

# Fences By August Wilson

Fences By August Wilson Fences by August Wilson: An In-Depth Exploration Fences by August Wilson is a monumental work in American theatre that captures the complexities of African American life in the 1950s. Through its compelling narrative, rich character development, and profound themes, the play offers a window into the struggles, aspirations, and realities of Black Americans during a pivotal era. As part of Wilson's ten-play series, "The Pittsburgh Cycle," Fences stands out as a quintessential piece that combines personal tragedy with social commentary, making it both timeless and urgently relevant.

**Background and Context of Fences** August Wilson and The Pittsburgh Cycle – August Wilson (1945–2005) was a renowned playwright celebrated for his portrayal of African American experiences. – The Pittsburgh Cycle, also known as the Century Cycle, comprises ten plays set in different decades of the 20th century, each exploring African American life. – Fences is the sixth play in this series, set in the 1950s, a period marked by significant social change and racial tensions.

**Historical and Social Context** – The 1950s in America was a time of segregation, limited economic opportunities for Black Americans, and the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. – Post-World War II economic shifts created both opportunities and challenges for African Americans. – Wilson's play reflects these societal dynamics through its characters' personal struggles and aspirations.

**Plot Summary** **Main Narrative Arc** – The story centers around Troy Maxson, a former baseball player who now works as a garbage collector in Pittsburgh. – Troy's relationships with his family—particularly with his son Cory and wife Rose—drive much of the play's emotional core. – The narrative explores Troy's past, his dreams deferred, and his confrontations with societal limitations.

**2 Key Events**

1. Troy's reflections on his baseball career and missed opportunities.
2. His conflicts with Cory over his desire to pursue football.
3. The revelation of Troy's affair and subsequent consequences.
4. The family's struggles to reconcile with Troy's actions and choices.
5. The

climactic confrontation and the play's poignant ending. Major Themes in Fences

**Racial Barriers and Discrimination** – Troy's bitterness stems partly from the racial barriers that prevented him from playing professional baseball. – The play examines how systemic racism limits opportunities and shapes individual identities.

**Fences: The Symbolic and Literal** – The title itself refers to both physical fences and metaphorical barriers. – Physical fences symbolize boundaries and protection, while metaphorical fences represent emotional walls and societal divisions.

**Generational Conflict and Fatherhood** – The play explores the tension between Troy and his son Cory, highlighting differing views on race, opportunity, and personal ambition. – Troy's own fatherless upbringing influences his parenting style and worldview.

**Dreams and Limitations** – Wilson emphasizes how dreams are deferred or shattered due to societal constraints. – Troy's own unfulfilled ambitions serve as a cautionary tale about the cost of these limitations.

**Responsibility and Guilt** – The characters grapple with their responsibilities toward family and society. – Troy's actions, including his infidelity, reflect internal conflicts and guilt.

**Character Analysis**

**Troy Maxson** – A complex protagonist embodying resilience, bitterness, and vulnerability. – His past as a talented athlete who faced racial discrimination fuels his worldview. – His struggles with his identity and authority shape his relationships.

**Rose Maxson** – Troy's wife, representing stability, patience, and moral strength. – She embodies the nurturing role and seeks to keep her family together despite hardships.

**Cory Maxson** – Troy's son, who dreams of a football career and independence. – His desire to break free from his father's restrictions highlights generational tensions.

**Gabriel Maxson** – Troy's brother, a Veterans Administration patient with a mental disability. – Gabriel symbolizes hope and spiritual connection amidst adversity.

**Literary Devices and Style**

**Use of Dialogue** – Wilson's dialogue is authentic, capturing African American vernacular and speech patterns. – The conversational style reveals character personalities and social contexts.

**Symbolism** – Fences as a recurring symbol of protection, separation, and barriers. – The baseball references serve as metaphors for lost opportunities.

**Character Monologues and Flashbacks** – Wilson employs monologues to deepen character development. – Flashbacks provide insight into Troy's past and motivations.

**Impact and**

Reception Critical Acclaim – Fences received widespread praise for its powerful storytelling and nuanced characters. – It won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1987 and the Tony Award for Best Play in 2010 (revival). Cultural Significance – The play is lauded for its authentic portrayal of Black life and its commentary on racial injustice. – It has been adapted into a film (2016), directed by Denzel Washington, further cementing its cultural relevance. Educational and Theatre Influence – Fences is frequently studied in literature and theatre courses for its themes and stylistic elements. – It has inspired countless productions worldwide, encouraging dialogue about race, family, and societal barriers. Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of Fences Fences by August Wilson remains a landmark in American theatre due to its profound exploration of individual and collective struggles within a racially divided society. Its rich characters, poignant themes, and masterful storytelling provide insights into the human condition, making it relevant across generations. The play challenges audiences to confront their own fences—whether physical, emotional, or societal—and consider the cost of barriers that divide us. As Wilson’s powerful narrative continues to resonate, Fences secures its place as a vital work that not only depicts a specific time and place but also speaks to universal truths about hope, limitation, and resilience.

