

"From the deep  
and the near  
South the sons  
and daughters  
of newly freed  
African slaves  
wander into the  
city. Isolated,  
cut off from  
memory, having  
forgotten the  
names of the  
gods and only  
guessing at  
their faces,  
they arrive  
dazed and  
stunned, their  
heart kicking  
in their chest  
with a song  
worth singing."

# JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

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*This study guide was created to support the 2026 Broadway revival of Joe Turner's Come and Gone. The production stars Taraji P. Henson and Cedric the Entertainer and is directed by Debbie Allen. It celebrates Black excellence both onstage and behind the scenes. Led by producer Brian Anthony Moreland, with Tyler Perry, Kandi Burruss, and The Apollo as producers, the production continues a powerful legacy of amplifying stories rooted in Black history and culture.*

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## WELCOME TO A BOARDINGHOUSE FULL OF STORIES, SECRETS, AND SONGS

*Joe Turner's Come and Gone* drops us into Pittsburgh in 1911, inside a busy **boardinghouse** where men and women are passing through on their way to new lives. Some are escaping the troubles of their past, some are searching for something or someone they've lost, and others are unsure of what they are seeking. What they share is movement: to new cities, new jobs, new names, and the hope that freedom means more in this new place.

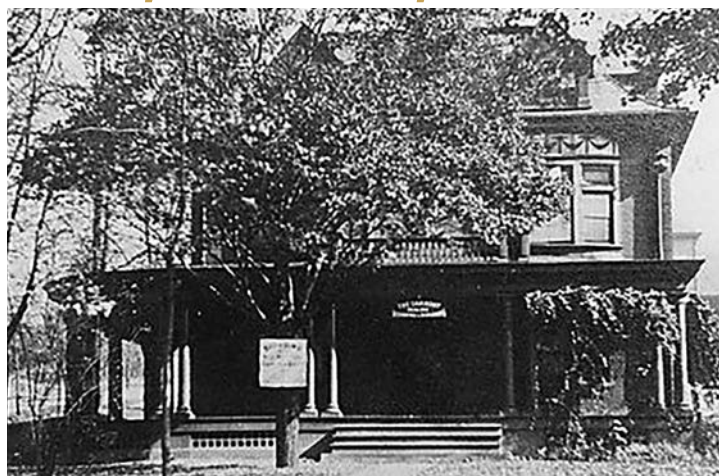


Photo courtesy of Oakmont Carnegie Library Archives

August Wilson fills this world with unforgettable characters. The women of the play offer strength, wisdom, and challenge, grounding the boardinghouse with love, humor, and honesty. The men wrestle with questions of dignity, purpose, and manhood in a world that has tried to strip those things away. At the heart of the story is Herald Loomis, a man splintered by injustice and haunted by

his past, whose arrival forces everyone in the house to confront who they are and where they belong.

Through storytelling, spirituality, and powerful dialogue, Wilson takes you on a journey in search of freedom, **identity**, belonging, and community. This is a play about finding your voice, defining yourself, and

discovering how people help each other heal.

As you read this study guide and step into the lives of these characters, get ready to listen closely because everyone in this play has a story to tell.

**Ask yourself:** If someone or something in your past tried to erase who you are, what would it take for you to take back your name, your voice, and your freedom?

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## WHO IS AUGUST WILSON?

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August Wilson (1945-2005) was an award-winning, preeminent American playwright who is best known for the "Century Cycle," a series of ten plays chronicling the Black experience in America during the twentieth century. Wilson wrote *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* in the mid-1980s with the first production opening in 1984 at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. In chronological order, *Joe Turner's...* is the second play in the cycle.

August Wilson grew up in Pittsburgh's Hill District, where most of his plays are set. As a young person, he was inspired by the stories, music, and lives of the

