**AUGUST WILSON ENGL 176**/THEA 175/AFAM 177

M, W 10:50a.m. – 12:10a.m.; Classroom BOGH 113 Masks are required during all class sessions until further notice.

##### Spring 2023 v5

Updated 3/15/23

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| **Professor:** Rashida Z. Shaw McMahon, Ph.D. [rshawmcmahon@wesleyan.edu](mailto:rshawmcmahon@wesleyan.edu) Downey House, 294 High Street, Office #216  **Monday Office Hours: 12:30-2p.m.** & by appointment | |
| **Teaching Apprentice:**  Funke Sowole [osowole@wesleyan.edu](mailto:osowole@wesleyan.edu)  **Office Hours:** *schedule appointments via email* | **Writing Tutors:**  The use of Writing Tutors are strongly encouraged throughout the semester. For available resources, please view the Shapiro Center’s Writing Resources for Students. |

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

During his lifetime, the world-renowned African-American playwright August Wilson graced stages with award winning and nominated plays from his "Pittsburgh Cycle." This course examines the 10 plays of this cycle in the order that the playwright wrote them, from JITNEY (1982) to RADIO GOLF (2005). We will pay special attention to the playwright's use of language, history, memory, art, and music within his oeuvre.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

* *Theorize* independently about the ways in which selected dramatic texts and performances reflect specific histories, practices, traditions, experiences, and ideologies as expressed by August Wilson’s playwriting;
* *Critique* scholarly articles in terms of the author’s main argument, supporting arguments, and/or overall analysis of performance/text;
* *Formulate* an original argument for an essay based on analyses of primary and secondary texts;
* *Employ* critical writing skills to craft an analytic essay.

### REQUIRED TEXTS\*

* *The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson*, edited by Christopher Bigsby (2007 or 2012)
* *Jitney* by August Wilson
* *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* by August Wilson
* *Fences* by August Wilson
* *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* by August Wilson
* *The Piano Lesson* by August Wilson
* *Two Trains Running* by August Wilson
* *Seven Guitars* by August Wilson
* *King Hedley II* by August Wilson
* *Gem of the Ocean* by August Wilson
* *Radio Golf* by August Wilson

**\*Available** for purchase at R. J. Julia Bookstore

**\*Available** via Olin Library’s Course Reserves (also accessible via course Moodle page)

This course syllabus, schedule, and class location are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. I will post announcements of changes on Moodle and include them in email messages to the entire class.

COURSE ASSESSMENTS

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| CLASS PARTICIPATION   * Involves active engagement with the material and with your peers, including any in-class activities. * Points will be granted for attendance at any suggested campus events and any **Open Discussion Posts** on Moodle.   *Please see Moodle for further instructions.* | **10%** |
| ONE ORAL PRESENTATION ON A “FOUND” THEATER REVIEW  Twice during the semester, each student will be responsible for finding a published production review that was written about a professional theatre production of an August Wilson play. On pre-assigned dates, each student will then present pertinent information from that review to the class within an in-class presentation.  *Please see Moodle for further instructions.* | **10%** |
| TWO “SHORT PAPER” SUBMISSIONS (15%, 20%)  Two analytical writing assignments will be submitted at designated times throughout the course. Each paper will be longer in length than the previous paper. These essays are designed to monitor and develop the ways in which students’ engage with course materials as well as sharpen critical writing.  *Please see Moodle for further instructions.* | **35%** |
| CRITICAL STAGED READINGS (TEAM PROJECT)  Each student will participate in one “Critical Staged Reading” in pre-assigned groups. Dates are scattered throughout the semester. During each presentation, students will discuss the ways in which the corresponding assigned reading influenced their performance and/or interpretation of the dramatic text. A one page write- up from each group is due in class on the day of their presentation.  *Please see Moodle for further instructions.* | **15%** |
| FINAL RESEARCH ESSAY   1. Students will submit a Research Topic Idea (on Sunday, April 16th via Moodle) (2%) 2. Students will participate on Workshop Day and bring related assignments (3%) 3. Students will submit a 10 page Research Essay on MOODLE that re-examines one or more of the plays read in the course through a unique and original perspective. You must use at least two outside sources from the library’s electronic or physical holdings. (25%) | **30%** |

# GRADE SCALE

This course uses Wesleyan University’s standard grading scale. The official chart is located at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/general_information/GPA_calculation.html>

1. Superior work demonstrating student’s ability to engage the materials in a stimulating, creative, and insightful manner; clearly written with no or minimal typographical or grammatical errors
2. Completion of requirements demonstrating student’s understanding of materials and ability to apply knowledge; minor writing and/or conceptual problems
3. Moderate completion of assignment requirements; lacks clear writing or has significant conceptual problems, and/or is inadequately proof-read
4. Unsatisfactory work; failure to engage with most of materials presented; unfocused discussion; failure to meet majority of requirements of the assignment

F Failed to complete/turn-in assignment; does not fulfill any requirements

# ATTENDANCE POLICIES

On a case-by-case basis, the following policies can be made flexible in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. HPPA (Health Protection and Promotion Act) privacy regulations will be upheld.

