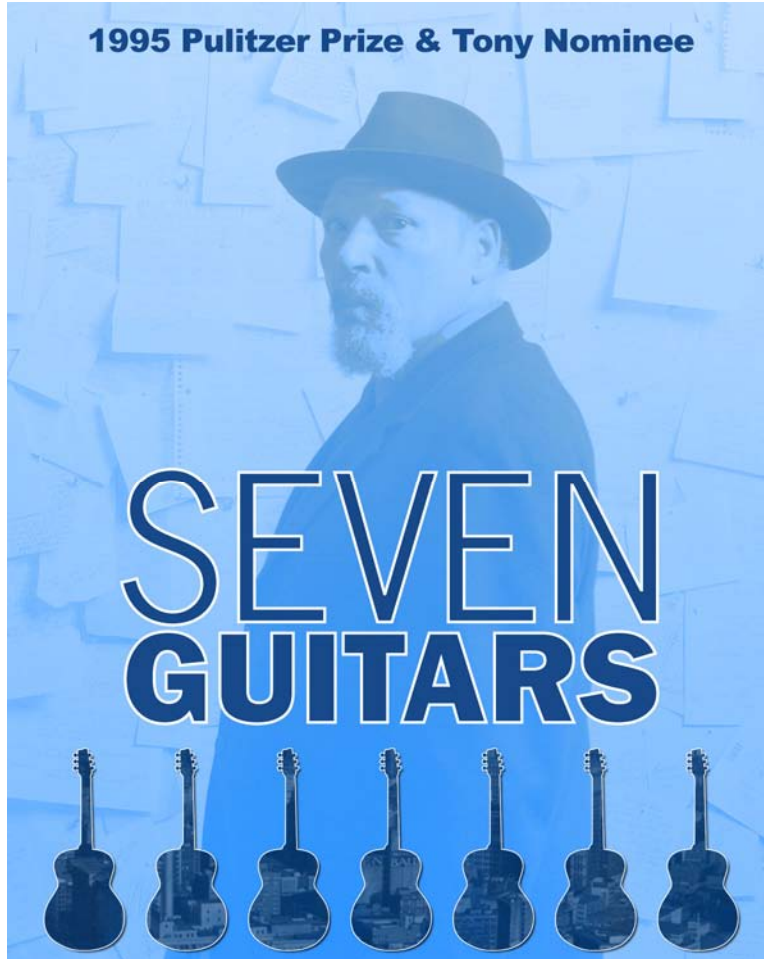




THEATRE COMPANY

A Study Guide for Educators



American Stage Education Partner



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AMERICAN STAGE THEATRE

American Stage is Tampa Bay's best professional regional Equity theatre. Founded in 1977, the company's mission is to create the most satisfying live theatre in the Tampa Bay area, accessible to all members of the community. The vision of American Stage is



to preserve the greatest human stories from our past, while creating the most defining stories and storytelling of our time.

American Stage presents its six-play Mainstage Series in its 182-seat Raymond James Theatre each year. The very popular American Stage in the Park celebrates its 26th Anniversary year. The theatre's other programming includes: "After Hours" Series, School Tour, and camps and classes for children and adults.

It is American Stage Theatre Company's goal to share the enriching experience of live theatre. This study guide is intended to help you prepare for your visit to American Stage. Should you have any comments or suggestions regarding this study guide, or if you need more information about scheduling trips to see an American Stage production, please feel free to contact us:

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The *Seven Guitars* study guide was compiled and written by Meg Heimstead. Teachers are permitted to copy any and all parts of this guide for use in the classroom.

THEATRE

ELEMENTS OF THEATRE

1. Theatre usually engages many forms of art including:

- Writing
- Visual/Design
 - Scenery & Props
 - Costumes
 - Sound
 - Lighting
 - Casting
- Music
- Dance/Movement

2. Elements of Drama:

- **Character**
WHO are the characters and what is their relationship to each other?
- **Plot/Story**
WHAT is the story line?
What happened before the play started?
What do the characters want?
What will they do to get it?
What do they stand to gain or lose?
- **Setting**
WHERE does the story take place?
How does this affect the characters' behavior?
How does it affect the plot?
How does it affect the design?
- **Time**
WHEN does the story take place?
What year is it? What season? What time of day?
How does this affect the characters, plot and design of the play?

Other Elements to Explore

Conflict/Resolution, Action, Improvisation, Non-verbal communications, Staging, Humor, Realism and other styles, Metaphor, Language, Tone, Pattern and repetition, Emotion, Point of view.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

*These **questions** were designed to promote classroom **discussion** of any play. Use these questions as a model to help you design your own analysis techniques.*

1. How does the play start?
2. What does the playwright do to set the scene? How are the characters introduced?
3. What other techniques does the play use to help you jump into the story?
4. Who is the main character?
 - What does he/she want? (Objective)
 - How will he/she get it? (Actions/Tactics)
 - What is stopping him/her? (Obstacles)
 - How does the character change throughout the play?
5. Why is the play set in the time period that it is? How would the play be different if the time period was different?
6. Is there a character who helps the main character come to decisions and changes?
How? Opposition? Reflection?
7. Is there a villain/antagonist in the play?
Does there need to be a good character and a bad one?
8. What makes the play relevant? What makes it important?
9. What are the elements that make this piece suitable for the stage, as opposed television, film or a novel?