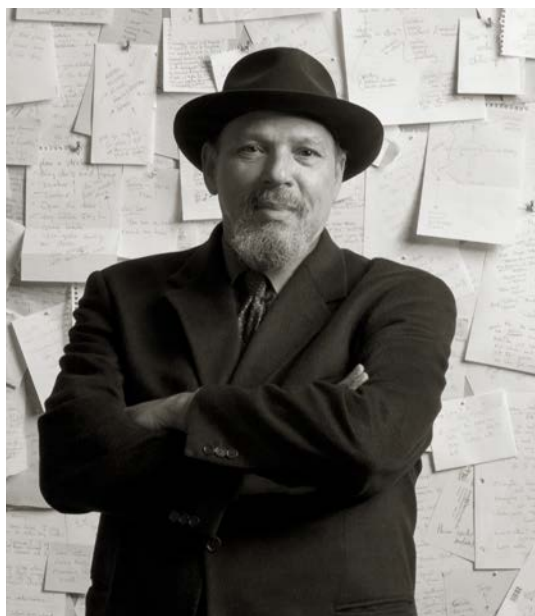


Photo by David Cooper Photography

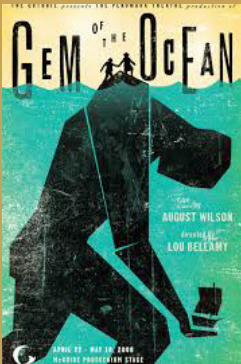
people in his neighborhood. His childhood had a strong effect on his writing and helped him develop a voice strongly connected to his history and culture. Wilson's work changed American theater by insisting that Black stories be told with honesty, depth and pride. His work changed how Black life is shown on stage, and they are still important, powerful and deeply impactful today.

For more information and resources about August Wilson, please visit:

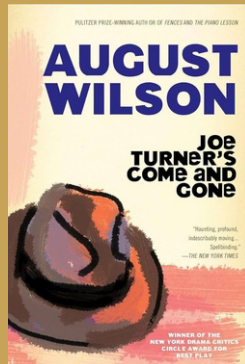
[WQED August Wilson Education Project](#)  
[PBS Learning Masters | August](#)

# CENTURY CYCLE: THE 10 PLAYS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

*Gem of the Ocean* (2003)



*Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988)



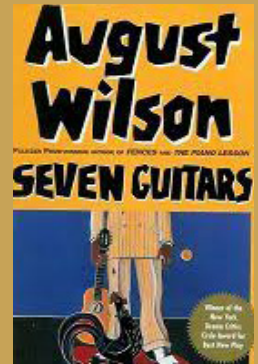
*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984)



*The Piano Lesson* (1987)



*Seven Guitars* (1995)



1900s

1910s

1920s

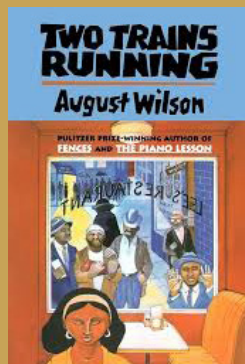
1930s

1940s

*Fences* (1985)



*Two Trains Running* (1991)



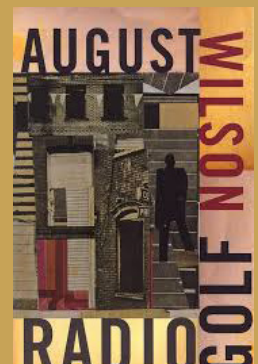
*Jitney* (1982)



*King Hedley II* (1999)



*Radio Golf* (2005)



