly journey to the City of Bones. His quest will take him to distant and dangerous places, and it must be completed before his past catches him mid-stride.

Wilson’s ninth play of his epic cycle tells the story that begins it all, turning on “African spirituality versus Christianity, moral versus man-made law, and individual expression versus community cohesion,” according to Wilson. “You have to remember, in 1904, any black person who was 42 or older was probably born into slavery. ...That generation had to decide what to do with their freedom. There were no models. There were no rules. You had to find out what emancipation and citizenship meant and carve out a way of living.” – CC ■

AUGUST WILSON

# "I WANTED TO BE THE BEST AT WHATEVER I DID"

## August Wilson's Coming of Age

August Wilson was born in Pittsburgh's Hill District in 1945. The predominantly black neighborhood's history contains within it the massive migration of former slaves to northern industrial cities at the turn of the century, the cultural flourishing of the Jazz Age, the false promises of urban renewal of the 1950s, the tumultuous fervor of the Black Power movement and of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, as well as the disrepair that comes from cycles of poverty. Today, residents of the Hill struggle with unemployment and a longstanding divestment in the neighborhood's resources, but there remains an ever-mounting commitment, begun in the 1970s with the cry of "Rebuild the Hill," to the kind of bottom-up planning that renews a neighborhood to the benefit of its inhabitants. Wilson lived on the Hill for thirty years; it is no surprise that he chose this area, rich with the history of a people, as the setting for his epic ten-play cycle.

The son of a white German father and a black mother, Wilson remembers his father as "mostly not there. ...The culture I learned in my mother's household was black." He had a high I.Q. and an obvious gift for language, as well as his mother's unwavering faith that he could do anything. "I wanted to be the best at whatever I did," he recalls. This trait has persisted into adulthood. Even now, he says, "when I sit down to write, I want to write the best play that's ever been written. Sometimes that's a fearsome place to stand, but that's when you call on your courage."

He encountered flagrant racism in a Catholic high school that was reinforced by faculty who disciplined Wilson for brawling and ignored his tormentors.



August Wilson in *How I Learned What I Learned* at Seattle Rep, 2003; photo: Chris Bennion



"There was a note on my desk every single day. It said, 'Go home nigger.'" He transferred to a vocational school, where the curriculum was "I swear, like fifth-grade work;" he dropped out two years before graduation, having decided he would become a writer.

Wilson had already worked as a dishwasher, a gardener, and a short-order cook, all before age fifteen. Getting little from his school studies, he educated himself in the library, where he guesses he read close to three hundred books. He was, he says, "searching for something you can claim as yours." Just before his 19th birthday in 1964, Wilson bought his first typewriter, a bulky Royal Standard he hauled from downtown up to his apartment on the Hill. He sat down and typed every possible variation of his given name, Frederick August Kittel (his moth-



Hanging out on the Hill, 1970s Pittsburgh

**"Anything you can name," he has said, "you can control and define; that's what the power of naming is." With this, he set out on a literary journey that would lead him to become one of the most important dramatists in the American theatre.**

er's maiden name was Wilson), settling finally on August Wilson. "Anything you can name," he has said, "you can control and define; that's what the power of naming is." With this, he set out on a literary journey that would lead him to become one of the most important dramatists in the American theatre.

In the fall of 1965, Wilson came home with an old record he'd bought for a nickel, whose fading, typewritten label read, "Bessie Smith: Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jellyroll Like Mine." He played it 22 times in a row, and wrote later, "The universe stuttered and everything fell to a new place." The blues are "the best literature we have," he says. The music he heard on the record "made me look at the

world differently. It gave the people in the rooming house where I lived, and also my mother, a history I didn't know they had. It was the beginning of my consciousness that I was the carrier of some very valuable antecedents."

For the next fifteen years, Wilson mostly wrote poetry. It wasn't until 1978, when he left the Hill and moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, that he found his bearings as a playwright. "There weren't many black folks around," he says. "In that silence, I could hear the language for the first time... I got lonely and missed those guys and sort of created them. I could hear the music."

Wilson lived in St. Paul for many years until he moved west to escape

Minnesota's harsh winters. He travels often to the various regional theatres that produce his work, but his home base is Seattle, where he lives with his wife, costume designer Costanza Romero, and their young daughter, Azula. *Gem of the Ocean* marks the ninth play in Wilson's cycle, but the first in the chronological story of the Hill District, and thus of Black history in America. He is nearly finished with play number ten, a work currently titled *Radio Golf*. As his cycle comes to a close, he is considering more plays, screenplays, and even children's theatre. The work ethic that has driven him this far remains unchanged: "I won't retire," he says. "I'll die with a pen in my hand." — CC ■



August Wilson

## YOU START AT THE BEGINNING EACH TIME YOU SIT DOWN **Wilson's Epic Cycle**

**A**ugust Wilson has described his cycle as “the dramatic tracing of the black American odyssey.” Some time after writing *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, set in 1927, Wilson realized he'd written three different plays set in three different decades; “Why don't I just continue to do that?” he asked himself. It became a project, and a way to answer an oft-cited call by acclaimed author James Baldwin for “a profound articulation of the Black Tradition.” The project, over twenty years in the making, has yielded a ten-play canon including – by decade – *Gem of the Ocean*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Seven Guitars*, *Fences*, *Two Trains Running*, *Jitney*, and *King Hedley II*. *Radio Golf* is in development.

The first play Wilson wrote was *Jitney*, in 1979. He sent it to the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference in Waterford, Connecticut, a leading development center for new plays. The O'Neill sent it back. He sent it again the following year; they sent it back. “That's when I decided to up my sights, so to speak,” he remembers. He returned to an earlier project, a play centered around legendary blues singer Ma Rainey. The O'Neill accepted it for the 1982 conference, and so began a pivotal, fruitful partnership with director Lloyd Richards, then Artistic Director of both the Yale Repertory Theatre and the O'Neill Conference. Richards remembers coming across *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* in the pool of more than a thousand scripts submit-

ted that year: “The talent was unmistakable. The characters were alive. They were people I had met in the barbershop on Saturday morning.”

His next play, *Fences*, was accepted to the 1983 O'Neill Conference while *Ma Rainey* was being produced at the Yale Rep, under Richards' direction. The latter made it to Broadway in 1984, and *Fences* followed in 1987, after development in

**“The talent was  
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regional theatres in New Haven, Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco. *Fences*, set in the 1950s, garnered the Tony Award for Best Play, as well as Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Direction. It also won Wilson his first Pulitzer.

*Joe Turner's Come and Gone* followed to Broadway one year later, after development at the O'Neill, New Dramatists (a New York-based playwrights organization), and regional theatres, including the Huntington Theatre Company. *The Piano Lesson* followed the same path to the Huntington in the 1987-88 season, and soon after went to Broadway. *The Piano Lesson*, which revolves around a family's decision to sell or retain an inherited piano, earned him a second Pulitzer.

*Two Trains Running*, set in the late 1960s, opened the following year after a similar development route, including a stop with the Huntington in the 1990-91 season, and directed, like the others, by Richards. *Seven Guitars*, set after

the Second World War, opened the Huntington's 1995-96 season, and followed the same path to Broadway.

*Jitney*, his early play about a gypsy cab station in the 1970s, achieved a kind of homecoming after some revisions and was produced in 1996 at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre. "They always remembered *Jitney* in Pittsburgh," Wilson says. His collaborations with Richards had been formative, and now Wilson was starting to work with a new collaborator, director Marion McClinton.