SEVEN GUITARS

EXPLORING THE PLAY

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT – AUGUST WILSON



August Wilson was born Fredrick August Kittel, Jr. in 1945 to a white father, Fredrick August Kittle, Sr., and an African-American mother, Daisy Wilson, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was the fourth of six children. His father was a German immigrant banker, and his mother was a cleaning woman from North Carolina. His parents stayed together until he was 5 years old. When he was a teenager, his mother remarried and moved the family from the Hill District, a predominately African-American section of Pittsburgh, to a

primarily white working class neighborhood where Wilson encountered severe racial hostility. A voracious reader who credits his mother for his love of language, Wilson dropped out of school in the ninth grade due to the threats and abuse he encountered there. Not wanting to tell his mother about his decision to leave school, he spent his time at libraries, educating himself through books.

In 1962, Wilson enlisted in the U.S. Army but was discharged a year later. In 1965, he decided to become a writer, buying his first typewriter for \$20. That same year, he legally changed his name to August Wilson to honor his mother after his father's death. In 1968, he helped to found Pittsburgh's Black Horizons on the Hill Theater, with the goal of "politicizing the community." *Recycling*, his first play, was performed there. His next two plays, *The Homecoming* and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, were produced at Pittsburgh Public Theatre. Wilson was also heavily involved in the civil rights movement and described himself as a "Black Nationalist." After he moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1978, Wilson's career began to gather steam. In 1980, he received a fellowship at the Minneapolis Playwrights Center. Following the oft-given advice to write what you know, Wilson created characters that spoke like people he knew from his childhood.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT – AUGUST WILSON (CONTINUED)

In 1982, the prestigious Eugene O’Neill Center produced his first play in the Pittsburgh Cycle, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*. The success of this play helped catapult Wilson into the national limelight. *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* received the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for best play and a Tony Award nomination. Wilson’s next effort, *Fences*, was even more successful, garnering an Outstanding Play Award from the American Theatre Critics, a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play, a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and a Tony Award for best play. He would later win another Pulitzer for his play *The Piano Lesson* and be awarded the National Humanities Medal in 1999. August Wilson died on October 2, 2005 in Seattle from liver cancer. Fourteen days later, the Virginia Theater in New York’s Broadway district was renamed the August Wilson Theatre. This is the first Broadway theater to be named after an African-American.

The Pittsburgh Cycle

August Wilson is best known for his 10-play “Pittsburgh Cycle.” Nine of the 10 plays take place in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, the neighborhood where Wilson spent the majority of his childhood. Each play is set in a different decade during the 20th century and together they chronicle the Black experience in America. Here is a list of the plays and the decade in which they take place:

- 1900s: *Gem of the Ocean*
- 1910s: *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*
- 1920s: *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*
- 1930s: *The Piano Lesson*
- 1940s: *Seven Guitars*
- 1950s: *Fences*
- 1960s: *Two Trains Running*
- 1970s: *Jitney*
- 1980s: *King Hedley II*
- 1990s: *Radio Golf*

Wilson did not write the plays in order, and they are not meant to be a serial story, although some characters appear or are mentioned in more than one play.

“What I want to do is place the culture of Black America on stage, to demonstrate that it has the ability to offer sustenance.” – *August Wilson*

SEVEN GUITARS – PRODUCTION HISTORY

Seven Guitars opened on January 21, 1995, at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago.

Seven Guitars had its Broadway premiere at the Walter Kerr Theatre on March 17, 1996. It closed on September 8, 1996 after 188 performances.

Awards

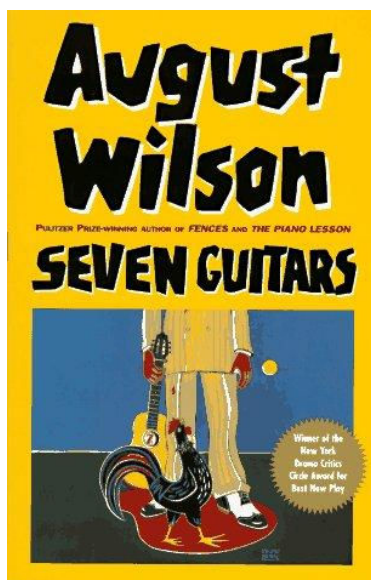
- * 1996 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play

Nominations

- * 1995 Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- * 1996 Drama Desk Award for Best Play
- * 1996 Tony Award for Best Play

SYNOPSIS

From the Goodman Theatre's *Seven Guitars* Study Guide



Pittsburgh's Hill District, 1948: In Louise's backyard, a group of friends gather after the funeral of Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton, whose sudden death has cut short a blues guitar career that had just been on the verge of taking off. The friends talk about the mysteries of Floyd's death and the black-hatted angels who seemed to appear at the grave site to bear him away. To the sounds of his first hit recording, "That's All Right," the play jumps back in time to piece together the final days of Floyd's life.

The play recounts Floyd coming home from his mother's funeral with empty pockets and being stopped by the police and arrested for vagrancy. In the workhouse, Floyd discovers he has a hit record, but no hit record money. When released, he gets a letter from his white producer inviting him back to Chicago to cut another record. Floyd sees the summons as a promise that he will become a star—all he has to do is find a way to get enough money together for him and his band to return to Chicago.

