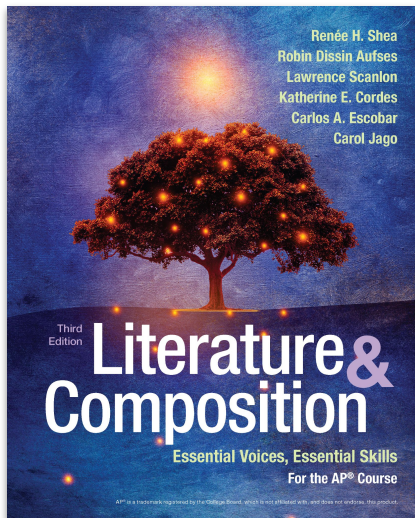
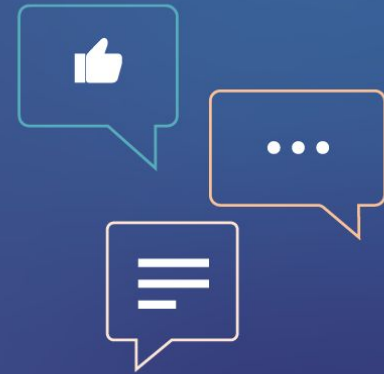


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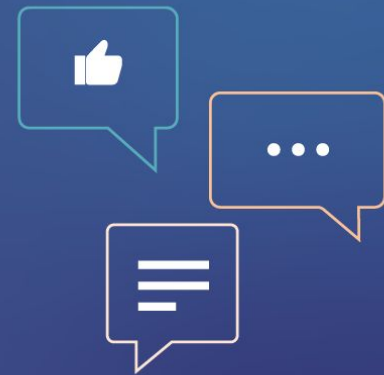
Presented by the *Literature & Composition*, 3rd Edition Team:
Renee Shea, Robin Aufses, Lawrence Scanlon, Kate Cordes, Carlos Escobar





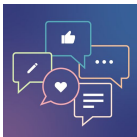
BFW AP[®] Literature

Professional Learning Community



Fences by August Wilson

Presented by Kate Cordes



Fences by August Wilson



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But first . . .

This play includes the N-word, which we have chosen to reprint in this textbook to accurately reflect Wilson's original intent as well as the time period, culture, and racism depicted in the text. We recognize that this word has a long history as a disrespectful and deeply hurtful expression when used by white people toward Black people. Wilson's choice to use this word relates not only to that history but also to a larger cultural tradition in which the N-word can take on different meanings, emphasize shared experience, and be repurposed as a term of endearment within Black communities. While the use of that word in Wilson's context might not be hurtful, the use of it in our current context very often is. Be mindful of context, both Wilson's and yours, as you read.



- **What was Wilson's context?**
- **What are the varying contexts in which we might be studying this play with our students?**
- **What do we need to be mindful of in relation to those contexts?**



Passing as a motif...

In what ways does Troy attempt to pass?

Do any other forms of passing exist within the play?





Fences by August Wilson



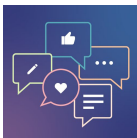
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Why Fences?



The Place for *Fences* in the AP English Literature Course

- Listed on Q3 in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2021
- Of the 44 works *since 2000* that have appeared on the AP exam for Q3 as many as or more times than *Fences*, *Fences* is
 - 1 of 7 plays published in the last 122 years and the newest play of all 7 by 19 years
 - 1 of 9 works by a person of color
 - 1 of 2 plays by a person of color
 - 1 of the 3 most recently published (only *All the Pretty Horses* and *Beloved* are newer)



Past AP Questions Inviting the Use of *Fences*

2002

Morally ambiguous characters—characters whose behavior discourages readers from identifying them as purely evil or purely good—are at the heart of many works of literature. Choose a novel or play in which a morally ambiguous character plays a pivotal role. Then write an essay in which you explain how the character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

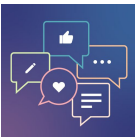
2003

According to critic Northrop Frye, “Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.”

Select a novel or play in which a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the suffering of others. Then write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by that figure contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

2005 B

One of the strongest human drives seems to be a desire for power. Write an essay in which you discuss how a character in a novel or a drama struggles to free himself or herself from the power of others or seeks to gain power over others. Be sure to demonstrate in your essay how the author uses this power struggle to enhance the meaning of the work.



Past AP Questions Inviting the Use of *Fences*

2009

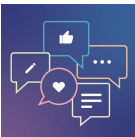
A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning.

Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2010 B

Sonsyrea Tate's statement suggests that "home" may be conceived of as a dwelling, a place, or a state of mind. It may have positive or negative associations, but in either case, it may have a considerable influence on an individual.

Choose a novel or play in which a central character leaves home yet finds that home remains significant. Write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the importance of "home" to this character and the reasons for its continuing influence. Explain how the character's idea of home illuminates the larger meaning of the work.