**At all times** and **as soon as possible**, speak to me about any challenges you have completing assignments.

**Grade deductions.** Missing **more than two classes** without a doctor’s note or other comparable emergency will drop your FINAL LETTER GRADE to the next plus or minus grade, per absence (i.e., A to an A-, B+ to a B). **Missing consecutive classes** is not recommended. **In extreme cases, students will be asked to withdraw from the course.**

**Withdrawal from course.** Students who miss **four or more classes** will be asked to withdraw from the course.

Students who **miss two consecutive assignments** will be asked to withdraw from the course.

**Laptop & Cell Phone Policy. Laptops** and **Ipads** are permitted in class as a courtesy to students due to our online reading assignments. These devices are to be used respectfully. These devices are to be used respectfully. The use of **cell phones** and **smart phone** features, including texting, during class is prohibited without express permission from the professor.

# ASSIGNMENTS

Allowed ONE 24 HOUR EXTENSION to complete your Short Paper assignment, no questions asked. You MUST email professor before 5p.m. (Eastern Standard time ) on the Sunday the assignment is due.

*If you are taking this extension you are still required to come to class unless there is an extenuating circumstance or a previously approved absence.*

* LATE ASSIGNMENTS will drop your grade to the next plus or minus grade, per each day late (i.e., A to an A, B+ to a B).
* REWRITES: In rare cases, the professor may suggest that you submit a Rewrite of your assignment for grade reconsideration. In the event of a Rewrite, your revised assignment can receive a grade no higher than a B+ (89).
* FONT REQUIREMENT: Please use one-inch margins in TIMES NEW ROMAN (or comparable font) in size 12 on all assignments to prevent point deductions.

## Time Commitment

While the exact time commitment for the class will vary individually and over the course of the semester, I recommend that you budget approximately three out-of-class hours for every class hour to complete the reading, assignments, homework, and project. I have designed the class so that it should be feasible to satisfactorily complete the requirements with approximately **twelve hours per week of time commitment**. If you are spending more time than this on a regular basis, I encourage you to check in with me.

## Students with Disabilities:

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact Accessibility Services in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021 or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685- 2332).

## Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources:

If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at [dleipziger@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dleipziger@wesleyan.edu) or any of the chaplains in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at https:[//w](http://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html)ww[.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html.](http://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html)

For a list of a religious holidays celebrated by members of the Wesleyan community, go to Wesleyan’s Multifaith calendar which can be found at:

https://[www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/multifaithcalendar.html.](http://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/multifaithcalendar.html)

## Title IX Resources:

If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at [dcolucci@wesleyan.edu,](mailto:dcolucci@wesleyan.edu) or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. Please feel free to contact us if you have questions about process. Thank you for your consideration.

## Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on the student code.

## Discrimination and Harassment

Wesleyan University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment and does not tolerate identity-based discriminatory harassment and/or sexual misconduct against students, faculty, staff, trustees, volunteers, and employees of any university contractors/agents. For purposes of this Wesleyan policy, identity refers to one’s race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression. The Office for Equity and Inclusion serves students, faculty, administrators and develops policies and procedures regarding issues of diversity and equal opportunity/affirmative action. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office for Equity and Inclusion at 860-685-4771.

## Honor Code

All students of Wesleyan University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council – Office of Student Affairs. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty members and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). The Office of Student Affairs has more information.

**SYLLABUS CODE**

Course Reserves = **CR**

R. J. Julia Book Store = **RJ**

Moodle = **M**

**\***All “Plays” are accessible through Course Reserves and available for purchase at R.

J. Julia Bookstore.

**\*\*** All **“Chapters”** are located within ***The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson*** book by **Christopher Bigsby** which is accessible through Course Reserves and available for purchase at R. J. Julia Bookstore.