SYNOPSIS (CONTINUED)

In the backyard, we meet Floyd's band members and his friends. Red Carter is the drummer who would happily return to Chicago, if Floyd could get his drums out of hock. Canewell is the harmonica player who is reluctant to go back, though he hungers for fame. He is tired of the road and would like to put down roots. Then there is the tubercular Hedley, who earns his living processing chickens in his makeshift backyard slaughterhouse and dreams that the legendary New Orleans trumpeter Buddy Bolden will come down and give him money for a plantation. The women of the play, a bit worn around the edges, epitomize love gone wrong. Vera, Floyd's girlfriend, takes him back after he left her for another, but she's ambivalent about going to Chicago. Louise, the landlady, has sworn off men and doesn't want anyone knocking on her door anymore. And finally we meet Ruby, Louise's promiscuous niece, who has just fled Alabama where one man killed another over her.

All of the characters, in one way or another, are involved with Floyd and his strategy to obtain the money to go to Chicago. But Floyd's plans appear to be ruined when he discovers that the agent who was to finance the trip has been arrested. His only recourse is to use the money he's been saving for a marker for his mother's grave. But that's not nearly enough, so Floyd takes a chance—a gamble that changes everything for Floyd and leads us to the secret behind his death.

“You ain't never seen nothing like Chicago—Seem like everybody in the world in Chicago.” – Floyd, *Seven Guitars*

THE TITLE

Here is what August Wilson had to say about the title in an interview with the Goodman Theatre's Dramaturg prior to the first production of *Seven Guitars* -

There are seven characters. Each one of the characters is a guitar. I guess I wrote the music and the characters have to play the guitar. Originally, I was going to have seven guys with guitars on the stage and they formed a little orchestra on the street corners. It was about how their world clashed with the white world who saw them as vagrants and as drunkards, and the black community who saw them as carriers of this tradition, these functional oral historians in this world. I was looking at two different ways of looking at blues singers so I had seven guys with seven guitars, then this woman walked on stage and everything changed.

CHARACTERS

Floyd “Schoolboy” Barton

- Dreams of being a famous and wealthy singer
- Has made a successful record but didn’t share in the profits
- History of being irresponsible
- History of infidelity
- In love with Vera
- A violent man



Hedley

- Lives in his dreams
- Claims to be a king
- Believer in saints, spirits, and prophets
- Dreams of owning a plantation
- Sick with tuberculosis
- Mentally unstable
- Believes that white people are out to get him
- Wants to be the father of Ruby’s child

Louise

- Middle-aged single woman
- Surrogate mother to Hedley
- Allowed her man to walk out on her years ago in exchange for his pistol
- Realist

Vera

- Loved by Floyd
- Clings to the belief that people can change for the better
- Her name comes from the Latin word *verus*, which means “true”
- Wants to resist Floyd but can’t help falling for him again

“I got me a thirty-two caliber pistol up there. That be all the man I need.” - Louise, *Seven Guitars*

CHARACTERS (CONTINUED)



Red Carter

- Floyd's friend and drummer in his band
- Laid back
- Can identify a rooster's birthplace by the sound of its crow

Ruby

- Louise's niece
- Young, vivacious, femme-fatale
- The "male pleaser"
- Comes to Pittsburgh from Alabama
- Two men in Alabama were ready to kill for her
- Free spirit
- Looking for a man to be the father of the child she is carrying

Canewell

- Floyd's friend and the harmonica player in his band
- Does not want to return to Chicago with Floyd
- His name comes from sugarcane; the crop that spurred the Europeans to enslave the Africans
- A drifter
- Edgy and quick tempered
- Tired of playing backup to Floyd

"All I want is for you to get out of my way. I got somewhere to go." – Floyd, *Seven Guitars*

THEMES AND SYMBOLS

“I think we should have stayed in the South. We attempted to transplant what in essence was an emerging culture, a culture that had grown out of our experiences of two hundred years as slaves in the South. The cities of the Urban North have not been hospitable. If we had stayed in the South, we could have strengthened our culture.” – August Wilson, in an interview with Bill Moyers

From enotes.com

Displacement

The characters of *Seven Guitars* are displaced both spatially and emotionally. The false promise Floyd sees in Chicago shatters under the weight of Pittsburgh’s Hill District. Ruby, a young girl who believes that salvation comes through sexuality, personifies the fallacy of assuming that a new place can create a new self. Men abandon Vera and Louise. The unconscious desire to reconcile the past in order to progress in the future proves heartbreakingly impossible. While Red Carter and Floyd are comparing guns, Canewell pulls out a knife, a weapon condemned by Carter as “nothing but a piece of history” and “out of style.” This displacement is most noticeable in Hedley: His economic and personal freedoms rest on a dream he had of his father, and his intention to build a plantation in Pittsburgh is preposterous. In a community that at least attempts to embrace the reality of its situation, Hedley is an anomaly who surrenders his fate to mystical beliefs and hallucinations. All are unable to find what they are looking for. It was a common experience for African Americans who migrated north to be disappointed with their experiences.

The Rooster

Perhaps the most enigmatic symbol of the play is the rooster. Its timed and deliberate crowing amid the cacophonous urban landscape is a constant reminder of the failure of the African American community to prosper in the North. That Hedley kills the rooster and Floyd in the same manner speaks volumes to the insignificance of the African American individual in the play. The rooster, too, is displaced, being more appropriate for a southern farm than a northern city.