McClinton and Wilson developed *King Hedley II* in regional theatres, including the Huntington (1999-2000). *Hedley*, set in the 1980s, concerns a troubled community and a dying black tradition in Pittsburgh's Hill District. Aunt Ester (who also figures prominently in *Gem of the Ocean* and *Two Trains Running*) stands as the embodiment of that tradition. "So, in 1985, these kids are out there killing one another. Aunt Ester dies of grief," Wilson explains. Her vision for the community has been blighted by violence and internalized hate. He continues, "If you had a connection to your grandparents and understood their struggle to survive, you wouldn't be out there in the street killing someone over fifteen dollars' worth of narcotics."

The only two decade-plays left unwritten after *King Hedley II* were the bookends of the century. *Gem of the Ocean*, set in 1904, begins the story cycle. McClinton has remained a close collaborator, and will direct the Huntington production. *Radio Golf*, the final play, is set in the 1990s, and tells the story of two well-heeled black real estate developers who plan to tear down Aunt Ester's house, which has long since fallen into disrepair.

"I want to be done with it," Wilson jokes about his ambitious, epic, and nearly complete project – "I didn't start out with a grand idea." Regardless, his commitment is clear, and his mark on the shape and quality of American theatre formidable. – CC ■■

## Center of the World: *Gem of the Ocean* and the City of Bones

The spiritual apex of *Gem of the Ocean* has to do with a City of Bones in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. "That's the center of the world," Aunt Ester tells Citizen Barlow, and traveling there is the only way to cleanse his soul. "All this and everything else you can see is built on that city." The bones, says August Wilson, are symbolic of Africans who died in transit to North America, chained within the hulls of slave ships. The City of Bones, and the people who belong to it, are echoed in Wilson's other plays, most notably *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. They function as a



Troy Hill, Pittsburgh

central metaphor anchoring Wilson's play cycle to the trauma of slavery and the African Diaspora. It is fitting, then, that *Gem*, the first story in the epic cycle, revolves around memory, heritage, and the mythical burial ground of the City of Bones. Wilson's plays rely on the recognition by his characters of their ties with black America's ancestors, and through this, the location of their "song," a gut-level remembrance of history and reclamation of selfhood.

In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Bynum Walker, a conjurer, tells the play's protagonist, Herald Loomis, "You a man who done forgot his song. ...A fellow forget that and he forget who he is." It is only through his reckoning with "the bones people" – a "spiritual transportation to his African origins" – that "he begins to feel he has a place in the world," writes scholar Wendy Coleman in her study on the meeting points between African and Christian spirituality within Wilson's plays. This method of redemption, echoed in *Gem of the Ocean*, underscores another prominent element in Wilson's work, inextricable from the first: the vitality and urgent importance of community. Such transports, in essence a reunion with a cultural and historical past, enable the recognition of "the reason for his existence and his responsibility to himself and his ancestors," explains Wilson. – CC

# AN INTERVIEW WITH August Wilson



Phylicia Rashad in the Mark Taper Forum's production of *Gem of the Ocean*, 2003; photo: Craig Schwartz

*This summer, August Wilson took some time out of his busy schedule to talk with Literary Manager Ilana M. Brownstein about *Gem of the Ocean*, his habits as a writer, and his future plans, now that the cycle is coming to a close.*

**IB:** You have had some amazing collaborative relationships in your professional life with directors of your plays – could you talk about your work with Marion McClinton, and how that collaboration developed?

**AW:** I started working with Marion on *Jitney* in, I think it was 1996 at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, and I've known Marion for about 25 years. When Eddie Gilbert [then Artistic Director at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre] wanted to do *Jitney*, I recalled that Marion, when we first did a reading of it way back in 1980, had subsequently taken that play, put it in his briefcase, and went all over the Twin Cities trying to get someone to produce it. So I naturally thought, well this is the guy who should direct this play, you know? I asked him to do it, and we had a wonderful production in Pittsburgh. We began to work together regularly, subsequent to that. I had this new play called *King Hedley II*, and we were already working on *Jitney*, so I asked Marion if he wanted to do *Hedley* – that really began our relationship. Now we're working on *Gem of the Ocean*.

**Does that relationship affect the way you develop your scripts before they go into rehearsal?**

Oh yeah. I've gotten some wonderful ideas from Marion. We always talk about the plays outside of any sort of rehearsal-based working relationship. I call Marion at home and we'll talk for two hours or more. I've gotten some great insight and suggestions from Marion – I've even gotten suggestions for major rewrites from him. And you know, then we'll go into rehearsal and of course it's a different way of working there than it is when I'm first writing the play.

**How do you like to approach the rehearsal process? Do you attend often?**

I go to a lot of rehearsals. I go all the time. Sometimes I'm not sure what I'm doing there, but I'm there. Marion is in charge of rehearsals, and I don't interfere with his work. So, I don't talk to the actors, I don't want to mess with the artists.

**What are your writing habits like?**

Everyone is different, everyone has their own way of working. I generally start with some sense of what I want to do – I don't really know what the word "theme" means, so I won't say that, but I do have an idea about the play. Then I have a sense of some of the characters. Then maybe I'll start a line of dialogue, and it's like tossing a pebble into a body of water. Everything starts to happen – it spreads out, and the next thing you know, it's a play.

**I read in a wonderful *New Yorker* article from 2001 – around the time you were working on *Hedley* – that when you approach a decade, you begin with the blues of the period. Is that still true? Do you do anything else to situate yourself historically?**

I don't do any historical research of the period, because ultimately, the plays are set in a specific decade and they may be about various things, but in the end they are really about love, duty, honor, betrayal, and things of that sort. I think in doing research you uncover interesting stuff, but then you begin to gear the play toward your research. I don't think that's a good idea for me. For other people, it works, but not for me. And I listen to music, but I do that all the time, so I don't have a moment where I sit down and suddenly start listening to blues – that's just part of my everyday thing.

**Your work is elementally human in its stories. You have said that the plays are about love, and need, and individuals placed against this larger historical backdrop. Do you approach your work in a socially conscious or political mindset, or do you let that come out of the relationships**

**"... as Aunt Ester says in *Two Trains Running* ... You've got to have the ball. So I think that may be the central idea of all the plays: go back and pick up the ball if you've fumbled it."**

**you create and the setting in which you place your story?**

Absolutely it comes out of the relationships and the setting, but it also has something to do with who I am. That's part of my make-up. You can only write yourself. When I started out, when I was twenty, I didn't know what they meant by that, but it's true. If the artist who sits down and works is politically conscious, aware, concerned, invariably, it will show up in the work. But my focus is on the characters, and things emanate out from their living through the experience of the play.

**What are your feelings about Aunt Ester, who is the centerpiece of *Gem of the Ocean*? She seems to me to be a pillar of the entire cycle, whether she appears on stage or not.**

She represents the entire body of wisdom and tradition of the African American – going back all the way to 1619, our first presence here in America. So that memory and that experience, that tradition and

wisdom are kept alive in the person of Aunt Ester. She really hovers over the whole cycle, whether she's mentioned by the other characters or not. She has emerged for me as singular, she's the most important character: all the cycle's characters are her children. But she's a symbolic representation of that. Obviously, no one can live to be 365 years old, or 387, 385... my math is terrible. As for the decision to put her on stage, I knew from the beginning that I didn't want just this mystical presence hanging over everything, I wanted her to be very human. Then we find out that this position of being Aunt Ester – this body of wisdom and memory that is her – has been passed down from one Aunt Ester to the other over a period of time. Though technically, I think, she is 285 years old, the actual person is probably 72 or 73.