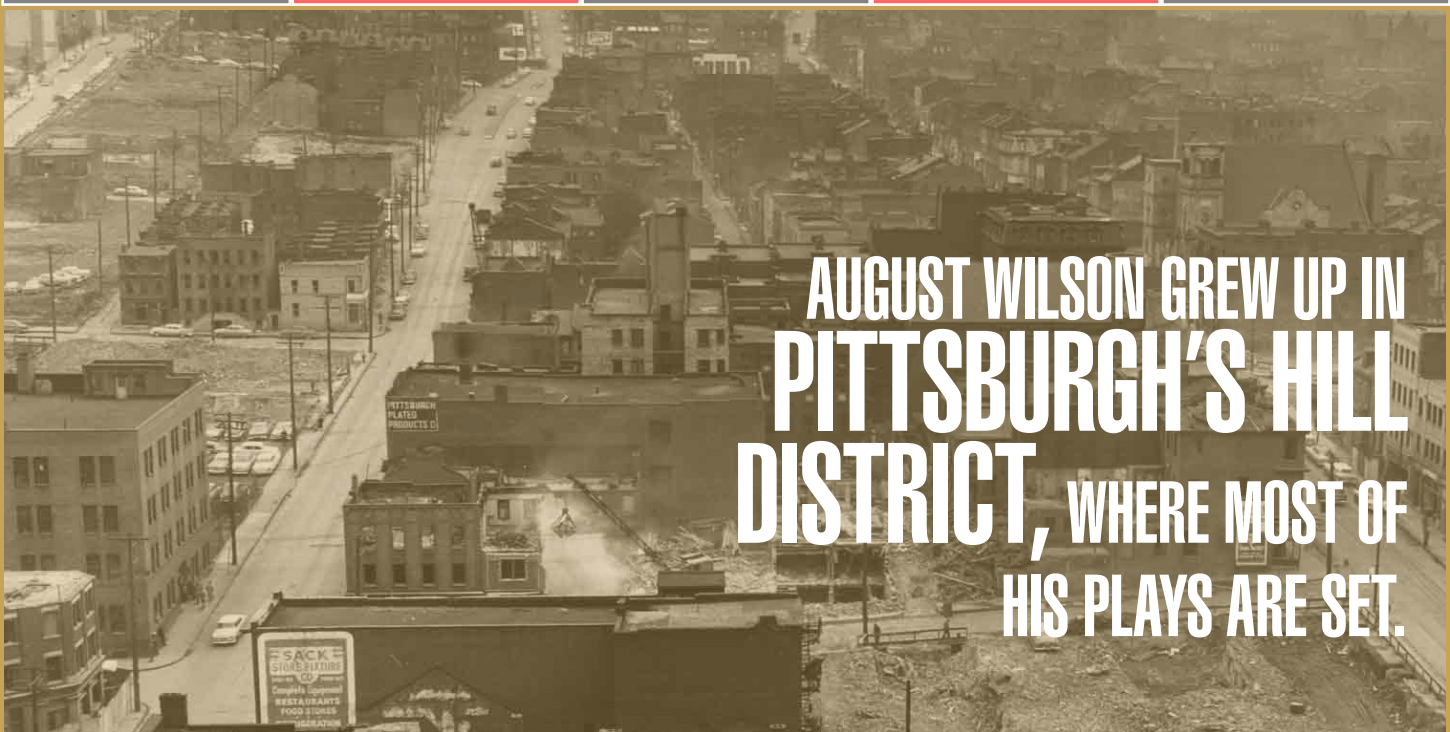
1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s



AUGUST WILSON GREW UP IN PITTSBURGH'S HILL DISTRICT, WHERE MOST OF HIS PLAYS ARE SET.



Taraji P. Henson as Bertha Holly and Cedric The Entertainer as Seth Holly. Photo by Julieta Cervantes

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## THE STRENGTH AND SPIRIT OF WOMEN IN *JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE*

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August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is a play about people searching for who they are, freedom, feeling accepted, and for faith and inner strength. It takes place in 1911, in America after slavery ended. While people often focus on the experiences of the male characters like Seth Holly, Herald Loomis and Bynum Walker, the women of the play are just as important. Characters such as Bertha Holly, Martha Loomis, Mattie Campbell, Molly Cunningham, and even the youngest of the group Zonia Loomis represent strength, love, survival, and the ability to make their own choices in a world affected by racism, sexism, and economic hardship. While often pushed aside by society, these women play a key role in helping to rebuild and support the emotional and spiritual lives of the men around them.

### **Women and Survival in a Harsh World**

The women in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* live in Pittsburgh, PA where it is easier to experience freedom than in the Southern states they moved from, such as Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. As Black women in the early 1900s, they face both racism and sexism. However, instead of showing them as helpless victims, Wilson

portrays them as survivors. They are able to adjust, use their strengths, endure hard times, and stay confident.

*Bertha Holly*, Seth Holly's wife, is the caretaker of the boardinghouse. She is a powerful example of strength and influence. While Seth focuses on his businesses, and protecting his property, Bertha makes the boardinghouse feel warm and safe. She gives advice, prepares meals, listens, and comforts others. Her work often goes unnoticed, but it is important to the survival of the community. Without Bertha, the boardinghouse would just be a place to stay. With her, it becomes a home. Her strength lies in her deep understanding of other people's feelings.

*Mattie Campbell* also shows strength as a survivor of abandonment and heartbreak. After her mother dies and her boyfriend leaves her, Mattie feels alone and unsure. Still, she does not give up. She continues to search for connection, showing emotional courage even after being hurt. Her survival is not only physical, but also emotional and spiritual as well.

## Love as a Form of Agency

One of the most important ways women express personal power in the play is through love as a choice, commitment, and sense of self.

