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Fences: A Guide to Criticism

by August Wilson

SUMMARY: *Fences: A Play*. "August Wilson, considered one of the most important American dramatists of the 1980s and 1990s, set this Pulitzer Prize-winning play in an anonymous big city during the 1950s. The play focuses on the troubled relationship between Troy Maxson, a hard-working former athlete, and his son Cory, who seeks to go to college on an athletic scholarship. Comic, sad, and gripping, the play combines sparkling dialogue and naturalistic intensity with a skilled use of allegory and myth."

Phillip M. Richards and Neil Schlager. Best Literature By and About Blacks, Detroit: Gale, 2000. p.277.

NARROW THE TOPIC:

- What is the plot of the play?
- Who are the characters in the play?
- What is the meaning of the play?
- Does the play raise any important issues, how are these addressed?
- What are Troy's tragic flaws?
- What is the symbolism of fences in the play?
- Compare Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* with August Wilson's depiction of the American dream.
- How does *Fences* compare with Wilson's earlier and later plays?
- Discuss the husband / wife conflict.
- Discuss father / son conflict as depicted in the play.
- Discuss the play's reflection of integration in professional baseball.

LINCC SUBJECT HEADINGS:

Wilson, August

Wilson, August-- Criticism & Interpretation

AVAILABLE AT THE REFERENCE DESK:

Critical Survey of Drama, Revised, volume 7: 3644-3650

Black Literature Criticism, volume 3:1964-65, 1967-68, 1970-71

Drama Criticism, volume 2:473-76, 483-89

Drama for Students, volume 3:180-97

American Drama Criticism: Supplement II and Supplement III to the Second Edition

African American Writers: volume 2

SOURCES SHELVED IN THE REFERENCE COLLECTION:

Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature, REF PS 153 .N5 G73 2005 v.5

Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature REF PS 153 .56 G74 2005 v.5

American Ethnic Writers REF PS153.M56 A414 2000

Black Literature Criticism, REF PS153.N5 B556 1992 volume 3:1964-65, 1967-68, 1970-71

Masterplots II Drama Series REF PN 6112.5 .M37 1990 v.2 p.600-4

Best Literature By and About Blacks REF PS153 .N5 R53 2000

McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama REF PN 1625 .M3?

Modern World Drama: Encyclopedia REF PN 1851 .M36????

Oxford Companion to American Literature REF PS 153 .N5 O96 1997

American Ethnic Writers REF PS 153 .M56 A414 2000 v.2

Literature and Its Times, REF PN50 .L574 1997 volume(s) 4:144-145

Contemporary Literary Criticism REF PN771 .C59 volume 50:267-71; volume 63:447-49, 451, 453-54, 456-58; volume 118:372-77, 379, 382, 388-89, 399, 403, 405-07, 412; volume 222:276-79, 281, 284, 286-88, 291-94, 297, 301, 306-7, 316-17, 325-26, 339-41, 356, 362-63, 365-66, 369-70, 372, 374-75, 377, 379

Contemporary American Dramatists REF PS352 .C65 1994 694-95

World Literature Criticism Supplement, REF PN523 .W67 1992 Suppl. 1:862-66, 868-69, 874

Cyclopedia of Literary Characters REF PN44 .M3 1998

Masterpieces of 20th-Century American Drama PS350 .A23 2005

Sport in American Culture: From Ali to X-Games REF GV706.2 .D86 2004

Masterplots PE44 .M33 1996 volume 4

Masterpieces of African-American Literature REF PS 153 .N5 M264 1992

Identities and Issues in Literature REF PS 153 .M56 I34 1997 volume 2

LIBRARY HANDOUTS:

[Literary Criticism](#) (html)
[Short Story Criticism](#) (PDF)

ELECTRONIC DATABASES:

[Academic Search Premier \(EBSCO\)](#)
[Biography Resource Center \(Gale\)](#)
[Expanded Academic ASAP](#)
[Literature Resource Center \(Gale\)](#)
[MagillOnLiterature Plus \(EBSCO\)](#)
[Humanities Full Text](#)
[JSTOR](#)

INTERNET SITES:

[August Wilson @ Dartmouth](#). 10 Feb. 1998. Dartmouth University. 2 Apr. 2007
<<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~awilson/>>.

"This website is devoted to the life, works, and influence of playwright August Wilson. His profound influence as a Montgomery Fellow here at Dartmouth College has motivated undergraduate students to create an ongoing dialogue about him which will be monitored and developed fully within the coming weeks."

"An August Heritage: The Pittsburgh Cycle." [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#). (n.d.). 23 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/03001/497623.stm> >.

"An August Wilson Index with links to more than 80 interviews, reviews and news stories, including some of his speeches, a comprehensive obituary and a photo journal."

"Black History Month Free Resources Site: August Wilson." 2004. [Thomson Gale](#). 23 Apr. 2007
<http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/bhm/bio/wilson_a.htm>.

Biography of the author with a short bibliography.

"BookRags Study Guide on Fences." 23 April 2007. <<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-fences/>>
Excerpts from [Fences Study Guide](#), available for sale.

Calvert, Ben, and Nadine C. Warner, comps. [Study Guide for Court Theatre's Production of: August Wilson's Fences](#). 2006. University of Chicago. 02 Apr. 2007

<<http://www.courttheatre.org/home/plays/0506/fences/studyguide/FencesStudyGuide.pdf> >.

"Court Theatre's Study Guide is focused on the artistic process by which a literary text is transformed into a piece of theatre, and to capture this process through photographs and written records. The Study Guides include historical background for the play, an outline of the characters, a glossary of words and terms, and a detailed synopsis."

Rawson, Chris. "August Wilson - a Timeline, 1945-2005." [Pittsburg Post-Gazette](#) 3 Oct. 2005. 23 Apr. 2007
<<http://www.post-gazette.com/magazine/19991216awtimeline9.asp>>.

Reuben, Paul P., comp. [PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - a Research and Reference Guide - an Ongoing Project: Chapter 8: August Wilson \(1945-2005\)](#). 28 Feb. 2007. Dept. of English, California State University, Stanislaus. 2 Apr. 2007 <<http://web.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap8/wilson.html>>.

Bibliography of primary works and a selected bibliography of August Wilson.

Wilson, August. Interview with Bonnie Lyons and George Plimpton. "The Art of Theater: XIV, August Wilson." [Paris Review](#) 153 (1999): 1-28 23 April 2007 <<http://www.parisreview.com/viewinterview.php/prmMID/839>>.
Interview with the author from a respected literary journal.

Prepared by Neil Linger
04/23/2007

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