Question Answer What is the main theme of August Wilson's play Fences? The main themes of Fences include racial discrimination, family dynamics, personal responsibility, and the struggle for identity and dignity within African American communities. How does the character Troy Maxson's past influence his relationships in Fences? Troy's past experiences with racism and missed opportunities in baseball shape his attitudes toward work and his family, often causing conflict and tension with his son and wife throughout the play. What role does the fence itself symbolize in August Wilson's Fences? The fence symbolizes both physical and emotional barriers—protecting loved ones and keeping others out, as well as representing Troy's attempt to control his family and his own emotional vulnerabilities. Why is Fences considered a significant work in African American theatre? Fences is considered a landmark because it vividly explores Black life in America, highlights issues of racial inequality, and showcases Wilson's poetic language and deep character development, earning critical

acclaim and Pulitzer Prize recognition. How does Troy's relationship with his son Cory evolve in *Fences*? Initially strained due to Troy's discouragement of Cory's athletic pursuits, their relationship evolves as Cory seeks independence, leading to conflicts but also moments of understanding and reconciliation.

5 Has *Fences* been adapted into other media, and if so, how was it received? Yes, *Fences* was adapted into a film in 2016, directed by and starring Denzel Washington. The film received critical acclaim, earning several award nominations, including an Academy Award for Best Actor for Denzel Washington.

*Fences* by August Wilson: A Powerful Exploration of Race, Family, and Identity August Wilson's *Fences* is widely recognized as one of the most compelling plays in American theatre, offering an unflinching look into the African American experience in the 1950s. As part of Wilson's ten-play cycle *The Pittsburgh Cycle*, *Fences* stands out for its richly drawn characters, poetic language, and profound themes. This article aims to provide an in-depth review of *Fences*, examining its narrative structure, thematic depth, character development, and its enduring significance in American literature and drama.

--- Overview of *Fences* Plot Summary and Context Set in the 1950s, *Fences* centers around Troy Maxson, a former baseball player who now works as a garbage collector in Pittsburgh. The play explores Troy's struggles with racial discrimination, personal ambitions, family dynamics, and the societal limitations placed on African Americans during that era. Through Troy's interactions with his wife Rose, son Cory, and other characters, Wilson paints a vivid portrait of a man caught between the desire for dignity and the realities of systemic oppression. The play unfolds over the course of several scenes, capturing moments of tension, confession, and reflection. Troy's complex personality—a mix of charm and bitterness—serves as the fulcrum for the narrative, revealing the internal conflicts that shape his decisions and relationships.

Critical Reception Since its debut in 1985, *Fences* has garnered critical acclaim, earning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1987 and a Tony Award for Best Play in 1987. It has been praised for its authentic portrayal of African American life, lyrical dialogue, and nuanced characters. The play's universal themes of family, dreams deferred, and personal responsibility resonate across generations and cultures.

--- Thematic Depth of *Fences* A. Race and Discrimination Wilson's *Fences* By August Wilson 6

Fences offers a candid exploration of racial barriers in mid-20th-century America. Troy's experiences as a Black man facing segregation, limited job opportunities, and societal prejudice shape much of his worldview. His bitterness toward opportunities denied to him—particularly in professional baseball—highlights the frustrations of a generation of Black Americans who felt the promise of equality was still out of reach. Key themes include: – The impact of systemic racism on personal aspirations – The tension between individual ambition and societal limitations – The generational shift in attitudes toward race and opportunity

**B. Family and Responsibility** At its core, Fences is a family drama. Troy's relationships with his wife Rose and son Cory are central to the narrative. The play examines the conflicts between personal freedom and familial duty, as Troy's decisions often clash with his desires for his family's well-being. Important aspects: – The role of fatherhood and paternal expectations – Sacrifice, betrayal, and forgiveness within the family – The generational divide—Troy's traditional views vs. Cory's aspirations

**C. Dreams and Disillusionment** Wilson's title itself refers to the metaphorical fences—barriers—people erect around themselves or others. Troy's own dreams of a baseball career have been thwarted, leading to feelings of bitterness that influence his interactions with his family. Themes include: – The tension between dreams deferred and acceptance – The cycle of hope and disappointment – The importance of confronting and understanding personal limitations

**D. Personal Identity and Morality** The play probes questions of morality, responsibility, and personal identity. Troy's actions—such as his infidelity and controlling behavior—are depicted with complexity, prompting reflection on human flaws and the societal pressures that shape moral choices.