By Sally R. Gass from the Goodman Theatre’s *Seven Guitars* Study Guide

Roots

Roots are another theme in *Seven Guitars*. Hedley goes to the unseen Miss Sarah for her magical roots to cure his tuberculosis and yearns to make a “plantation” even though the citified Louise tells him to go see a doctor. Canewell brings Vera a Golden Seal plant and extols the virtue of its leaves and roots on colds and other ills. He carefully tells her how to plant the roots. In truth, it is Canewell who wants to put down roots. He is sick of the road music business and is looking for a good woman with whom to settle down. Finally, the tangled, uprooted “roots” of the last scene are the catalyst of the violent and mysterious ending.

THEMES AND SYMBOLS (CONTINUED)

Justice and Jail

Finally, there is justice and jail. Floyd is stopped with empty pockets by the police, arrested for vagrancy, and serves 30 days in the workhouse. Canewell was arrested in Chicago for playing his harmonica, thus disturbing the peace. Red says you need a license to do anything—including walking down the street. These men are punished for doing nothing; ironically, when Floyd commits a crime, he is not apprehended.

The play is the urban challenge versus the South's roots. It is guns and knives versus Miss Tillery's rooster and, in the end, neither the bullet nor the bird wins.



SEVEN GUITARS

EXPLORING THE CONTEXT OF THE PLAY

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE 1940's

“We had just gone off and demonstrated our allegiance and willingness to fight and die for our country. We actually believed things would be different and that we would be accorded first class citizenship. We came back after the war and that was not true.” – *August Wilson*

By Sally R. Gass from the Goodman Theatre's *Seven Guitars* Study Guide



The 1940's saw a series of setbacks for the civil rights of African-Americans. In 1940, the NAACP launched a campaign to desegregate the U.S. Armed Forces, sending a seven-point manifesto to President Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt promised to create more job opportunities for blacks in the army, but insisted that troops would not be integrated because that would “produce situations destructive to morale.” However, A. Philip Randolph, a labor leader and one of the nation's

foremost African American spokesmen, threatened to organize a mass march in Washington, D.C. in 1941, protesting discrimination in the military and in the defense industry. When government pressure failed to deter his plans, Roosevelt changed his policies and issued Executive Order 8802, banishing federal discrimination. Despite executive orders, at Freeman Field, Indiana, over 100 African American military officers were locked in the stockade after entering a whites-only officers club. In 1943 Detroit, African Americans were excluded from civilian defense related jobs. A protest riot resulted in 34 deaths. The NAACP reported that 1946 was a grim year in black history, for black veterans suffered blowtorch killings and eye-gougings after returning from a war to end torture and racial extermination.

On the home front, World War II meant many new unskilled defense-related industries, most of which were based in northern and western cities. Poor blacks from the South migrated to these cities in record numbers. In the years between 1941 and 1945 more than 50,000 African Americans moved to Detroit alone.



THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE 1940'S (CONTINUED)

Many white residents of these cities resented black competition for jobs and also opposed black families living in their neighborhoods. Such opposition occurred in Detroit in 1942, when 1200 whites bearing knives, clubs, and firearms tried to prevent three black families from moving into the 200-unit Sojourner Truth Settlement, designated as black housing by the U.S. Housing Authority. After scores of injuries and arrests occupancy was postponed. When the Philadelphia Transportation Company tried to hire African Americans, 4500 white employees struck in protest. Rioting broke out and President Roosevelt was forced to order an army takeover of the transit system. In Gary, Indiana, 1000 white students in public schools boycotted classes to protest racial integration.



Still, there was some progress. In 1941, the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first all-black unit of the air corps, was formed in Tuskegee, Alabama. It would fly more than 500 missions during one year of WW II, before being joined with the 332nd Fighter Group. In 1942, General Douglas MacArthur welcomed black troops for combat duty in the South Pacific, while most other generals dissolved black combat units and re-assigned them to service duty. In 1944, the 92nd Division of the US Army became the first African American unit sent

into combat duty in Europe; the 761st Tank Battalion, all African Americans, played a major role in the D-Day invasion in Normandy. Finally, in 1944, the War Department called for an end to segregation in U.S. Army recreation and transportation facilities.

In the arts and sports worlds, African Americans fared better. In 1941, Hattie McDaniel became the first African American to win an Academy Award for her role as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*. Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* was published and also produced as a play. *Othello* opened on Broadway starring Paul Robeson and Hollywood released *Panama Hattie* with Lena Horne; *Stormy Weather* with Lena Horne, Fats Waller, Cab Calloway and Bill Robinson; *Cabin in the Sky* with Eddie Robinson, Ethel Waters, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong. In 1943, and 1948, Joe Louis successfully defended his world heavyweight boxing championship for the 23rd time, and, in 1943, Jackie Robinson became the first black to play major league baseball, joining the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE 1940'S (CONTINUED)

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman called upon the U. S. Congress to pass civil rights legislation, with anti-lynching, fair employment and anti-poll-tax provisions. At the Democratic National Convention that year, a civil rights plank was adopted. Yet, the Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina delegations walked out and formed the nucleus of the States' Rights or "Dixiecrat" Party in rebuke to this stand for equal rights. Thus, in the 1940s, for every step forward there was a step back.