**Do you have anything in particular you want audiences to walk away with after they see your plays?**

No, no, no. I'm not trying to send a "message" other than good theatrical experience. I'm simply trying to tell a story within each of those plays. If you take the whole body of plays, and look at them, a lot of them point toward reclaiming your past, and making connections with your past so that you can understand who you are in the present. Or as Aunt Ester says in *Two Trains Running*, if you drop the ball you've got to go back and pick it up. There's no point in continuing to run because you get to the end zone and there won't be a touchdown. You've got to have the ball. So I think that may be the central idea of all the plays: go back and pick up the ball if you've fumbled it.

**As the cycle is concluding, where do you go next? More performing, as you did recently for your one-man show, *How I Learned What I Learned*, at Seattle Rep?**

I doubt if I'll do that, man. I was telling a guy yesterday I wanted to do stand-up, but I was kidding. I only said it because that guy was a stand-up himself. No, I'm

not interested in performing anymore. I want to write a novel! That's what I'm going to do. And I'm going to write some plays outside of the cycle. But I have this idea for a novel that's been haunting me for about ten years now, and I need to find a time to sit down and do that. It'll probably be the first thing I do after *Radio Golf*.

**Is the topic of the novel a secret, or can you share?**

Well, I don't know. I mean, I have some idea of course. It's a journey to the landscape of the American experience and American countryside – American geography. This character wanders around, and encounters things and people in the course of his travels – more or less searching for a story, you know?

**In terms of other artists, whom do you admire, from whom do you take inspiration?**

Those are two really different questions, because the people I admire I don't necessarily draw inspiration from. C.K. Williams is my favorite poet, and it doesn't have anything to do with my work, but his poetry keeps the artist alive, and it keeps me on an even keel. It's an inspiration to me. Also, music primarily – John Coltrane, Kurt Weill, Bach all inspire me.

**I remember reading that you enjoyed Dylan Thomas in your youth.**

Oh yeah, I was twenty years old. Actually, the first money I ever made as an "artist" was when I recited some Dylan Thomas poems in 1965 at a fashion show in downtown Pittsburgh. It was in one of those big hotels, with two guys in tuxedos playing the violin, standing behind me on the runway while I recited Dylan Thomas. They paid me fifty bucks, and in 1965, that was a lot of money! I thought oh, man, this is easy. Thomas will always be part of me, I really embrace that. I can still recite those poems I committed to memory forty years ago.

**What are you reading and listening to these days?**

I'm reading the Constitution of the United States, and I'm listening to Kurt Weill. I'm reading the Declaration of Independence, too. I just feel it's a time when we need to remind ourselves what those documents say.

**It's been a few years since you've been to Boston and the Huntington. How are you feeling about your return?**

I'm excited about coming back to Boston. The Huntington is – and I tell everyone this, even when I'm in Chicago – it's always been my favorite theatre to work in, you know? For a lot of reasons, Peter Altman and his legacy being one of them. I like the theatre, I like the house, and the Huntington has always supported my work in a very positive way. I always felt well supported and glad to be in Boston, so I'm really looking forward to it. It doesn't seem like four years since the last time I was there, I can't believe

it's been so long. I'm probably more excited than anyone else!

**On a final note, you've been working on the cycle for 25 years. Have you developed what you might call a mission as a playwright?**

That's always a difficult question. The idea is, if you're walking down the street and I, or some other playwright, comes up and taps you on the shoulder and says – and hey, this is the definition of a playwright I'm giving you – he says, "Whatever you were going to do, don't do it tonight. Come to such-and-such a theatre, at such-and-such a place, pay such-and-such money, because *I* have something to say to *you*, and it's more important than anything else you could be doing tonight." I want an audience to feel that way – that's what I want them to know, that I have something to say to you. I don't want to tell them what it is, or how they should experience it, and that they need to know such-and-such before they come. I don't think there should be any prerequisites. Just come. ■

## August Wilson and the Huntington

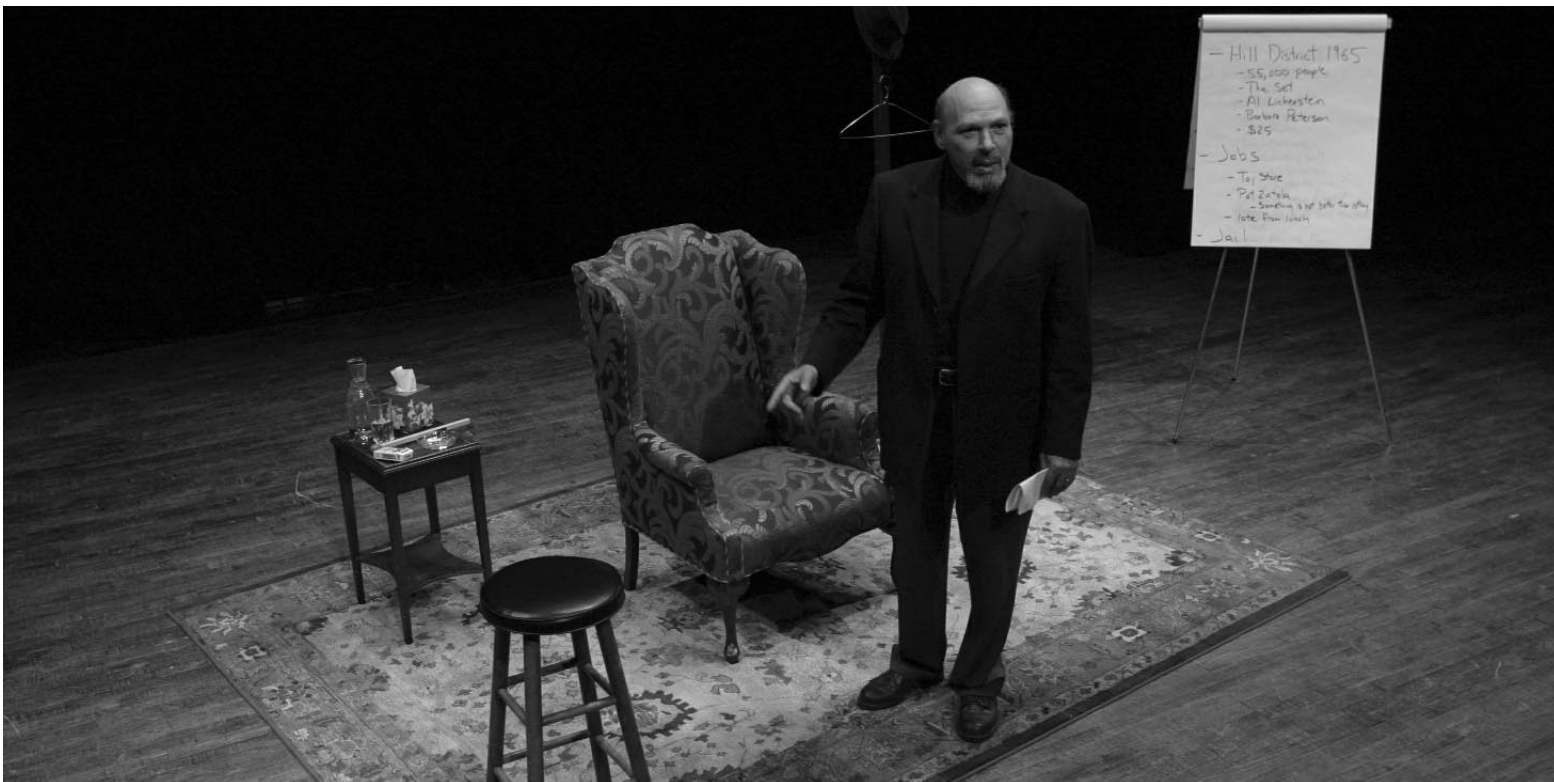
Set in Pittsburgh's Hill District in 1904, *Gem of the Ocean* is the story that begins Wilson's epic cycle of decade plays, exploring what he calls the "dazed and dazzling" African-American experience of the past century. Seven out of the ten plays have graced the Huntington stage over the years.