--- **Character Analysis and Development**

**A. Troy Maxson** Troy is the play's protagonist—a deeply complex character embodying both strength and vulnerability. His background as a former baseball player who was barred from Major League Baseball due to racial segregation fuels much of his cynicism. Troy's pride and sense of dignity often conflict with his shortcomings as a husband and father. Characteristics: – Charismatic yet authoritarian – Proud, stubborn, and sometimes manipulative – Haunted by past disappointments – Struggles with notions of masculinity and legacy

**B. Rose Maxson** Rose is

Troy's wife—a nurturing, resilient woman who seeks stability and love for her family. Her unwavering support and moral grounding serve as a counterbalance to Troy's flaws.

Characteristics: – Compassionate and maternal – Strong-willed and principled – Represents hope and moral integrity

C. Cory Maxson Cory is Troy's son, representing the younger generation's aspirations and desire for independence. His relationship with Troy is fraught with tension, especially when Troy forbids him from pursuing football scholarships due to his own bitterness.

Characteristics: – Ambitious and eager – Rebellious against paternal authority – Seeks to forge his own path

D. Other Supporting Characters – Gabriel: Troy's brother, whose head injury has left him mentally challenged but spiritually significant. – Lyons: Troy's son from a previous relationship, who struggles with poverty and dependence. – Jim Bono: Troy's loyal friend, who provides perspective and support. --- Stylistic Elements and Literary Devices

Poetic Language and Dialogue Wilson's mastery of language *Fences* By August Wilson shines through in *Fences*. The dialogue is lyrical, rhythmic, and infused with African American vernacular, capturing the authentic voice of the characters. The play balances realism with poetic expression, often using metaphors and biblical allusions to deepen thematic resonance.

Symbolism – Fences: The titular fences symbolize emotional barriers, societal divisions, and personal defenses. Characters build fences—both literal and metaphorical—to protect themselves or isolate others. – Baseball: Troy's past as a baseball player symbolizes lost opportunities and racial barriers. – The Fence in Troy's Yard: The physical fence Troy builds around his yard mirrors the emotional and generational fences he maintains within his family.

Structural Elements Wilson employs a straightforward, chronological structure, allowing emotional buildup and character arcs to unfold naturally. The play's scenes are tightly woven, emphasizing dialogue-driven storytelling that invites audience reflection. --- Enduring Significance and Cultural Impact

Representation and Social Commentary *Fences* is celebrated for its authentic portrayal of Black life, capturing the nuances of racial discrimination, family loyalty, and personal resilience. It challenges audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about societal injustice and human imperfection.

Educational and Artistic Influence The play has become a staple in academic settings, often

used to discuss race, literature, and American history. Its powerful themes and compelling characters continue to inspire adaptations—most notably, a 2016 film directed by and starring Denzel Washington. Relevance Today While set in the 1950s, *Fences* remains profoundly relevant, echoing contemporary debates about race, opportunity, and family dynamics. Its exploration of barriers—both societal and personal—resonates with audiences navigating today’s social landscape. --- Conclusion: A Masterpiece of American Theatre August Wilson’s *Fences* is more than just a play—it is a mirror reflecting the struggles, hopes, and contradictions of Black America in the mid-20th century. Its richly developed characters, poetic language, and universal themes ensure its place as a cornerstone of American literature and theatre. For those seeking a profound, emotionally charged theatrical experience, *Fences* offers an unflinching exploration of human flaws and resilience, making it an essential work for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of identity, race, and family. Its enduring relevance and powerful storytelling cements its status as a true masterpiece—an artistic fence guarding the gates of cultural understanding and empathy. August Wilson, *Fences* play, American drama, African American literature, Pittsburgh setting, 1980s, Tony Award, race relations, family dynamics, Wilson's plays