FAST FACTS ABOUT THE 1940'S

- Average Salary was \$1,299. Teacher's salary was \$1,441.
- Life expectancy was 68.2 for females and 60.8 for males.
- World War II changed the order of world power; the United States and the USSR became super powers.
- The Cold War begins.
- 45% of US homes still do not have indoor plumbing.
- The Supreme Court decides that African Americans do have the right to vote.
- In 1948 the average home cost \$7,700. A new car cost \$1,230. Minimum wage is \$.40 per hour.



Car ad 1948 Oldsmobile Series "60" Convertible Coupe.

PITTSBURGH IN THE 1940's



Pittsburgh's Mill District in 1940

From wikipedia.com

Pittsburgh was at the center of the "Arsenal of Democracy" that provided steel, aluminum, munitions and machinery for the U.S. and the Allies during World War II. Pittsburgh's mills contributed 95 million tons of steel to the war effort.

David Lawrence, a Democrat, served as mayor of Pittsburgh from 1946 to 1959 and as Pennsylvania's governor from 1959 to 1963. Lawrence used his political power to transform Pittsburgh's political machine into a modern governmental unit that could run the city well and honestly. In 1946 Lawrence decided to enforce the Smoke Control Ordinance of 1941 because he believed smoke abatement was crucial for the city's future economic development. However, enforcement placed a substantial burden on the city's working-class because smoky bituminous coal was much less expensive than smokeless fuels. One round of protests came from Italian-American organizations, which called for delay in enforcing it. Enforcement raised their cost of living and threatened the jobs of their relatives in nearby bituminous coal mines. Despite dislike of the smoke abatement program, Italian Americans strongly supported the reelection of Lawrence in 1949, in part because many of them were on the city payroll.

PITTSBURGH'S Hill DISTRICT

From wikipedia.com

The Hill District is a collection of neighborhoods that is considered by many to be the cultural center of African-American life in Pittsburgh. Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay once called the district "the crossroads of the world," referring to the neighborhood's heyday in the 1930s–1950s. It is known to many Pittsburghers as simply "The Hill."



From souldofamerica.com

From the 1920s to the 1940s, no other city better defined the athletic genius and social impact of Black baseball than Pittsburgh. As headquarters for the Negro National League and hometown to two Negro League teams (Pittsburgh Crawfords and Homestead Grays), the city defined championship baseball play. The Pittsburgh Crawfords emerged from integrated neighborhoods in the Hill District and later were bankrolled by Gus Greenlee, owner of the

world-famous Crawford Grill jazz club. The 1936 Crawfords boasted five Baseball Hall of Famers: Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, "Cool Papa" Bell, Oscar Charleston and Judy Johnson.

Pittsburgh Courier editor and owner Robert L. Vann grew his newspaper, then located in the Hill District, into the largest circulating Black newspaper in the country, using its reach and reputation to crusade against discrimination and to document African American social, political and cultural developments.

Pittsburgh's prime Black community continued to thrive on a number of fronts and Pittsburgh born artists and entrepreneurs helped to make the Hill District the musical center during the golden age of jazz music.

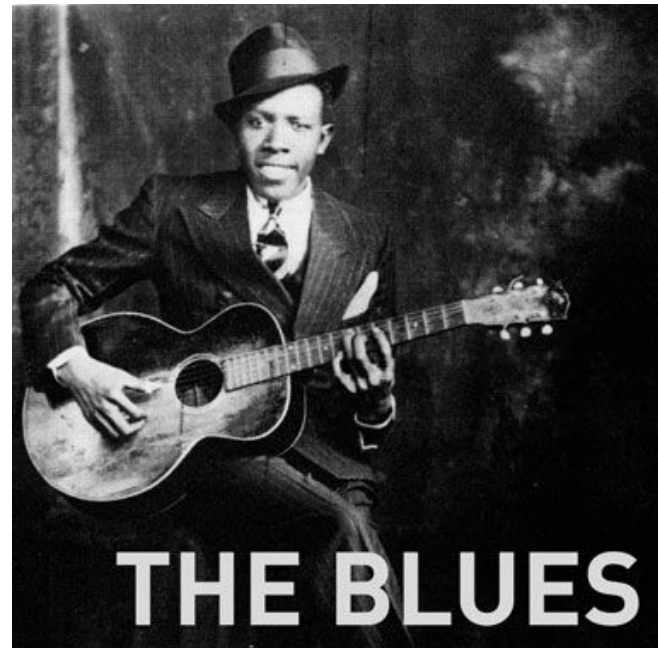
Located in the heart of the Hill District on Centre Ave, the Ellis Hotel housed visiting ball players, musicians, literati, and Black folks in general in the Jim Crow Era. When the Crawfords or Grays won a big game, the party was on. You never know which great musician would pop in unannounced.

Today the Hill District struggles with the twin identify of gentrification and preserving its past. Perhaps the saddest note is that the owner of the Crawford Grill closed that landmark institution to focus on its downtown clientele. Despite that tragedy, the Hill District is strong and forging a future that will pleasantly surprise.