*Martha Loomis* represents a woman who chooses faith and safety after experiencing trauma. Her husband, Herald, was captured by Joe Turner, an experience that destroyed their family. Martha survives by relying on her faith. While some may view her faith as restraining, it can also be seen as her way of taking control of her life. Martha depends on her faith to give her peace and self-identity in a broken world.

Her reunion with Herald Loomis is one of the play's most powerful moments. Martha offers him love, forgiveness, and the chance to heal, and courageously, she does not lose herself in the process. When Herald rejects her faith, Martha recognizes that they must continue their journeys separately. Martha exemplifies emotional strength and self-respect, reinforcing the idea that love does not require losing yourself completely.

## Women and Personal Identity

A major theme of the play is identity—what it means to know who you are after slavery has stripped people of names, families, and histories. While men like Loomis struggle deeply with this loss, the women often demonstrate a stronger sense of self.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Let's talk about Agency. It means having personal power and the ability to make your own choices. How do the women show Agency through their choices? What message does it send about self-love and self-respect?
- What does the play suggest about identity after slavery has taken so much from people?
- How do the male characters' relationships with women (like Bertha, Molly, Mattie and Martha) reflect their own struggles with identity and self-worth?

*Molly Cunningham* stands out as a woman who refuses to accept traditional expectations and social rules. She is independent, confident, and uninterested in being controlled by anything, including a man. Molly enjoys her freedom and does not apologize for it. Wilson presents her as a woman taking control of her life and body. Molly's identity is not defined by marriage or home life, which challenges ideas about womanhood, particularly during the early 1900s.

Bertha also, has a strong sense of identity. She embraces her role in the boardinghouse without resentment. She does not stay silent in conversations with Seth; she

## ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WAYS WOMEN EXPRESS PERSONAL POWER IN THE PLAY IS THROUGH LOVE AS A CHOICE, COMMITMENT, AND SENSE OF SELF.

challenges his harshness, and advocates for kindness. Bertha is clear about who she is and what she values, even if the world does not reward her for it.

## Women as Healers and Restorers

Perhaps the most important role women play in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is that of emotional and spiritual healing. While the men struggle with anger, confusion, and feeling cut off from others, the women often serve as steady, grounding forces.

Bertha encourages Seth to show kindness and reminds him of the value of community. Martha helps Herald confront his pain and move closer to reclaiming his sense of self. Mattie offers Jeremy the possibility of love and partnership, even if he is not ready to accept it. These women do not "save" the men in a simple way, but they provide opportunities for healing.

Importantly, the play does not suggest that women exist solely to support men. Instead, it shows that their strength, ability to understand others' feelings, and wisdom are essential to the rebuilding of a broken community. The care and emotional support they give others, though often overlooked, is a powerful form of leadership. The women of the play remind us that healing is not only about taking back the past, but also about choosing how to live, love, and define yourselves in the present.



Romare Bearden, Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket, 1978, collage. ART©Romare Bearden Foundation. For more information, visit [beardenfoundation.org](http://beardenfoundation.org)

## MICROCOSM OF THE BOARDINGHOUSE

August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* takes place almost entirely inside Seth and Bertha Holly's boardinghouse. The house is a living **microcosm** (a small reflection of a larger society) of Black life in the early 1900s. During the Great Migration, many Black people moved from the South to the North looking for jobs, safety, and a fresh start. The boardinghouse becomes a meeting place for those people who are searching for work, for family members and for their identity.

The people staying in the boardinghouse are a community. They have arrived at this place at different points in their lives. They share similar reasons for being there: some are looking to rebuild after painful experiences; and others are there to find love, stability, or purpose. Everyone under this roof eats together, argues, laughs and share stories. This constant interaction shows the importance of community and how it is built.

### INQUIRY

- Why do you think Wilson chose to set most of the play in one house instead of many different places?
- How does living together affect the characters' relationships?

The women of the play provide strength, care, and independence. Bertha Holly, the heart of the house, supports the community through acts that seem ordinary: cooking meals, offering conversation, demanding respect, and giving sound advice. Her compassion and support make the house feel safe where the people can survive and grow.

The other women also shape the community in important ways. Mattie Campell wants love and stability but worries about being hurt. She shows how scary it can be to open your heart to someone, but you do it anyway. Molly Cunningham, on the other hand, stands up for herself and values independence. She refuses to be controlled. Through these women, the play shows different ways women survive and protect themselves.