#### WEEK ONE

##### Monday, Jan. 30th

#### CLASS AGENDA:

Introductions; Syllabus; and, Strategies for Reading, Writing, & Time Management; an Overview of August Wilson

##### Wednesday, Feb. 1st

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* + Read: *New York Times* obituary “August Wilson, Theater’s Poet of Black America, is Dead at 60” by Charles Isherwood **[M]**
  + Read Chapter 1: “August Wilson: the ground on which he stood,” by Christopher Bigsby, p. 1-27 **[CR/RJ]**

**UNIT I: The Cycle Begins**

***Access Points in Jitney*:**

**Race (Racial Inequality); Gender (Masculinity, Hypervisibility of Black Women); Relationships; Sociology (Urban Renewal); and, Background/Unseen Characters**

#### WEEK TWO

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| **Monday, Feb. 6th** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Play:** *Jitney* (produced 1982, about the 1970s)   \*SPECIAL IN-CLASS AGENDA: Introduction of First Paper Assignment |
| **Wednesday, Feb. 8th** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Chapter 12:** “*Jitney*, folklore and responsibility,” by David Krasner, pgs. 158- 168 **[CR/RJ]** * **Essay:** “The Cigar Annies of August Wilson: Ethnographically Unmasking Black Women’s Invisibility,” by Rashida Z. Shaw McMahon **[CR]** |

***Access Points in Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*:**

**Race (Racial Inequality, Whiteness); Gender (Black Feminism, Black Masculinity); Economics; Psychology (Self-worth, Trauma); and, History (Music Industry)**

**WEEK THREE**

##### Monday, Feb. 13th

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* **Play:** *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (produced 1984, about the 1920s)

**Wednesday, Feb. 15th**

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* + **Chapter 7:** “*Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom:* cutting the historical record, dramatizing a blues CD,” by Alan Nadel, pgs. 102-112 **[CR/RJ]**

\*SPECIAL IN-CLASS AGENDA: Reminder about Theater Reviews

Film Department Screening of Zora Neale Hurston: Claiming Space PBS American Experience documentary series

**SPECIAL EVENT**

Thursday, Feb. 16th 8 P.M

**Short Paper #1**

HARD DEADLINE: SATURDAY, FEB. 18TH ON MOODLE @ MIDNIGHT

**Rolling Deadline Friday-Saturday Feb. 17th - 18th**

**UNIT II: Wilson’s Signature Themes**

***Access Points in Fences*:**

**Race (Racial Inequality, Discrimination); Gender (Motherhood, Fatherhood, Heterosexual Relationships); History (American Dream, Baseball); Psychology (Self-Worth); and, Symbolism**

#### WEEK FOUR

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| **Monday, Feb. 20th** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Play:** *Fences* (produced 1987, about the 1950s) * **Eliana** *Fences* Production Review |
| **Wednesday, Feb. 22nd** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Chapter 10:** “Safe at home? August Wilson’s *Fences*,” by Matthew Roudané, pgs. 135-144 **[CR/RJ]** * **Max** *Fences* Production Review |

**Zora Neale Hurston Panel Discussion** Hosted by Professor Shaw McMahon 4:30-6p.m., Daniel Family Commons

**SPECIAL EVENT**

Wednesday, Feb. 22nd @ 4:30 P.M

***Access Points in Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*:**

**Race (Trauma); Culture (Religion, Spirituality, African Diaspora); Narrative Form (Epic, Myth Making); Politics (Freedom, Liberation); and,**

**History (Atlantic Slave Trade, Great Migration)**

**WEEK FIVE**

##### Monday, Feb. 27th

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* **Play:** *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (produced 1988, about the 1910s)
* **Annie** *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* Production Review

\*SPECIAL IN-CLASS AGENDA: Instructions for Critical Staged Readings (Friday Eve: Sign up on Google Docs for Groups)

**Wednesday, Mar. 1st**

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* **Chapter 6:** *“Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*,*”* by Samuel A. Hay, pgs. 89-101

#### [CR/RJ]

* **Hannah** *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* Production Review

**UNIT III: Honing in on Character & Gender**

***Access Points in The Piano Lesson*:**

**History (Family, Slavery, Legacy, Ancestors); Economics (American Dream); Culture (Religion & Spirituality); Psychology (Self-Worth, Trauma & Healing); and, Symbolism**

#### WEEK SIX

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| **Monday, Mar. 6th** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Play:** *The Piano Lesson* (produced 1990, about the 1930s) * **Sophia** *The Piano Lesson* Production Review |
| **Wednesday, Mar. 8th** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Chapter 8:** “A piano and its history: family and transcending family,” by Felicia Hardison Landré, pgs. 113-123 **[CR/RJ]** * **Senica** *The Piano Lesson* Production Review |

**ENJOY SPRING BREAK**

**Saturday, March 11th – Sunday, March 26th**

***Access Points in Two Trains Running*:**

**Gender (Hypervisibility of Black Women); Politics (Activism, Justice, Reclamation, & Reparations); and, Culture (Religion & Spirituality)**