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



# STEPPING OUTSIDE THE CYCLE

## Wilson's One-Man Show



August Wilson in *How I Learned What I Learned* at Seattle Rep, 2003; photo: Chris Bennion

August Wilson had been joking for a few years that, as a respite from the cycle of plays still under construction, he would write and star in a one-man show called “I’m Not Spalding Gray.” But what began as a joke soon took the shape of an actual project when Seattle Repertory Theatre – the largest regional theatre in Wilson’s adopted hometown – asked him to craft a new play to commemorate their 40th anniversary season.

Unlike the ambitious, sprawling ensemble pieces that made his name, *How I Learned What I Learned* is a shorter, more intimate monologue-play, performed by the playwright himself. Written while he was working on *Gem of the Ocean*, *How I Learned What I Learned* is a kind of collage of the stories Wilson has

told in bars and around tables for years, from the first time he fell in love at the seventh-grade Christmas pageant, to a brush with death at the Oyster House when he was 20.

He has said he isn’t a performer; in preparing this piece with director Todd Kreidler, who met Wilson as a dramaturg when *King Hedley II* premiered in Pittsburgh, he says he found a new respect for the actors who perform his work. “What I’m finding out is in addition to, you know, the memorizing lines, it’s physically [and] emotionally exhausting.” Kreidler has been working steadily with the playwright since *King Hedley II*, refining and organizing both *Gem of the Ocean* and the screenplay for *Fences*. When the going got tough in rehearsal for *How*

*I Learned*, Kreidler says he reminded Wilson what the playwright himself always says: “You can’t get it wrong.”

That advice proved prescient as the glowing reviews and sold-out audiences poured in during the world premier run in May of 2003. Joe Adcock of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* sums up the feelings of many who witnessed Wilson’s performing debut: “Cultural historians sometimes marvel at the success of 19th century writers who became performers. Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, and Mark Twain were pop superstars when they took to the podium. I expect Wilson’s show is something like those barnstormings of 150 years ago. Indeed, Wilson is a lot like Twain. He has that same combination of irony, moral fire, and sly humor.” — CC ■

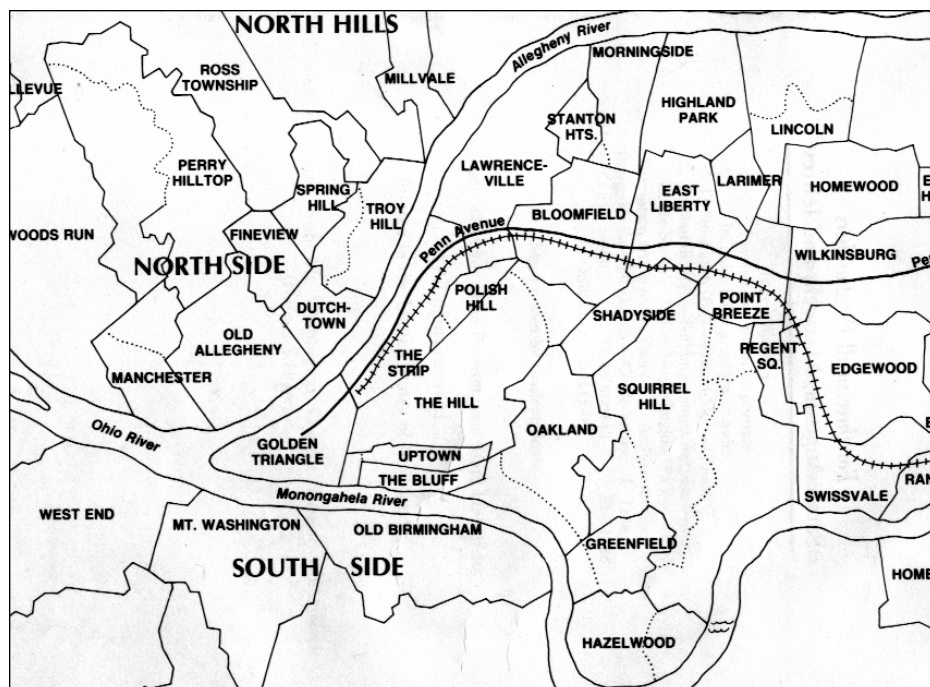


BU Theatre by T. Charles Erickson

## Audience Etiquette

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

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



Map of Pittsburgh neighborhoods

## BACKGROUND & Objectives

In *Gem of the Ocean*, August Wilson introduces the first installment of his theatrical decade-by-decade chronicle of the African-American experience. Set in 1904, when slavery is still a living memory, Citizen Barlow is a man in spiritual turmoil who seeks out Aunt Ester's house claiming sanctuary from Caesar, the local constable. At 285 years of age, Aunt Ester is not too old to heal, and she guides him on a soaring, lyrical journey to the City of Bones. He sets into motion a series of events, leading to startling discoveries that set him on a path where duty ultimately leads to redemption.

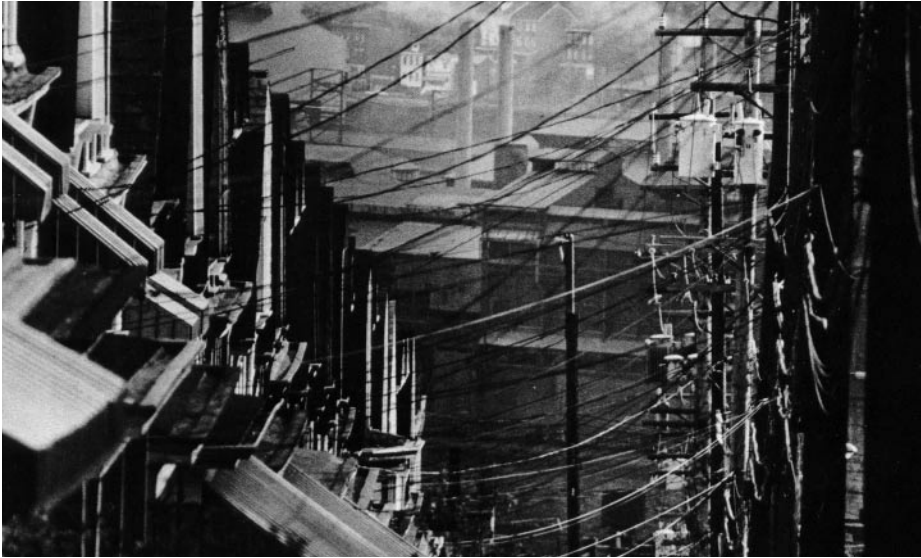
### Objectives

Students will:

1. Identify central themes in *Gem of the Ocean*, possibilities include:  
journey toward spiritual redemption;  
the struggle to understand and claim freedom and citizenship;  
moral versus man-made law;  
community resilience.
2. Analyze the play's central themes and social issues.
3. Relate the play's themes and social issues to their own lives.
4. Examine how treatment of Black Americans has changed since the Civil War.
6. Recognize, find, and examine literary and historical allusions made in the play.
7. Recognize August Wilson's contributions to and impact on American theatre.
8. Evaluate the Huntington Theatre's production of *Gem of the Ocean*.