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from legendary playwright august wilson comes the powerful stunning dramatic bestseller that won him critical acclaim including the tony award for best play and the pulitzer prize troy maxson is a strong man a hard man he has had to be to survive troy maxson has gone through life in an america where to be proud and black is to face pressures that could crush a man body and soul but the 1950s are yielding to the new spirit of liberation in the 1960s a spirit that is changing the world troy maxson has learned to deal with the only way he can a spirit that is making him a stranger angry and afraid in a world he never knew and to a wife and son he understands less and less this is a modern classic a book that deals with the impossibly difficult themes of race in america set during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s now an academy award winning film directed by and starring denzel washington along with academy award and golden globe winner viola davis

the only african american playwright to win the pulitzer prize twice wilson has yet to receive the critical attention that he merits with 12 original essays this volume provides a thorough introduction to his body of work

contains three plays about twentieth century african american lives



discussion and criticism of ma rainey s black bottom fences joe turner s come and gone and two trains running

the african american dramatist august wilson who was born in a pittsburgh slum in 1945 saw the first professional productions of his plays in 1981 and 1982 in little theaters in st paul minnesota and pittsburgh he had also begun sending his plays to the eugene o neill playwrights conference which sponsors workshops to develop the talents of young american playwrights the connecticut based conference eventually accepted a work in progress ma rainey s black bottom staged in 1984 and from that moment wilson s career took off like to use the title of his 1992 play two trains running with ma rainey wilson began a ten play cycle dramatizing different decades in the history of african americans in the twentieth century the other works in the still unfinished cycle include fences staged in 1985 joe turner s come and gone staged in 1986 the piano lesson staged in 1990 two trains running staged in 1992 and seven guitars staged in 1996

now a netflix film starring samuel l jackson winner of the new york drama critics circle award for best play this modern american classic is about family and the legacy of slavery in america august wilson has already given the american theater such spell binding plays about the black experience in 20th century america as ma rainey s black bottom joe turner s come and gone and the pulitzer prize winning fences in his second pulitzer prize winner the piano lesson wilson has fashioned perhaps his most haunting and dramatic work at the heart of the play stands the ornately carved upright piano which as the charles family s prized hard won possession has been gathering dust in the parlor of berniece charles s pittsburgh home when boy willie berniece s exuberant brother bursts into her life with his dream of buying the same mississippi land that his family had worked as slaves he plans to sell their antique piano for the hard cash he needs to stake his future but berniece refuses to sell clinging to the piano as a reminder of the history that is their family legacy this dilemma is the real piano lesson reminding us that blacks are often deprived both of the symbols of their past and of opportunity in the present

in the dramatic vision of august wilson sandra shannon follows the playwright s path through each decade from the outset she considers how he uses poetry the blues romare bearden s art and other cultural artifacts to lead him to imagined sites of pain and resignation healing and renewal in the collective memory of black america it is in these places of defeat and victory shannon demonstrates that wilson creates drama as he excavates examines and reclaims the past although wilson diverts attention away from factual details and focuses on the human costs of family dislocation chronic unemployment or cultural alienation shannon illustrates how fully the plays are grounded in credible historical contexts from slavery and emancipation to the aftermath of world war ii the 1960s and the vietnam war moreover she identifies and analyzes the themes that recur in some plays and branch off in new directions in others including the dislocations that attended black migration to the north and communication gaps between black men and women as she examines each of the plays in wilson s dramatic history of the african american experience shannon conveys the broad range of his dramatic vision book jacket title summary field provided by blackwell north america inc all rights reserved

a collection of works by and relating to playwright august wilson highlights include a signed first edition of wilson s first book ma rainey s black bottom 1985 an original advertising poster for fences 1987 signed by both august wilson and james earl jones signed first editions of two trains running 1993 and the ground on which i stand 2001 first editions of joe turner s come and gone 1988 the piano lesson 1990 romare bearden his life and work 1990 august wilson three plays 1991 speak my name black men on masculinity and the american dream 1995 jitney 2001 and radio golf 2007 a first edition of seven guitars 1996 signed by both wilson and ruben santiago hudson and also inscribed by michele shay a first edition of king hedley ii 2005 signed by both leslie uggams and stephen mckinley henderson a first edition of gem of the ocean 2006 signed by both john earl jelks and ruben santiago hudson a number of original advertising posters theatre programs promotional brochures and flyers for a variety of wilson productions and a complete set containing all ten first editions in dust

jackets of the august wilson century cycle 2007

it has been produced around the world and is one of the most significant african american plays of the 20th century this reference is a comprehensive guide to wilson s dramatic achievement the volume begins with an overview of wilson s aesthetic and dramatic agenda along with a discussion of the forces that propelled him beyond his potentially troubled life in pittsburgh to his current status as one of america s most gifted playwrights a detailed plot summary of fences is provided followed by an overview of the play s distinguished production history