*Martha Pentecost* (also called Martha Loomis) is not on stage very much but still plays an important role. Her strong faith and her reunion with Herald Loomis and their daughter Zonia show that healing and wholeness is possible. She shows how women often ground the community even when they are not physically present.

Many of the men in the boardinghouse are searching for something deeper. They are searching for **identity** and connection.

Seth Holly, the owner of the boardinghouse, believes in hard work and owning property as protection against poverty and racism. He is strict and orderly. His focus on money and stability sometimes puts him at odds with others

searching for deeper meaning. Seth's steadiness, however, is incomplete without Bertha. While Seth enforces rules and boundaries, Bertha builds connection and understanding. Together they reveal two necessary elements in maintaining community: structure and compassion.

## INQUIRY

- How do Seth and Bertha represent different yet necessary roles in keeping the community balanced?

Bynum Walker is the spiritual guide. He believes every person has a “song,” or true identity, that connects them to their past and their purpose. Bynum helps them to find their song. He represents African traditions and the connection to spiritual roots.

## INQUIRY

- What do you think Bynum means by a person’s “song”?
- Why is knowing your identity important?

Jeremy Furlow is younger and more carefree. He enjoys music and relationships, but he also hates unfair treatment because of racism. Through Jeremy, we see how even hopeful young people must deal with injustice.

Herald Loomis is the one searching the most. His painful experience of forced labor by Joe Turner broke his connection to his faith, his family and his identity. When he arrives at the boardinghouse, he is not only looking for his wife, Martha, but he is searching for himself. He feels angry, restless and spiritually empty. Unlike Seth, who believes in hard work, or Jeremy, who is carefree, or Bynum, who believes in spiritual guidance, Loomis feels removed from both stability and faith. Throughout the play he struggles to understand how to move forward. By the end of the play, he realizes that he must reclaim his identity and stand on his own instead of waiting for someone else to restore it for him. His journey shows that finding yourself can be a painful yet necessary journey to freedom.

By bringing all these characters together, Wilson turns the boardinghouse into more than a place to stay. It becomes a symbol of growth, hope and reclaimed identity during the Great Migration. Together these characters create a living picture of Black life during this time of change.

## INQUIRY

- Which character seems the most “lost”? Which character seems the most grounded? Why?
- How do the characters’ struggles with their past shape their future?”
- What does the play suggest about the role of the community in healing personal trauma?”

## Who is a Wilsonian?

The term Wilsonian was first used to describe the actors and directors who worked directly with August Wilson while he was creating and developing his plays. Over time, the meaning grew to include the actors who later worked with those original artists on productions of August Wilson’s plays. A true Wilsonian is someone who understands the language, rhythm and style of August Wilson’s writing. They are often trusted to help guide the storytelling when his plays are performed. Wilsonians are important to the American Theater because they keep August Wilson’s stories alive. Through their work, audiences can experience his plays with the power and meaning that stays true to his vision.

A few notable Wilsonians include:

- **Lloyd Richards**
- **Anthony Chisholm**
- **Ella Joyce**
- **Stephen McKinley Henderson**
- **Kenny Leon**
- **Michelle Shay**
- **Ruben Santiago Hudson**
- **Viola Davis**
- **Brandon Dirden**
- **Marion McCClinton**
- **Yvette Ganier**
- **Tony Todd**
- **Israel Hicks**
- **Brian D. Coats**

## EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

Research to discover how many August Wilson plays each of these Wilsonians have brought to life onstage, whether through acting or directing. Go a step further to learn how many have appeared or directed August Wilson’s plays on Broadway.



Ruben Santaigo-Hudson as Bynum Walker and Joshua Boone as Harold Loomis. Photo by Julieta Cervantes

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## JUBA

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The characters in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* dance [Juba](#), a powerful African American dance tradition with deep historical roots. Juba began during the time of slavery, when enslaved Africans were often forbidden from using drums and speaking in their native languages. In response, they turned their bodies into instruments. Juba uses clapping, stomping, shuffling, snapping, and patting the body to create layered rhythms. It was more than entertainment; it was a way to preserve African traditions, communicate with one another, and build community under oppression.

After **emancipation**, Juba continued to evolve and influence many forms of Black American music and dance. Its rhythmic patterns and emphasis on improvisation helped shape [tap dance](#), the [Charleston](#), and other early 20th-century social dances. One of the most famous dances connected to this tradition is the [Lindy Hop](#), which emerged in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s. Like Juba, the Lindy Hop includes rhythm, individuality, and call-and-response. Dancers use their bodies to “talk” to each other through movement, responding in the moment rather than following strict **choreography**. Both dances celebrate freedom, creativity, and connection. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, dancing Juba helps the characters reconnect with themselves and each other.