# PREPARATION FOR GEM OF THE OCEAN



Hazelwood district

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

- Family History
- Education (August Wilson dropped out of school. What was it about him that enabled him to become the great writer he is today? How was he able to beat the odds and become such an acclaimed success?)
- Development as a Playwright
- Influence on American Theatre
- Attitudes and Reflections on Playwriting
- Thirteen-year collaboration with Lloyd Richards
- More recent collaboration with Marion McClinton
- Awards and Honors

## KEY ISSUES

### Memory, Heritage, and the Journey towards Self Discovery

Wilson asserts that the only way for Black Americans to gain control of their existence is to dig deeper into the past; to remember and connect the stories of Africa, slavery, the Civil War, and emancipation to the present. In *Gem of the Ocean*, the older generation (i.e. Aunt Ester, Solly, etc.) passes their memories of black history and spirituality through oral stories, songs, and dreams.

Ask students to investigate their own heritages by interviewing an older family or community member. How were things different for them when they were growing up? How did their past affect the way this person lives their life or views the world today? Encourage students to think about pivotal events that have happened in their own lifetimes and how these events have affected them. What are the similarities between their experiences and those of an older generation?

## Freedom and Citizenship

With the ratification of the 13th Amendment in 1863 and the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1866, African Americans were technically freed from slavery and granted equal rights as American citizens. But racism—institutionalized and otherwise—continued to oppress Blacks in both the North and South. In the face of poor housing conditions, low wages, unemployment, and violent hate crimes, Blacks struggled to define the true nature of freedom and to claim their rights as citizens of the United States. In *Gem of the Ocean*, Solly Two Kings admits, “It’s hard to be a citizen. You gonna have to fight to get that. And time you get it, you be surprised how heavy it is.”

Ask students to define, in their own words, what the words ‘freedom’ and ‘citizenship’ mean to them. Is it possible to be free under the law, but still be a “slave?” How can being a citizen be considered “heavy?”

## Moral versus Man-Made Law

In the beginning of the play, a young black man drowns himself in a river in Pittsburgh’s Hill District after being accused by Caesar, the local constable, of stealing a bucket of nails that he did not steal. In protest, the mill workers strike and vow to take up arms against their oppressors. Meanwhile, African Americans in the South are being held hostage by angry Whites that use physical force and intimidation tactics to keep them from migrating North. Many African American characters in the play feel the time has come to battle their oppressors, despite the consequences of breaking the law. Solly Two Kings, and others, are torn between wanting to defend what they know is morally just and wanting to be “good” citizens and abide by the rules. Even the Bible sends them contradictory messages. God says, “I will smite my enemies,” but also tells mankind to turn the other cheek. What does it mean to do the “right” thing? Who decides what the “right” thing is? Is it ever okay to break the rules? When?



Steel factories of Pittsburgh

## FOR FURTHER Exploration

1. In 1997 playwright August Wilson and theatre critic Robert Brustein engaged in a public debate over their views on cultural diversity and artistic standards in the United States. Wilson claimed that Black culture (and thus Black theatre) was a singular and discrete experience. He argued that race mattered –so much that he discouraged African-American actors from performing in non-black plays and from performing for white audiences. In his opinion, the dominant American culture has gained “authority over [black] cultural and spiritual products,” using them to revitalize itself. Wilson wrote that it is time “to have a theatre that promotes the values of Black Americans, our hard won survival and prosperity, which addresses ways of life that are peculiar to us, that investigated our personalities and social intercourse and philosophical thought, is not to be.” Robert Brustein called Wilson’s remarks “the language of self-segregation.” In his opinion, theatre is created by universal artists whose “perceptions go beyond racial and sectarian agendas.”

Research the Wilson-Brustein debate and discuss the issues these writers

raise. What do you think of Wilson’s claims? Of Brustein’s response?

2. Many of the characters in Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean* have names that are inspired by notable figures from history, religion, and mythology. The following is a list of characters from the play and some of the historical figures that share their name:

**AUNT ESTER:** Queen Ester (Aunt Ester is mentioned as a spiritual guide in two of Wilson’s previous plays: *Two Trains Running* and *King Hedley II*)

**CAESAR:** Julius Caesar (the Roman dictator)

**ELI:** Elijah P. Lovejoy

**BLACK MARY**

**SOLLY TWO KINGS:** Biblical figures, David and Solomon (Solly is also referred to as Moses, which could be a reference to the Biblical figure Moses, as well as to Harriet “Moses” Tubman)

Research these figures, their time periods, and their accomplishments. What qualities or ideas do these names symbolize? Do you think the names fit the characters that Wilson has attributed them? Why do you think Wilson

chose these names and what does that say about the world of the play?

3. Read and discuss the song, “Columbia, The Gem of the Ocean,” written by David T. Shaw and Thomas Beckett in 1843. What does “gem of the ocean” refer to in the poem? How is this phrase used as a central metaphor in Wilson’s play?

*“Columbia, Gem of the Ocean”*

*O, Columbia! the gem of the ocean,  
The home of the brave and the free,  
The shrine of each patriot’s devotion,  
A world offers homage to thee.  
Thy mandates make heroes assemble  
When Liberty’s form stands in view;  
Thy banners make tyranny tremble  
When borne by the Red, White  
and Blue!*

4. Aunt Ester is turning 285 years old, the number of years since the first enslaved Africans arrived in America. Trace the history of slavery in America.

a. Create a timeline of key events and people, reporting briefly on how they affected the life of Black Americans. Some topics to consider are:

- The Middle Passage
- The Great Migration
- Abraham Lincoln
- Andrew Jackson
- The Underground Railroad
- The Emancipation Proclamation
- The 13th and 14th Amendments
- The Fugitive Slave Law
- Reconstruction
- The Ku Klux Klan
- Jim Crow laws

b. Identify some of the key struggles black Americans faced after the Civil War (i.e. unemployment, legal misrepresentation, poor housing conditions, racism, the KKK). What challenges do African Americans face today?