Past AP Questions Inviting the Use of *Fences*

2022

In many works of fiction, houses take on symbolic importance. Such houses may be literal houses or unconventional ones (e.g., hotels, hospitals, monasteries, or boats).

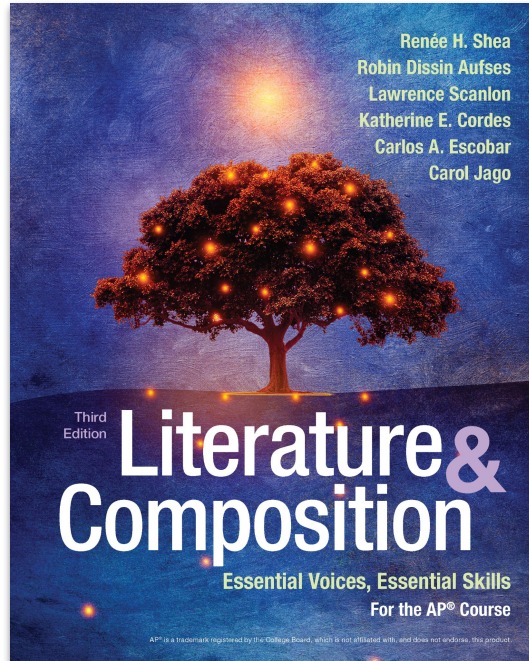
Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which a literal or unconventional house serves as a significant symbol. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how this house contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.



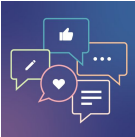
Fences by August Wilson

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Literature & Composition, 3e



Exciting Features!



Analyzing Language, Style, & Structure Questions - p. 1089

Analyzing Language, Style, and Structure

- 1. Vocabulary in Context.** In the “Setting” stage notes, Wilson describes the porch of Troy and Rose’s house: “A relatively recent addition to the house and running its full width, the porch lacks congruence.” How does the word “congruence” reveal the importance of the porch to the setting of the play? How does this description of it foreshadow the conflicts in the play?
- 2. AP® Character and Figurative Language.** Troy Maxson’s last name makes subtle reference to the Mason-Dixon Line — the imaginary line that in the 1820s divided slave states from free states. How does this allusion to history help prepare you for the play’s themes? What are the connotations of other characters’ names — for example, “Rose” and “Gabriel”?

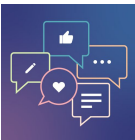


From L&C 3e - p. 1078

This image is from the 2016 film version of *Fences* starring Denzel Washington as Troy and Viola Davis as Rose.

What aspects of Troy and Rose's relationship does this image capture?



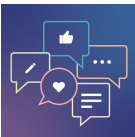


extending beyond the text

In December 2020, Major League Baseball (MLB) commissioner Rob Manfred announced that the 1920–1948 Negro Leagues would be elevated to Major League status, ensuring that the records of seven distinct leagues and some 3,400 Black players will become part of baseball's official story. An effort to acknowledge the inequity of segregation in the sport often called America's "national pastime," this decision came a full century after the creation of the first Black baseball league. Bob Kendrick, director of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, called this recognition "historical validation for those who had been shunned from the Major Leagues and had the foresight and courage to create their own league that helped change the game, and the country, too."

Shown here are a few images from the era of the Negro Leagues. The first is the 1946 cover of *Negro Baseball* magazine, featuring Jackie Robinson. In the second image, Josh Gibson slides into home plate during an East-West All-Star Game of the Negro Leagues in 1944. The final image shows the two teams that played in the first game of the first ever Colored World Series in 1924.

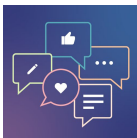




Literary Argument and Analysis Essay Prompts

Topics for Composing

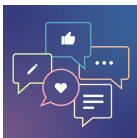
1. **AP[®] FRQ** **Literary Argument.** The poet T. S. Eliot believed in what he described as “the presence of the past.” Many works of drama and fiction explore the way the past holds a vice grip on the present. In *Fences*, many of the characters are affected by both the collective cultural past and their specific experiences. In a well-written essay, analyze how Troy’s individual and communal past influence his identity and contribute to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.
2. **AP[®] FRQ** **Prose Fiction Analysis.** The following question refers to act II, scene 1, lines 331–413 of August Wilson’s *Fences*, published in 1985. In this passage, the two major characters, Troy and Rose, argue about the reasons for Troy’s infidelity. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Wilson uses literary elements and techniques to portray two different values systems and perspectives on life.



Close Reading Opportunity

TROY Rose, I done tried all my life to live decent . . . to live a clean . . . hard . . . useful life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know. But . . . you 335
born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely . . . always looking for the curve ball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike. If you 340
going down . . . you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you. What you gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job . . . I was safe. Couldn't nothing 345
touch me. I wasn't gonna strike out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I wasn't gonna lay in the streets with a bottle of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job. I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on 350
first looking for one of them boys to knock me in. To get me home.