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## HARLEM MIGRATION

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Between 1910 and 1920, during the Great Migration, millions of Black Americans left the South to escape racism and unfair laws in search of better jobs and safer communities in the North. By 1920, about 300,000 Black peoples had settled in cities like Chicago, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and Philadelphia. Harlem became the most popular city of them all.

Harlem didn't just grow with new residents; it came alive. It became a powerful center of Black culture, entertainment, and leadership. Writers like [Langston Hughes](#) and [Zora Neale Hurston](#) live and worked in Harlem. They created

stories and poems that reflect the experience of Black people in Harlem and across the nation. Leaders such as [W.E.B. Du Bois](#) organized groups to fight for civil rights and equality. People were drawn to Harlem because it was a place where Black voices mattered, and Black culture was celebrated.

In the 1920s, the building that would later become the [Apollo Theater](#) was segregated. Black performers and audiences were not allowed inside. In 1934, everything changed. After other Harlem theaters, like the [Lafayette Theater](#), closed their doors, the Apollo finally opened its doors to Black performers and the community. Talented artists moved their shows to the Apollo stage, and together with the audience's energy, they helped turn the Apollo into a historic cultural landmark.

Graphic by William H. Johnson - photos/smithsonian/  
Public Domain

## NOW YOU TRY IT

Juba is not about perfect steps or polished techniques. It is about listening, responding, and expressing who you are through rhythm. To create your own Juba dance, begin with a simple beat using claps or stomps. Repeat it until it feels steady. Then add body percussion: pat your thighs, chest, or hips. Layer movements, change the rhythm, or pause for effect. You can dance solo or in a group, taking turns leading and responding. Pay attention to the energy of the room and let that guide your movement. Creating your own Juba is a way to claim space, share your story, and find community through rhythm.



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## CHINAI ROUTTÉ: *MY THOUGHTS AS BERNIECE*

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I portrayed the role of Berniece in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* as the newest Resident Company Member at Everyman Theatre in Baltimore, Maryland. Performing this role was both an honor and a personal milestone in my career as an actress. I dreamed of playing her for years, but I came to understand how much timing matters. My lived experiences gave me a deeper emotional connection to her strength, pain, and fierce protectiveness. It allowed me to tell her story with honesty and care. This production also marked my first time performing in an August Wilson play, making the experience especially significant. Wilson's writing is rich and layered, filled with characters who are complex and fully realized. Berniece stands out as a powerful woman whose voice carries history, grief and resilience. Being surrounded by a supportive cast and theatre community made the journey even more meaningful. Engaging with Wilson's work, whether as a performer or audience member, reminds me that these stories are lived, remembered and must be passed to the next generation.



Chinai Routté as Berniece in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* at Everyman Theatre. Photo by Teresa Castracane Photography

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What is something you've dreamed about doing that you were able to accomplish? How did the experience affect your life?
- Why is emotional awareness important when portraying characters who carry pain, history and trauma like the ones in Joe Turner's *Come and Gone*.

## KEY CONCEPTS

**BOARDING HOUSE** - a private home or building where people rent individual rooms on a short-term basis. The house or building usually has shared common spaces and offers services like meals and laundry.

**ROOT WORKER** - a healer and spiritualist in the tradition of hoodoo. They use herbs, roots, and other natural materials in remedies for healing, protection, luck, and love.

**SPIRITUALS** - religious folksongs that are a blend of African musical traditions and Christian hymns, often featuring call and response, symbolism and themes of hope and freedom.

**JIM CROW LAWS** - were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation in America.

**EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY** - The willingness to be open, showing emotions, admitting weakness and sharing your true self despite the risk of being hurt or rejected. It is often seen as a strength that fosters deeper connections, trust, and intimacy in relationships.

**PERSONAL AGENCY** - personal power and the ability to make one's own choices.

**RECLAIM** - Get something previously lost, given or taken back.

**IDENTITY** - the unique set of characteristics that can

be used to identify a person as their individual self and no one else. It includes the person's core personal traits, experiences, and physical attributes.