HISTORY OF THE BLUES

Essential to an understanding of Wilson's plays is the importance of black music, particularly the blues, which he acknowledges to be an inspiration of his art. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Wilson said "the blues are important primarily because they contain the cultural responses of blacks in America to the situation that they find themselves in. Contained in the blues is a philosophical system at work. You get the ideas and attitudes of people as part of the oral tradition. That is a way of passing along information. The music provides you with an emotional reference for the information, and it is sanctioned by the community in the sense that if someone sings the song, other people sing the song."

The blues originated in America during the end of the 19th century. It combines the tonality of African-American work songs with European derived harmonic structures. The blues is said to be the first musical genre that was conceived in America. Before the blues, American popular music was imported from Europe. The blues is not just a generic term that applies to any music that addresses suffering and loss. Instead, classic blues songs are almost always composed of the "well known three line verse, in twelve measures of 4/4 rhythm, with an A-A-B rhyme pattern and a line length usually measured by five stressed syllables." (From *Nothing but the Blues* by Lawrence Cohn, Abbeville Press, 1993.)



A product of the black experience in America and the tradition of slavery, the blues draws from the massive mistreatment of African Americans during the time of slavery and beyond. The blues is inspired by many factors, including the African call-and-response tradition, unaccompanied vocal music, the oral tradition of storytelling, and the European harmonic structure. The blues evolved slowly from spirituals and work songs sung by slaves. Where its exact roots were formed is still a mystery. However, it is thought that the blues may have taken shape in Mississippi. The state had a large, isolated, and impoverished African American population where they were forced to create their own entertainment. In northern Mississippi, the concentration of African American communities was so dense that the musical life preserved elements of African melody and instrumental style that had all but vanished elsewhere in the South. We will never know who sang the very first blues song. Who ever did, changed American music forever.

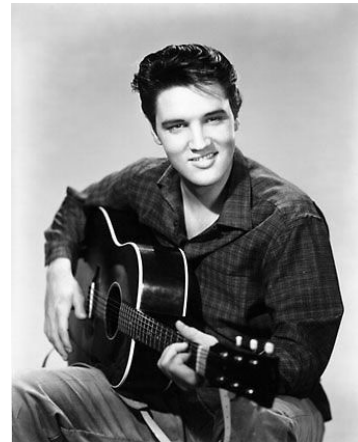
HISTORY of THE BLUES (CONTINUED)

While the blues originated in the South, it soon spread across the country thanks, in part, to The Great Migration. People from the South took the blues with them and the blues evolved in each place that they settled. There are now many types of blues. They include Country Blues, Piedmont Blues, Delta Blues, Memphis Blues, New Orleans Blues, Chicago Blues and West Coast Blues. However, they all represent a state of mind, a way of working unhappiness out of one's system through song. Fredrick Douglas wrote, "Slaves sing to make themselves happy rather than to express their happiness through singing." The blues doesn't come from a mood. It strives to produce one.

"All the characters in *Seven Guitars* are living the blues." –
August Wilson

INFLUENCE of THE BLUES

The blues has had a profound affect on other types of music. It has influenced many famous musicians and paved the way for new types of music like Rock and Roll. One of the most well known musicians of all time, Elvis Presley, was influenced by blues greats like B.B. King, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Little Richard, Fats Domino and many more. Elvis would often frequent blues clubs on Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee. That area of town had a primarily African American clientele, so Elvis was defying convention (one of many times) by going there. By ignoring the status quo, Elvis was introduced to a type of music that would later help him define his own style eventually leading him to become known as the King of Rock and Roll.



Other artists that have been heavily influenced by the blues include: The Beatles, Jimmy Hendrix, The Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton. Many modern types of music would not be what they are today without the blues. Soul, Hip-Hop, R & B, Funk, Jazz, and Rap all draw inspiration from the blues. Blues also helped pave the way for African American musicians. Early blues artists broke barriers and fought to be defined not by the color of their skin but as artists. If they hadn't done so, modern day African American musicians would not have the status and respect they do today.

REFERENCES IN THE PLAY

Buddy Bolden

Hedley thinks the spirit of Buddy Bolden is going to visit him and pay him the money that Bolden owed his father. Cornetist Buddy Bolden (1877-1931) is one of the legendary figures of jazz. Credited as the founder of "jass," later to be called jazz, he was the first player to pursue an improvisational style. He was the founder of New Orleans' first jazz band and was nicknamed "the King." He was a superlative musician and performer. In or about 1907 Bolden became ill while playing his cornet in a street parade. He was committed to an asylum where he remained until his death in 1931.



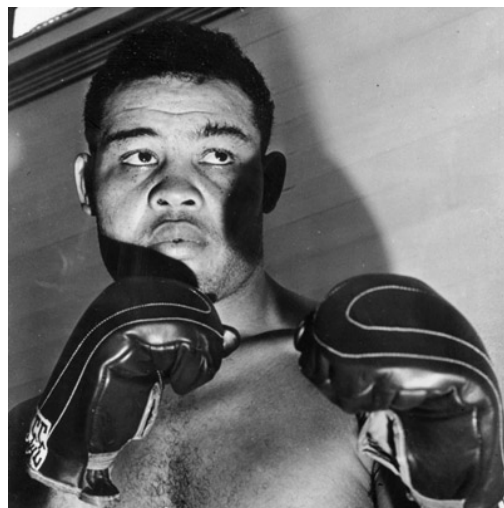
Muddy Waters

Muddy Waters From biography.com

Floyd admires Muddy Waters, a very successful and influential blues guitarist and singer. Born in Mississippi on April 4, 1915, McKinley Morganfield got the name Muddy Waters because he played in a creek as a boy. He grew up immersed in the Delta blues, and was first recorded by archivist Alan Lomax. In 1943 he moved to Chicago and began playing in clubs. A record deal followed, and hits like "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man" and "Rollin' Stone" made him an iconic Chicago blues man.