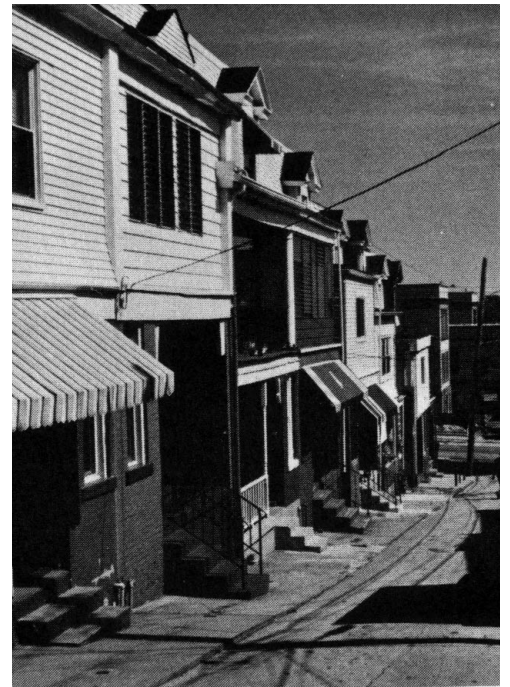
# MASTERY Assessment

## ACT ONE

1. What kind of relationship do Aunt Ester, Eli, and Black Mary have?
2. Why does Aunt Ester act surprised or tired when anyone mentions it is her 285th birthday?
3. Who is Selig? How do the black characters in the play feel about him compared to the way they feel about whites in general?
4. Why would the boy who drowned himself in the river rather die than go to jail for thirty days? What part did Caesar play in his death?
5. What is the significance of Aunt Ester's dream about Solly and her rowing across the ocean? How does it contribute to the development of the play?
6. What is happening down South that is prohibiting African Americans, like Solly's sister, to leave?
7. What lesson is Aunt Ester trying to teach Black Mary by insisting that she touch Solly's bag of dog manure (or "pure")?
8. Why does Aunt Ester say that people are going to throw stones at Black Mary if she visits Percy Saunders and Robert Smiley?
9. What makes Solly's walking stick and Ester's paper boat "magical"? What purpose do these objects serve in the play?
10. Why does Aunt Ester call Solly a black cat that brings good luck?
11. When Citizen breaks into Aunt Ester's house, how does Aunt Ester react? Why does she compare him to her late husband, Junebug?
12. Why can't Citizen wait until Tuesday to get his soul washed?
13. Solly says, "freedom is a long row to hoe when you ain't got a plow." What does this mean? How do other characters in the play feel about what it means to be a free and black after the Civil War?
14. Why does Caesar give Citizen a quarter? Why doesn't Citizen accept it?
15. When Citizen asks for Black Mary's love in scene four, she pushes him away but then quickly embraces him. Why does she react this way? What does she want from Citizen? In the end, why is she unwilling to accept what he has to give?
16. Why does Black Mary declare that relying on oneself is never going to be enough? How does this statement reflect her political position in the play?
17. Who was Ms. Tyler? What did she pass on to Aunt Ester? Why would this gift be too much for some folks to carry?

## ACT TWO:

1. What does Solly mean when he says, "they wave the law on one end and hit you with a Billy club with the other?"
2. What does the City of Bones represent? Why is it significant that it exists in the middle of the ocean? Why does Aunt Ester take people there?
3. Who are the people that Citizen sees in the bottom of the boat? What reaction does he have to seeing them and why?
4. Who is the gatekeeper to the City of Bones when Citizen journeys there?
5. What does it mean to be a "gatekeeper?" What other characters serve as gatekeepers in this play?
6. What motivated Black Mary to speak up to Aunt Ester? Explain Aunt Ester's reaction.
7. Why doesn't Aunt Ester question whether or not Solly is guilty of arson? Why is she helping him get away?
8. Why is it significant that Aunt Ester's paper boat is her bill of sale into slavery?
9. Why did the judge dismiss Aunt Ester after Caesar arrests her? What boundaries does the law have? Who decides those boundaries?
10. Why does Aunt Ester give Citizen Solly's stick? What does she hope he will do with it?
11. What does Solly's piece of chain symbolize? Why is it significant that Citizen gets it after Solly dies?
12. How is Citizen different at the end of the play? What lesson did he learn?
13. Caesar is left at the end of the play stunned by Black Mary's declaration that he is no longer her brother. Why does her declaration affect him so strongly?



Conkling Street on the Middle Hill



Summer shower on the Hill

# QUESTIONS FOR AFTER Attending the Performance

*Note to teachers: After viewing the play, ask the following questions:*

## 1. About the Play and Production

- A. What was your overall reaction? Were you surprised? Intrigued? Amused? Explain your reactions. How was the play structured? Did it build to a single climax? Was it episodic? Did this structure help or hinder your understanding of the play? Was the dialogue interesting? Appropriate? Poetic? Were you aware of the imagery and symbolism during the course of the play? Would you have been aware of these devices without previous preparation?
- B. Was the pace and tempo of the production effective and appropriate?

## 2. About the Characters

- A. Did the characters touch you personally in some ways? Did you care about them?
- B. Were the characters three-dimensional and believable?

- C. Were the motivations of the characters clear?
- D. What qualities were revealed by the actions and speech of the characters?
- E. Did the characters change/develop/undergo transformation during the course of the play?
- F. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the play?

## 3. About the Set

- A. Was the set usable and workable?
- B. Was the set compatible with the production as a whole? Were there any features of the set that distracted from the action of the play?
- C. Did the design reflect the themes, type and style of play?
- D. Were the artistic qualities of unity, balance, line, texture, mass and color used effectively?
- E. Did the set provide appropriate environment and atmosphere?

- F. Was the set used to present any symbolic images or did it simply represent the space in which the action of the play occurred? Did it contain elements of both a "realistic" and a "symbolic" approach?

## 4. About Lighting and Sound

- A. Did the lighting establish mood and atmosphere? Was the illumination sufficient? Did the lighting harmonize with, and contribute toward, the unity of the production?
- B. Were the music and sound effects appropriately conceived? Were they executed effectively?

## 5. About Costumes/Makeup/ Hairstyles

- A. Were all of these elements correct in terms of the period fashion? Were they suitable in terms of character and storytelling for the production?
- B. Did the costumes and make-up use of color/ design serve to illuminate the themes, type and style of the play, or any particular choices of interpretations in this production?

# OPEN RESPONSE and Writing



Grandmother and granddaughter on the Hill

*Instructions for students: Please answer the following as thoroughly as possible. Remember to use topic sentences and examples from the text.*

## Open Response Assessment

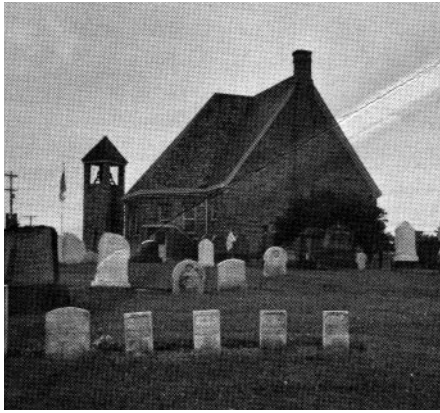
1. Most plays have a propagandistic and antagonistic force. Define these two terms. Who or what is the protagonist in this play? Who or what is the antagonist? Justify your choices.
2. Eli is building a rock wall around Aunt Ester's house to keep Caesar out. How is building a rock wall different than building a fence? What effect might the wall have on the relationship between Aunt Ester's house and her community? On the people in Aunt Ester's house?
3. Why did Citizen Barlow's mother name him "citizen" after freedom came? What does it mean to be a citizen?
4. How are the elements (earth, wind, rain, fire) used as metaphors in the play?
5. Aunt Ester believes that everything works out according to God's plan. Define fate. How do characters in the play try to control fate?
6. Should Black Mary forgive Caesar for

killing the boy who stole a loaf of bread from their bakery? Why or why not?

7. To what extent are violence and survival in this play? Locate examples of characters using non-violent ways of dealing with conflict in the play. What strategies do they use? Are those strategies successful? Why or why not?