**WEEK SEVEN**

##### Monday, Mar. 27th

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* **Play:** *Two Trains Running* (produced 1992, about the 1960s)
* **James** *Two Trains Running* Production Review

\*SPECIAL IN-CLASS AGENDA: Introduction of Second Paper Assignment

**Wednesday, Mar. 29th**

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* + **Chapter 11:** “*Two Trains Running*: blood on the tracks,” by Stephen Bottoms, pgs. 145-157 **[CR/RJ]**
  + **Hudson** *Two Trains Running* Production Review

**Suggested Attendance:** CLASSIX Panel Discussion Hosted by Professor Shaw McMahon

And Weekend Workshop (info forthcoming, Wesleyan CFA)

Special Events March 30 – 31st

#### WEEK EIGHT

**CRITICAL STAGED READING DAY**

First Three Groups

**CLASS LOCATION: Center for African American Studies (1st floor lounge)**

343 High Street

**MANDATORY LIBRARY PRESENTATION DAY**

**Location: Meet in Olin Library, Develin Room**

**Monday, Apr. 3rd**

**Wednesday, Apr. 5th**

**Short Paper #2 (similar to first paper assignment)** HARD DEADLINE: SUNDAY, APR. 8TH ON MOODLE @ MIDNIGHT **NEW DEADLINE**

**Rolling Deadline Friday-Saturday Apr. 7th – 8th**

**UNIT IV: Developments in Writing Style (Form)**

**Access Points in *Seven Guitars*: Institutions, Family, Diaspora, Culture, Reclamation**

**WEEK NINE**

##### Monday, Apr. 10th

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* **Play:** *Seven Guitars* (produced 1996, about the 1940s)
* **Isa** *Seven Guitars* Production Review

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

**Wednesday, Apr. 12th.**

**Class Held on Zoom**

* + **Chapter 9:** “The tragedy of *Seven Guitars*,” by Brenda Murphy, pgs. 124-134

#### [CR/RJ]

* + **Kaden** *Seven Guitars* Production Review

**SUBMIT FINAL RESEARCH PAPER IDEAS ON MOODLE FOR**

**(This Paper is Due at The End of the semester)**

HARD DEADLINE: SUNDAY, APRIL 16TH ON MOODLE @ MIDNIGHT

**NEW DEADLINE**

**Rolling Deadline Saturday-Sunday Apr. 15th – 16th**

***Access Points in King Hedley II*: Institutions, Family, Violence, Memory, Sacrifice**

#### WEEK TEN

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| **Monday, Apr. 17th** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Play:** *King Hedley II* (produced 2001, about the 1980s) * **Raimi** *King Hedley II* Production Review |
| **Wednesday, Apr. 19th** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Chapter 13:** “*King Hedley II*: in the midst of all this death,” by Joan Herrington, pgs. 169-182 **[CR/RJ]** |

**UNIT V: Bookends!**

***Access Points in Gem of the Ocean*:**

**Ancestors, Memory & Continuity, Spirituality, Law, Freedom & Justice**

**WEEK ELEVEN**

##### Monday, Apr. 24th

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* **Play:** *Gem of the Ocean* (produced 2004, about the 1900s)
* **Cam** *Gem of the Ocean* Production Review

**Wednesday, Apr. 26th**

#### ASSIGNMENT DUE:

* + **Chapter 5:** “*Gem of the Ocean* and the redemptive power of history,” by Harry J. Elam, Jr., pgs. 75-88 **[CR/RJ]**
  + **Ray** *Gem of the Ocean* Production Review

***Access Points in Radio Golf*:**

**Aspiration (Black Middle Class), Family & Community, Memory, Justice, Symbolism**

#### WEEK TWELVE

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| **Monday, May 1st** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Play:** *Radio Golf* (produced 2005 about the 1990s) |
|  | * **Jake** *Radio Golf* Production Review |
| **Wednesday, May 3rd** | **ASSIGNMENT DUE:**   * **Chapter 14:** “*Radio Golf:* the courage of his convictions – survival, success and spirituality,” by Margaret Booker, pgs. 183-192 **[CR/RJ]** * **Selene** *Radio Golf* Production Review |

**WEEK THIRTEEN**

WORKSHOP DAY:

Bring Draft Intro paragraph & List of 5 library sources for Final Paper.

**Monday, May 8th**

**Wednesday, May 10th**

**CRITICAL STAGED READING & COURSE WRAP-UP DAY**

Last Two Groups

**CLASS LOCATION: Center for African American Studies (1st floor lounge)**

343 High Street

**READING PERIOD**

**Thursday, May 11th – Monday, May 15th**

**Thursday, May 18th**

**FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE BY 11:59p.m. on Moodle**

(Thursday night into Friday morning)