Joe Louis From biography.com

Joe Louis was born on May 13, 1914, Lafayette, Alabama and died on April 12, 1981 in Las Vegas, Nevada. He was an American boxer who was world heavyweight champion from June 22, 1937, when he knocked out James J. Braddock in eight rounds in Chicago, until March 1, 1949, when he briefly retired. During his reign, the longest in the history of any weight division, he successfully defended his title 25 times, more than any other champion in any division, scoring 21 knockouts (his service in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1945 no doubt prevented him from defending his title many more times). He was known as an extremely accurate and economical



knockout puncher. Further, he was a great source of pride for African Americans in the 1930s and 40s, a time when they endured fierce and violent oppression. To black people, Joe Louis symbolized the strength, ability, and dignity that African Americans had but could not express because of America's racial oppression. Joe Louis retired in glory but had to return to the ring because of financial problems, and he was embarrassingly defeated. Having virtually no money, Louis ended his life working as a casino host in Las Vegas.

REFERENCES IN THE PLAY (CONTINUED)

Marcus Garvey From biography.com

Social Activist. Born Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jr. on August 17, 1887, in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica. Self-educated, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, dedicated to promoting African-Americans and resettlement in Africa. In the United States he launched several businesses to promote a separate black nation. After he was convicted of mail fraud and deported back to Jamaica, he continued his work for black repatriation to Africa. Garvey advanced a Pan-African philosophy, which inspired a global mass movement, known as Garveyism. Garveyism would eventually inspire others, from the Nation of Islam to the Rastafari movement.



Toussaint L' Ouverture From *The Blues of Seven Guitars* by Daniel Addis

Toussaint Breda, later called Toussaint L'Ouverture and sometimes called the "black Napoleon," led a successful slave revolt in Haiti against the French colonial government. After gaining independence for Haiti during the French Revolution, he became the governor of Haiti. However, a few years later, Napoleon deceived Toussaint: Napoleon agreed to recognize Haiti's independence, and he invited Toussaint to come to France to negotiate Haiti's independence. When Toussaint arrived, Napoleon imprisoned him in a dungeon in the mountains where he slowly died of starvation, cold, and neglect.

Lazarus From *The Blues of Seven Guitars* by Daniel Addis

Lazarus was dead three days when Jesus raised him from the dead, saying "I am the resurrection and life. He who believes in me, though he were dead, will live" (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Jn. 11:25). Canewell says Jesus should have let Lazarus stay dead because living is suffering. Canewell's view implies that religion or perhaps more specifically, Christianity, does not relieve one's suffering. It did not relieve the suffering of African Americans. This interpretation is reinforced when Canewell mentions that he neglected to bring his Bible but brought a goldenseal plant and that, according to the Bible, only 44,000 people will be saved, and rest will "be cast into the fiery pit" (1.3).

SEVEN GUITARS

ACTIVITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

By Robin Bennett of the Goodman Theatre and Sally R. Gross

Exploring 1948

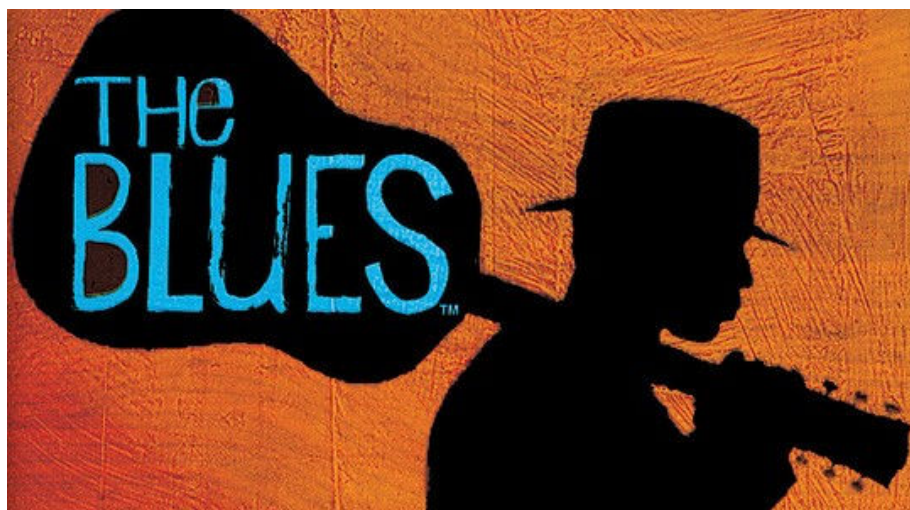
Below are some questions about that time in America. Some of the answers are in the play, but most are also available in your library or online. But remember, most published accounts are “dominant culture” history. You might get different answers by questioning people of varying ethnic heritage. History has many different sides!