## Writing Assignments

1. What is Caesar's perspective on Black Americans and freedom? Describe in your own words what happened in Caesar's life that causes him to feel this way. Contrast Caesar's social/political point of view with another character's point of view in the play.
2. Why did Solly set fire to the mill and attempt to burn down the prison? What do these two buildings symbolize in the lives of Black Americans? Was Solly justified in his actions? Imagine you are Solly before burning down the mill. Write a letter to another character in the play explaining your reasons for committing this crime.
3. What does it mean to "do the right thing?" Who decides what the right thing is? Research an event in history when a person, or a group of people, defied the law (i.e. Harriet Tubman/ Underground Railroad, Rosa Parks/ Civil Rights Movement etc) for social and/or political reasons. Write a report describing the circumstances of the event. Do you agree with the choice(s) that were made? Why or why not?
4. Choose a female character from one of Wilson's former plays and compare her to the character of Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean*. What role does each of them play? How are they similar and/or different? How do their actions comply with or defy the roles women typically played during that decade in American history?



Cross Roads Presbyterian Church, Monroeville

# MEDIA Assessment

port their point of view and to draft an opening statement. Hold a debate in class with the teacher in role as the facilitator.

## ROLE PLAY AND IMPROVISATION

### Hold a Community Meeting

Organize a 1904 Pittsburgh Hill District community meeting to discuss issues raised in the play (i.e. Caesar's eviction policies, poor housing conditions, racism, unemployment, the strike at the mill, violence etc.). Have each of your students role play a character from the play (if there are more students than characters, have some students create characters that might have lived in the Hill District in 1904). The teacher should be in role as the mediator to probe students for further thought and to guide discussion.

### TV Times

Have students improvise the moment when Garrett Brown, accused of stealing a bucket of nails, walks into the river and drowns himself, choosing death over thirty days in jail. Using a remote control as a device, "fast forward," "rewind," and "pause" the scene to emphasize critical moments and to interview (or "hot seat") characters (i.e. Garrett Brown, Caesar, the mill workers who are watching the drowning, etc.) about why they are making the decisions they are making and how they feel at particular moments throughout the scene. Discuss why Wilson decided to allude to the drowning incident through dialogue rather than include it as a scene in the play.

### Frozen Images and Captions

Ask students to think of a time that they were treated unfairly or had to make a difficult choice that might have gone against what was traditionally considered "right."

Divide the class into groups of three or four and allow students time to share their stories with their classmates. Ask each group to create tableaux inspired by these stories and present them to the class. Coach students to describe what they see with questions like: Who is placed where, whose hands are joined, etc. Once they have described what they see, then ask them what emotions or intentions seem to emerge from the details. Finally, have the class devise a caption for the image based on their analysis.

### Acting

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

### Visual Art

August Wilson credits the art of Romare Bearden as one of his major influences. Look at some of Romare Bearden's work and discuss why he chooses collage as his primary medium of expressing African American history. Have students create a poster for *Gem of the Ocean* that represents a major moment or theme in the play using collage. Students should use paper, drawings, fabric pieces, photographs, old puzzle pieces, magazine and newspaper

## LITERACY ALIVE

### Vocal Collaging Poetry

Distribute copies of William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" and discuss the poem's major themes, emotions, moments etc. Divide the class into small groups and assign each a section of the poem. Instruct students to share and/or divide up the words and phrases in their section using some of the following techniques:

- Speaking as a chorus
- Chanting or repeating words and phrases
- Echoing words
- Speaking individually or in partners
- Varying volume, pitch, rhythm, and tone
- Adding a percussive beat (handing clapping, percussion instruments)
- Adding sound

Encourage students to incorporate movement into their sequence. Ask students to rehearse and perform their collaged pieces in order. Perhaps suggest putting them in different orders and discussing how the poem changes? Discuss how their choices revealed new meanings or affected how they felt about the poem.

### Gaining Perspective

Discuss the debate between August Wilson and Robert Brustein (See Further Explorations) and the issues that each scholar raises. Divide the class in half and assign each one side of the argument. Ask students to research the issues that sup-

clippings, and quotations from the play to express the play's conflicts, relationships, and emotions. Encourage students to consider texture and color when making decisions to best represent their chosen moment or theme. Have students share their work with the class. By picking out the qualities of each collage, have them guess what moment or theme is being expressed.

## MUSIC/MOVEMENT

### Soundtracks

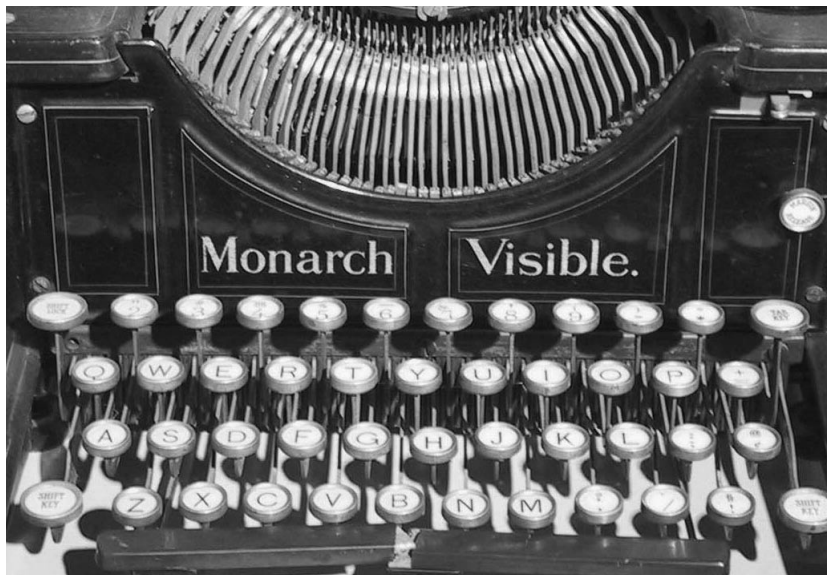
Have students create a soundtrack for a scene in the play (or for an incident that is alluded to such as the young man drowning in the river). Encourage students to make sounds using found objects, percussion instruments (if available), their bodies and their voices. After allowing everyone to rehearse, invite some students to act out the scene while the rest of the class performs the soundtrack. Discuss how the music affected the scene.

### Creating Choreography

Identify key themes in the play such as courage, freedom, power, justice, violence, and prejudice and ask students to create short movement pieces that represent one of these themes. Students should choreograph these pieces to a song of their choosing. Remind students to develop a piece with a clear beginning, middle, and an end. Allow time for students to talk about the process of creating, rehearsing, and performing their movement pieces.

### The Design Process

Students should research what neighborhoods were like in Pittsburgh's Hill District in 1904 and create scenic designs for Aunt Ester's house in *Gem of the Ocean*. Encourage students to consider non-realistic designs. Aunt Ester's house is referred to as a sanctuary in play. Why? How does that reference affect the class's design choices? Students should be able to defend their choices and explain how each design reflects the social, economic, and political context of the production.



## Did You Know...?

- August Wilson quit school when he was fifteen after his teacher accused him of plagiarizing an impressive 20-page essay on Napoleon. Despite Wilson's word that the essay was legitimate, his teacher gave him a failing grade. Wilson dropped out of school immediately, in the middle of ninth grade, and began his own "informal" education at the public library.
- Wilson's sister Freda paid him \$20 to write a college term paper. He used the money to buy his first typewriter.
- Wilson noted in a recent NPR interview that his greatest influences are the 4 'B's: Writers Amiri Baraka, and Jorge Luis Borges; the artist, Romare Bearden; and the blues.
- Wilson has won two Pulitzer Prize Awards: *Fences* in 1987 and *The Piano Lesson* in 1990.
- The director of the Huntington's production of *Gem of the Ocean*, Marion McClinton, has been collaborating with August Wilson since 1995, when he directed the world premiere of Wilson's play, *Jitney*, at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre.
- After its run at the Huntington, *Gem of the Ocean* has immediate plans to premiere on Broadway.
- While enjoying the success of *Gem of the Ocean*, Wilson is currently working on the last play of his ten-play cycle, *Radio Golf*, which explores the experience of African Americans in the 1990s.