**ABANDONMENT** - an emotional state in which people feel undesired, left behind, insecure, or discorded.

**REJECTION** - to refuse to accept love, care for, or give attention to a person, essentially pushing them away in a relationship, friendship or social situation.

**MICROCOSM** - a small, self-containing world that represents a much larger one

**CHOREOGRAPHY** - the art of arranging movements or steps into a dance

**EMANCIPATION** - being set free from the control, authority or power of someone else.

# JOE TURNER'S COME & GONE PRE SHOW LESSON (45 MIN)

## Workshop Goal:

Students will develop the background knowledge needed to meaningfully experience Joe Turner's Come and Gone.

## Workshop Objective:

Students will explore essential themes in the play through close reading of selected excerpts.

## Standard Alignment:

In this 45-minute pre-show lesson, students build historical and cultural context to deepen their understanding of August Wilson's \*Joe Turner's Come and Gone\*. Through multimedia sources, music, and close reading of selected excerpts, students explore key themes including the legacy of slavery, the Great Migration, identity, and hope. Guided discussion and collaborative activities help students connect historical events to character experiences while preparing them to engage thoughtfully with the live performance.

## MEDIA MATERIALS

VIDEO - [Life After the Emancipation Proclamation](#) (4:33)

MUSIC - [Joe Turner Blues](#) (0:41), W.C. Handy, Father of the Blues

VIDEO - [Writing from Art: A. Wilson & R. Bearden](#) (1:51)

VIDEO - [Great Migrations - A People on the Move](#) (0-1:50)

VIDEO - [Great Migration - The African Americans](#) (1:21)

## PRE LESSON

If possible, view this before the lesson for historical context.

- WATCH AND DISCUSS [Life After the Emancipation Proclamation](#) (4:33)

## DO NOW

The Blues (3 min)

- LISTEN to [Joe Turner Blues](#) (0:41), W.C. Handy, Father of the Blues

## Questions:

- What are your first impressions?
- What feelings or thoughts come up for you when you listen to this song?

\*As you watch the play, listen for this song and observe the effect it has on the characters.

## WARM UP

Joe Turner & the Legacy of Slavery (5 min)

- WATCH [Writing from Art: A. Wilson & R. Bearden](#) (1:51)

## Questions:

- Who was Joe Turner?
- How many men would Joe Turner “catch” at once?
- Which character from Joe Turner's Come and Gone is central in the painting?
- What do you think it means to “have lost your song”?

## MINI ACTIVITY

### The Great Migration (12 min)

- DEFINE migration. *The movement of people from one locality to settle in another*
- DEFINE the Great Migration. *The movement of millions of African Americans from rural communities in the South to urban areas in Northern and Western states during the 20th century*
- WATCH [Great Migrations - A People on the Move](#) (0-1:50)
- CREATE a t-chart.
- LIST push *factors* (varying hardships in the South) of the Great Migration.
- WATCH [Great Migration - The African Americans](#) (1:21)
- LIST pull *factors* (hope and opportunity in the North) of the Great Migration.

## MAIN ACTIVITY

### Essential Themes (20 min)

- DEFINE identity. *The set of qualities that define a person or make a person who they uniquely are (personal traits, beliefs, motivations, experiences, likes, relationships)*
- DISCUSS the significance of identity. *Individual and group identity are essential to the African American experience, and both are central themes in Joe Turner's Come and Gone. Most of the characters in the play are struggling and searching in various ways to understand and come to grips with their identity, which was either lost or taken away in the post slavery Jim Crow South that they left behind, so that they can start anew, give meaning to their “song”, and take their rightful place in a new world.*
- READ excerpts from [Joe Turner's Come and Gone](#). Which essential theme (Legacy of Slavery, Migration, Hope, or Identity) is addressed in each excerpt?
- SHARE OUT

## Excerpts from

### Joe Turner's Come and Gone

"Niggers coming up here from the backwoods... coming up here from the country carrying Bibles and guitars looking for freedom." (MIGRATION) - Seth Holly 1,1

"All my life I been looking for somebody to stop and stay with me." (IDENTITY) - Mattie Campbell 1,1

"After Abraham Lincoln give you all Nigras your freedom papers and with you all looking all over for each other... we starting finding Nigeria's for Nigras." (LEGACY OF SLAVERY) - Rutherford Selig 1,2

"They shaking hands and saying goodbye to each other and walking every whichaway down the road." (MIGRATION) - Bynum Walker 1,4

"That's why I don't trust nobody but the good Lord above, and I don't love nobody but my mama." (IDENTITY) - Molly Cunningham 2,1

"I wanna go everywhere and do everything there is to be

got out of life." (MIGRATION) - Jeremy Furlow 2,1

"Everywhere I go people wanna bind me up." (LEGACY OF SLAVERY) - Herald Loomis 2,2

## DIFFERENTIATION

During the activities the excerpts can be read silently, out loud, or individually out loud within a group.