a celebration of august wilson s journey from a child in pittsburgh to one of america s greatest playwrights august wilson 1945 2005 was a two time pulitzer prize winning playwright who had a particular talent for capturing the authentic everyday voice of black americans as a child he read off soup cans and cereal boxes and when his mother brought him to the library his whole world opened up after facing intense prejudice at school from both students and some teachers august dropped out however he continued reading and educating himself independently he felt that if he could read about it then he could teach himself anything and accomplish anything like many of his plays feed your mind is told in two acts revealing how wilson grew up to be one of the most influential american playwrights the book includes an author s note a timeline of august wilson s life a list of wilson s plays and a bibliography

provides a guide to the political and historical context of the 1950s and to the african american cultural context

offers pedagogical techniques for teaching august wilson s plays in the college classroom using topics such as jazz spatial politics memory satire african belief systems fractals pittsburgh women urbanism shakespeare and tennessee williams includes information on editions reference works biographies and online resources gives syllabus suggestions for

undergraduate and graduate courses

one of america's most powerful and original dramatists august wilson offered an alternative history of the twentieth century as seen from the perspective of black americans he celebrated the lives of those seemingly pushed to the margins of national life but who were simultaneously protagonists of their own drama and evidence of a vital and compelling community decade by decade he told the story of a people with a distinctive history who forged their own future aware of their roots in another time and place but doing something more than just survive wilson deliberately addressed black america but in doing so discovered an international audience alongside chapters addressing wilson's life and career and the wider context of his plays this 2007 companion dedicates individual chapters to each play in his ten play cycle which are ordered chronologically demonstrating wilson's notion of an unfolding history of the twentieth century

it is 1936 and boy willie arrives in pittsburgh from the south in a battered truck loaded with watermelons to sell he has an opportunity to buy some land down home but he has to come up with the money right quick he wants to sell an old piano that has been in his family for generations but he shares ownership with his sister and it sits in her living room she has already rejected several offers because the antique piano is covered with incredible carvings detailing the family's rise from slavery boy willie tries to persuade his stubborn sister that the past is past but she is more formidable than he anticipated

award winning african american playwright august wilson created a cultural chronicle of black america through such works as ma rainey's black bottom fences joe turner's come and gone the piano lesson and two trains running the authentic ring of wit anecdote homily and plaint proved that a self educated pittsburgh ghetto native can grow into a revered conduit for a century of black achievement he forced readers and audiences to examine the despair generated by poverty and racism by exploring african american heritage and experiences over the course of the twentieth century this literary companion provides the

reader with a source of basic data and analysis of characters dates events allusions staging strategies and themes from the work of one of america s finest playwrights the text opens with an annotated chronology of wilson s life and works followed by his family tree each of the 166 encyclopedic entries that make up the body of the work combines insights from a variety of sources along with generous citations each concludes with a selected bibliography on such relevant subjects as the blues malcolm x irony roosters and gothic mode charts elucidate the genealogies of wilson s characters the charles hedley and maxson families and account for weaknesses in wilson s female characters two appendices complete the generously cross referenced work a timeline of events in wilson s life and those of his characters and a list of 40 topics for projects composition and oral analysis

collects a selection of the many interviews wilson gave from 1984 to 2004 in the interviews the playwright covers at length and in detail his plays and his background he comments as well on such subjects as the differences between african americans and whites his call for more black theater companies and his belief that african americans made a mistake in assimilating themselves into the white mainstream he also talks about his major influences what he calls his four b s the blues writers james baldwin and amiri baraka and painter romare bearden wilson also discusses his writing process and his multiple collaborations with director lloyd richards publisher description

the first comprehensive study of august wilson s drama introduces the major themes and motifs that unite wilson s ten play cycle about african american life in each decade of the twentieth century framed by wilson s life experiences and informed by his extensive interviews this book provides fresh coherent detailed readings of each play well situated in the extant scholarship it also provides an overview of the cycle as a whole demonstrating how it comprises a compelling interrogation of american culture and historiography keenly aware of the musical paradigms informing wilson s dramatic technique nadel shows how jazz and particularly the blues provide the structural mechanisms that allow wilson to examine alternative notions of time property and law wilson s improvisational logics become

crucial to expressing his notions of black identity and resituating the relationship of literal to figurative in the african american community the final two chapters include contributions by scholars harry j elam jr and donald e pease

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## FAQs

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