# Lesson Plans

*Teachers= note: Choose activities that are appropriate for your classroom period.*

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

## **DAY ONE** - Introducing the Play

1. Read the synopsis of *Gem of the Ocean* in the Literary and review the play's key themes. Discuss other literary or artistic works the students have studied that share these themes.
2. Distribute Mastery Assessment for *Gem of the Ocean* for students to read before and review after attending the performance.
3. Choose two pages from the literary guide to copy and distribute or, to save time, narrate highlights to students. Suggested pages: "August Wilson's Coming of Age," "Wilson's Epic Cycle," and "Center of the World: Gem of the Ocean and the City of Bones."  
If time allows, break the class into small groups and assign each group an article to read and discuss. Then have each group share the highlights with the class.
4. Review Audience Etiquette.

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

## **DAY ONE** - Introducing the Production

Same as Day One above; completed before seeing the production.

## **DAY TWO** - The Production

Attend the performance at the Huntington Theatre Company.

**Homework:** *Students should answer the Mastery Assessment questions.*

## **DAY THREE** - Follow-up Discussion

Discuss Mastery Assessment answers in class and any of the following elements:

Their reaction to the play and what they saw as its single most important theme.

Their reaction to elements of the play: setting, plot, characterization, dramatic structure, and language.

Their reaction to the production's scenic, lighting, sound, and costume designs; direction; and acting.

**Option One:** *Distribute Handout 1: Vocabulary Charades*

**Option Two:** *Choose one of the activities from Media Assessment to explore in class*

**Option Three:** *Discuss the Wilson-Brustein Debate (For Further Exploration, P. ) and hold a mock-debate in class (Media Assessment, P. ).*

## **DAY FOUR** - Process Knowledge

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

**Optional:** *Students may choose one task from For Further Exploration or Media Assessment to complete for extra credit.*



**SEVEN-DAY LESSON PLAN** completely integrates *Gem of the Ocean* into your schedule. Within seven school days, you can introduce the play, assign reading and vocabulary, and assess your students on both a group and individual level. Students will ideally view the play after reading the play and answering Mastery Assessment questions.

**DAY ONE** - Introducing the Play

Same as Day One above

**Homework:** *Read Act One of Gem of the Ocean and answer corresponding Mastery Assessment questions.*

**DAY TWO** - Act One

Discuss Act One and answers to Mastery Assessment questions.

**Homework:** *Read Act Two of Gem of the Ocean and answer corresponding Mastery Assessment questions.*

**DAY THREE** - Acts Two and Three

Discuss Act Two and the answers to the Mastery Assessment questions.

**DAY FOUR** - Attend Performance at the Huntington Theatre.

**DAY FIVE** - Group Work

Read and discuss W.C. Bryant's poem, "Thanatopsis." Answer questions in Handout 2 about the poem's themes.

Discuss how these themes relate to themes in *Gem of the Ocean*.

**Distribute Handout 2:** *Creating a Dramatic Monologue and allow time in class for students to brainstorm ideas and to write.*

**Homework:** *Finish a rough draft of your monologue.*

**DAY SIX:** Performance and Response

Have students perform their monologues for the class. Discuss the following elements:

How did students use language, movement, and voice to convey meaning?

What surprised you about the way students' interpreted the poem?

How did the poem's meaning shift when characters, other than Solly, communicated its ideas?

**Homework:** *Students may choose one task from For Further Exploration or Media Assessment to complete for extra credit. Preview Examination.*

**DAY SEVEN:** Test Knowledge

To develop an exam, choose either several Open Response Assessment questions or one question from Writing Assignments. Writing should be completed in one classroom period.

**For extra credit:** *Students may choose an additional For Further Exploration or Media Assessment task.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Handout 1**

## **VOCABULARY CHARADES FOR *GEM OF THE OCEAN***

- 1.** Pre-Test: Ask students to match as many words as they can with their appropriate definitions.  
Most students will probably answer only a handful of the terms correctly on the pre-test.
- 2.** Bringing Words to Life: Divide the class into small groups and assign each group 2-3 words to act out for the class. While each group is presenting, the rest of the class should act out the definitions along with them.
- 3.** Post-Test: Once all of the groups have presented, distribute another copy of the vocabulary test.  
You'll be amazed at the number of perfect scores!

**Words and Phrases from *Gem of the Ocean***

**(some words need to be edited out; definitions need to be added in quiz form).**

Abode	Pall Bearers
Aiding and Abetting	Quarry
Arson	Rations
Billy Club	Realm
Bondage	Redemption
Caravan	Refuge
Citizen	Righteous
Civilized	Riot
Clodhoppers	Run-a-Muck
Collateral	Sanctuary
Consort	Scoundrel
Consumption	Scourge
Crap Game	Shackle
Disturbing the Peace	Smite
Drapery	Soothe
Dungeon	Splendor
Fugitive	Sustain
Innumerable	Thoroughbreds
Kerosene	Vanity
Liable	Vengeance
Loitering	Verily
Moonshine	Warrant
Ordeal	Zealous

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Handout 2

## CREATING A DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

### ***GEM OF THE OCEAN***

(An excerpt from Act II, Scene 1)

*Eli pours each a drink of whiskey. Solly raises his glass in a toast.*

SOLLY: So live, that when the summons comes to join  
The innumerable caravan which moves  
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take  
His chamber in the silent halls of death,  
Thou go not like the quarry-slave at night,  
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust approach they grave  
Like one that wraps the drapery of his cough  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

*They drink.*

The last nine lines of William Cullen Bryant's poem, "Thanatopsis," are recited by Solly in celebration of Citizen's departure to the City of Bones and are recited later in the play by Eli to commemorate Solly's death.

- Read and discuss the poem, "Thanatopsis." What lesson is the poem teaching about the overall relationship between human beings and nature? Do you find the ideas it expresses consoling or depressing? Why is the poem included in *Gem of the Ocean*?
- Research the life and work of W.C. Bryant. What sort of religious and philosophical outlook did Bryant have? What audience was he writing for? Why is it significant that both Solly and Eli have the last passage of "Thanatopsis" memorized?
- Bryant's first version of "Thanatopsis" was written when he was 17 and did not include the last nine lines. Seven years later, he expanded the poem to include this final passage. How does this final passage change the poem's perspective on death? What do you account for the change? How might he have written the poem 20 or 50 years later?

Using your own words, rewrite the final passage of this poem as a monologue. The monologue should be written from the perspective one of the characters from *Gem of the Ocean* (you may choose Solly or another character from the play). Decide whether or not this character agrees with Bryant's philosophies (Your monologue should not be a literal translation of the poem. Instead use the poem's themes as springboards to express your character's thoughts and feelings).

### **Before you begin writing, please consider the following questions:**

Who are you?

Who are you speaking to?

What do you want from this person?

Why is it crucial that you tell your story right now?

Where are you at this moment?

How will you get your message across in a way that will be heard? (In addition to choosing appropriate language, consider how you will use your voice and your body to get your message across).

Perform your monologue for the class.