## LESSON NOTES

Questions to keep in mind while watching Joe Turner's Come and Gone:

- What were the causes of the Great Migration?
- How does migration challenge or reshape an individual's identity?
- Why should people define their own identity instead of letting others do it?

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## JOE TURNER'S COME & GONE POST SHOW LESSON (45 MIN)

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### Workshop Goal:

Students will explore and express their identity through creative interpretation and original artistic writing.

### Workshop objective:

Students will craft an original hook that creatively and courageously communicates their sense of self.

### Standard Alignment:

This lesson aligns with New York State ELA and Arts Learning Standards by engaging students in analyzing literary and theatrical representations of identity while creating an original artistic expression that draws intentionally on personal experience, interpretation of text, and thematic understanding.

## MATERIALS

MUSIC - [Joe Turner Blues](#) (0:41), W.C. Handy, Father of the Blues

PHOTO - "Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket", Romare Bearden, 1978

TEXT - Excerpts from Joe Turner's Come and Gone (Bynum)

## PRE LESSON

The play

- SEE [Joe Turner's Come and Gone](#)
- DISCUSS [Joe Turner's Come and Gone](#)

## DO NOW

The Blues (3 min)

- LISTEN to [Joe Turner Blues](#) (0:41), W.C. Handy, Father of the Blues

After hearing this song in the play, how do you feel?



Romare Bearden, Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket, 1978, collage. ART©Romare Bearden Foundation. For more information, visit [beardenfoundation.org](http://beardenfoundation.org)

## WARM UP

### Art as inspiration (7 min)

- INTRODUCE “Mill Hand’s Lunch Bucket”, Romare Bearden, 1978

*\*This collage was August Wilson’s inspiration for Joe Turner’s Come and Gone.*

- WATCH [Writing from Art: A. Wilson & R. Bearden \(1:51\)](#)

*\*Ask students to pay special attention to August Wilson’s explanation of his inspiration for Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*

- IDENTIFY the collage’s influence on Joe Turner’s Come and Gone’s:
- Setting
- Characters
- Themes

*Like many characters in the play, the protagonist, Herald Loomis, is searching for his identity.*

## MINI ACTIVITY

### Identity (12 min)

- READ AND DISCUSS

*“Say when you look at a fellow, if you taught yourself to look for it, you can see his song written on him. Tell you what kind of man he is in the world. Now, I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forgot his song. Forgot how to sing it. A fellow forget that and he forget who he is.” -Bynum Walker, 2,2*

*In the passage above, what does the “song” represent?*

- A person’s inner spirit and sense of self; purpose; **identity**
- DEFINE **identity**. Discuss the following with the students.
- *The set of qualities that define a person or make a person who they uniquely are (personal traits, beliefs, motivations, experiences, likes, relationships)*

*\*There are many internal and external factors that shape identity, review and pose these questions to your students:*

1. *How do you see yourself?*
2. *What are your deeply held values & beliefs?*
3. *What are your social roles (child, friend, employee, etc.)?*
4. *What is your cultural background (ethnicity and heritage)?*
5. *What are some of your biological characteristics (physical appearance, gender, health, etc.)?*

## MAIN ACTIVITY

### Create a hook (20 min)

- READ OUTLOUD

*“See, Mr. Loomis, when a man forgets his song. He goes off in search of itself... till he find out he’s got it with him all the time.” - Bynum Walker, 2,2*

*\*Herald Loomis is the protagonist in Joe Turner’s Come and Gone, and he desperately searches for his “song” (identity/purpose). Most songs have a “hook” (short and catchy phrase that is the focal point and that grabs the listeners attention and repeats frequently - typically in the chorus).*

*You are the protagonist in your own life’s story. Using your answers from the identity questions above as inspiration, write the “hook” for your “song”.*

- SHARE OUT

## DIFFERENTIATION

During the activities the excerpts can be read silently, out loud, or individually out loud within a group.

## CLOSING REFLECTION

What is the importance of self-identification?