- Who was President of the United States? What political party was dominant?
- What were THREE major historical events of the year?
- What was a significant development in race relations that year?
- Who was the most important athlete at that time? What was her/his nickname?
- What were some differences in ethnic lifestyles: African, Asian, European, Hispanic?
- What were “Jim Crow” laws? How did they affect race relations?
- Who were the influential African American leaders and organizations of the time?
- What were the “hot fashions,” and where could ordinary people find them?
- Find some “headline news” from a Chicago newspaper and a Pittsburgh newspaper.

Police Drama: Write a police drama follow-up scene to the end of the play that solves the mystery and uses all the clues in the play.

Justice Stories: Find all the stories in the play that deal with the justice system, police, courts or jail. Find a recent news story that has something in common with each of the stories in the play.

Tracing Roots: Choose a story from the newspaper that interests you, and that reminds you of one of the themes in this play. Rewrite it as if it happened in 1948, using the circumstances (and perhaps some of the characters) of the play.



SEVEN GUITARS

ACTIVITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY (CONTINUED)

African American Culture: August Wilson's plays stem from his experience of African American culture. Identify aspects of this culture as seen in the play.

Hedley's Role: Hedley alternates between several roles, including inventor, prophet, entrepreneur, cook and patient. Identify where in the play Hedley plays each (and possible other) roles.

TB and AIDS: Throughout the play, Hedley's tuberculosis is a major issue. While his friends hope a doctor will help him get better, Hedley sees the medical establishment's lack of attention as a "plot against the black man." He suggests that the authorities who are coming to get him are more interested in getting rid of him than helping him, and that the potions of Miss Sarah have the real power to heal. The AIDS epidemic has produced similar emotional responses. Research both diseases, and report on the differences and similarities in the way that patients are treated by groups of people and governmental agencies. Do you think that poor people or members of ethnic or social minorities who have these diseases are treated differently? If they are, describe how and discuss what the reasons might be for the difference in treatment.

Weapons and Violence: The history of violence for African Americans begins with ancestors who were violently brought to this country, and is well documented in Wilson's plays. Yet Red Carter's theory of the "bigger gun" seems to have grown to genocidal proportions in the last 50 years. Hold a debate on this issue within the context of African American history

Letters from the Characters: Choose the character(s) you best understand and, in their individual style, write a letter (or in Floyd's case, dictate it) to another character. Exchange and reply with other students doing the same project

Woman Talk: Choose one of the scenes where the women are speaking to each other with no men present, up until the point where a male character enters. Rewrite the scene as it might take place today, with today's language rhythms and points of view.

Relationships: Choose one of the speeches your favorite character makes about romantic relationships. Describe what you imagine their relationship is like. Then write a three-minute scene between them.

Acting Monologues: This play has a wealth of monologue possibilities. Performing a monologue (often done for audition purposes) can allow you to demonstrate exactly who you think the character is, and bring the parts of yourself that is like that character to your performance. Memorizing the lines is important, because you are not free to act until the words belong to you.

Activity Sheet

REFLECTIONS ON THE PERFORMANCE

Let's use our senses to reflect on the production of *Seven Guitars* at American Stage Theatre Company

Visually: *scenery, lighting, props, costumes, the physicality of the actors.*

Which of these had the strongest effect on you? _____

Why do you think they affected you so strongly? _____

How did these elements help you understand the story? _____

Aurally: *sound effects, vocal quality, diction, theatre acoustics.*

Which of these had the strongest effect on you? _____

Why do you think they affect you so strongly? _____

How did these elements help you understand the story? _____

Texture: *fabric of costumes, scenery, sound, lighting*

Which of these had the strongest effect on you? _____

Why do you think they affect you so strongly? _____

How did these elements help you understand the story? _____

Writing Activity

BE A THEATRE CRITIC

A very strong element in the success or failure of a new production is the Theater Critic. Use the following outline to write a review of the American Stage production of *Seven Guitars*.

Paragraph 1: About the Play – Part I

1. What was the title of the play?
2. Who wrote the play?
3. Which theater company produced it?
4. What was your overall reaction to the play?
5. Give a brief synopsis of the plot of the play.

Paragraph 2: About the Play – Part II

1. What aspects of the production (i.e. sets, costumes, lights, sound, acting) were similar to how you envisioned them? What aspects were different? What aspects would you like to have changed and why?
2. What scenes in the play did you find most/least interesting, entertaining and enjoyable? What about those scenes made you like or dislike them so much?
3. Did the production move too slowly, quickly, or at the right speed?

Paragraph 3: About the Characters/Performers

1. Did any characters touch you personally? Who was your favorite?
2. Were the character's motivations clear? In other words, could you understand what each character wanted?
3. Which actor do you think gave the best performance? What did this actor do that made you think she/he gave the best performance?
4. How did the way the actors used their bodies onstage enhance their performance?

Paragraph 4: About the Set

1. Did the set provide the right environment/atmosphere for the production? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Did the set reflect the themes and style of the play?
3. Were there any interesting details in the set? If so, what?

Paragraph 5: About the Lighting and Sound

1. Did the lighting establish the right mood and atmosphere for the production? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Did the music/sound add to the mood and atmosphere of the production or did it take away from it?

Paragraph 6: About the Costumes

1. Were the costumes appropriate for the mood and style of the production? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Did any of the costumes reflect a character's personality or wealth? What clues did the costumes give about the characters?

Paragraph 7: Conclusion

Would you recommend this production to someone? If so, to whom? If not, why not?

SEVEN GUITARS

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