ROSE I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too. I gave eighteen years of my life to stand in the same spot with 375
you. Don't you think I ever wanted other things? Don't you think I had dreams and hopes? What about my life? What about me. Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? That I wanted to lay 380
up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities? That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good? You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my 385
wants and needs, my dreams . . . and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard 390
and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom.



Striking Out

TROY I'm gonna tell you what your mistake was.

See . . . you swung at the ball and didn't hit it.

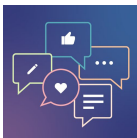
That's strike one. See, you in the batter's box
now. You swung and you missed. That's strike

one. Don't you strike out!

550

TROY (to CORY): All right. That's strike two. You
stay away from around me, boy. Don't you
strike out. You living with a full count. Don't
you strike out.

420



Fences by August Wilson

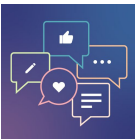


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The Baseball Metaphors

Death and the Outside Corner

TROY Death ain't nothing. I done seen him.
Done wrassled with him. You can't tell me
nothing about death. Death ain't nothing but
a fastball on the outside corner. And you
know what I'll do to that! Lookee here,
Bono . . . am I lying? You get one of them
fastballs, about waist high, over the outside
corner of the plate where you can get the
meat of the bat on it . . . and good god! You
can kiss it goodbye. Now, am I lying?



Curve Balls and Bunting

TROY Rose, I done tried all my life to live
decent . . . to live a clean . . . hard . . . useful
life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In
every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the
world backwards, I don't know. But . . . you 335
born with two strikes on you before you come
to the plate. You got to guard it closely . . .
always looking for the curve ball on the inside
corner. You can't afford to let none get past
you. You can't afford a call strike. If you 340
going down . . . you going down swinging.
Everything lined up against you. What you
gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted.

When I found you and Cory and a halfway
decent job . . . I was safe. Couldn't nothing 345
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more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary.
I wasn't gonna lay in the streets with a bottle
of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job.
I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on 350
first looking for one of them boys to knock
me in. To get me home.

ROSE You should have stayed in my bed, Troy.

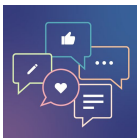
TROY Then when I saw that gal . . . she firmed
up my backbone. And I got to thinking that if 355
I tried . . . I just might be able to steal second.
Do you understand after eighteen years I
wanted to steal second.



extending beyond the text

In 2018, E. Ethelbert Miller published a poetry collection entitled *If God Invented Baseball*, a tribute to his love of the game and a reflection on race in the sport. “Knuckleball,” one of the poems, uses baseball as an occasion to comment on aspects of Black history and culture.

1. **A knuckleball is a slow pitch that has virtually no spin and moves erratically and unpredictably. How does Miller turn this literal meaning into a metaphor for what it means to be Black?**
2. **What do the allusions to jazz musicians such as Charlie “Bird” Parker and Ella Fitzgerald, and to jazz terms such as Bebop, add to the poem’s meaning?**
3. **How does Troy’s life “[flutter] in unpredictable ways” (l. 4)?**
4. **How does *Fences* support or challenge the speaker’s assertion that “It’s impossible to dance / To slavery anymore” (ll. 12–13)?**



“Knuckleball” - E. Ethelbert Miller

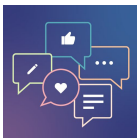
E. Ethelbert Miller

Every black man should be born
with a big mitt.
How else can one catch the world
That flutters in unpredictable ways.

The sound of a knuckleball 5
is Parker on his horn.
When Ella scats don't try
to copy her.

Oriole Hoyt Wilhelm in 1958 threw 10
a no-hitter against the Yankees.
It was like Douglass being Lincoln
For a day. It's impossible to dance
To slavery anymore. It ended with
the hangman's swing.

The knuckleball is Bebop. 15
Don't be baffled by its strange beauty.
Just keep hitting it with your ears. ■



“Knuckleball” - E. Ethelbert Miller

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Fences by August Wilson



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From August Wilson's 1996 Speech, "The Ground on Which I Stand"

Theatre can do that. It can disseminate ideas, it can educate even the miseducated, because it is art—and all art reaches across that divide that makes order out of chaos, and embraces the truth that overwhelms with its presence, and connects man to something larger than himself and his imagination.

Theatre asserts that all of human life is universal. Love, Honor, Duty, Betrayal belong and pertain to every culture and every race. The way they are acted out on the playing field may be different, but betrayal is betrayal whether you are a South Sea Islander, a Mississippi farmer, or an English baron. All of human life is universal, and it is theatre that illuminates and confers upon the universal the ability to speak for all men . . .

I believe in the American theatre. I believe in its power to inform about the human condition, I believe in its power to heal, "to hold the mirror as 'twere up to nature," to the truths we uncover, to the truths we wrestle from uncertain and sometimes unyielding realities. All of art is a search for ways of being, of living life more fully.



Fences by August Wilson



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Further Resources/Teaching Ideas

- [The August Wilson Education Project - WOED](#)
- [American Theatre - The Ground on Which I Stand](#) and [Responses and Reflections](#)

