AUGUST WILSON'S

TWO TRAINS RUNNING

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE
2018-2019 Season
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the educator resource guide for Triad Stage’s production of Two Trains Running. We are excited to share this transformative piece with students during our student matinee performances.

Our goals for this guide include:
- Noting historical and artistic context about the show that you can share with your students.
- Providing practical instructional activities that you can use in your classroom that make connections between the production and curricular standards in areas including English/Language Arts and Drama/Theatre.
- Offering opportunities for students to make personal connections between the production and their own experiences, as well as sparking dialogue about the play’s central themes and big ideas.

In the guide, you will find dramaturgical (background) information about the show and Triad Stage’s production of the play, as well as a number of links to additional resources and information. There is also a section of classroom activities that are aligned with secondary English/Language Arts standards, are designed to meet curricular goals, and seek to support students’ exploration of the play’s themes. Standards are pulled from a variety of grade levels, and all activities are adaptable across middle and high school grade ranges.

If you have any questions about the guide or how to use it, please don’t hesitate to reach out to Learning Director Lauren Smith at lauren@triadstage.org.
ABOUT THE STORY: PLOT OVERVIEW

*Two Trains Running* takes place entirely in a diner in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1969. This diner is owned by Memphis, a businessman whose establishment is caught up in a wave of urban development that is hitting the Hill District hard. The city has required Memphis to sell the diner, but they only want to pay him $12,000 instead of the $25,000 he believes is a fairer price. Meanwhile, West, a wealthy owner of a funeral home near the diner, offers to buy the diner for more than the city is offering but less than Memphis’s price; Memphis refuses this offer.

Director Keith Arthur Bolden said of the play that “every character has a leading role.” Other characters essential to the story include Risa, who works as a waitress at the diner, Wolf, who plays the Pennsylvania illegal Lottery (“the numbers”), and Sterling, a man who has just been released from prison and is looking for a fresh start. They are joined by Hambone, who, while he can say only a few words, is relentless in his pursuit of fair compensation from a man who short-changed him on a job he performed years before. Additionally, we meet Holloway, a retired man who has spent his life opposing injustice in its many forms. He frequents the diner and encourages both Memphis and Sterling to go see Aunt Ester who, while unseen, offers spiritual guidance about a range of issues. *Two Trains Running* explores what it takes to pursue justice in the face of gentrification and racism.
MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT: AUGUST WILSON

“I wanted to place this culture on stage in all its richness and fullness and to demonstrate its ability to sustain us in all areas of human life and endeavor and through profound movements of our history in which the larger society has thought less of us than we have thought of ourselves.”

- August Wilson

- Born on April 27th, 1945 in Pittsburgh, PA, August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel. He was one of seven children.
- When he was 15, a teacher accused him of plagiarism on a paper that was entirely his own. After this incident, he dropped out of high school and spent most of his time at the Carnegie Library, where he continued his education on his own.²
- He co-founded the Black Horizons Theatre in his hometown of Pittsburgh.³
- He wrote The Century Cycle, which is a collection of ten plays, each of which explore a different decade of the Black experience in America during the 1900s.
- He passed away in October 2005. The Virginia Theatre on Broadway was later renamed the August Wilson Theatre to honor his legacy.⁴

Based on what you know about August Wilson, what are some of the themes you think he might address in his writing?

How does the time period in which an author is alive inform their writing?
THE CENTURY CYCLE

The Century Cycle is a collection of ten plays, each of which explore a different decade of Black stories of the 20th century. Below, you will find the plays of The Century Cycle, listed in the order of the decade in which they are set. Loosely, The Century Cycle begins with the abolition of slavery and follows Black stories through the end of the 1900s, ending with plays that raise questions of how urban development and gentrification affect Black Americans. The cycle takes place in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, PA where Wilson grew up. The cycle does not follow a single narrative or group of characters, but rather shares diverse experiences and challenges of the community of the Hill District as their neighborhood evolved over time. In Two Trains Running, for example, Memphis struggles to sell the diner he owns for the price he believes is reasonable, rather than what the city wants to pay him.5

Gem of the Ocean (set 1900-1910, written 2003)
Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (set 1910’s, written 1988)
Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (set 1920’s, written 1984)
The Piano Lesson (set 1930’s, written 1990)
Seven Guitars (set 1940’s, written 1995)
Fences (Set 1950’s, written 1987)
Two Trains Running (set 1960’s, written 1991)
Jitney (Set 1970’s, Written 1982)
King Hedley II (set 1980’s, written 1999)
Radio Golf (set 1990’s, written 2005)6

- Why might August Wilson choose to write a number of stories about a particular neighborhood over the course of a whole century?
- How does a specific place (like a neighborhood, city, or state) spark specific stories? How are stories about North Carolina, for example, different from stories about other parts of the US or the world?
- What’s a place that’s important to you? If you were writing a story or play, how might you incorporate parts of that place into your writing?
August Wilson grew up in the Hill District, a neighborhood in Pittsburgh, PA that is the setting for all but one of the 10 plays in The Century Cycle. In the early 1800s, the Hill District housed many immigrant families who came to work in the steel mills during the Industrial Revolution. After slavery ended, many African Americans also moved to the Hill District. By the early 1900s, the Hill had become a diverse and vibrant community, rich in culture. Then, starting with its infrastructure, the neighborhood began to decline. Many of the inhabitants of the Hill moved on to other parts of the city, leaving primarily African American residents behind. In the mid-1900s the Hill District included many Black-owned shops, restaurants, and nightclubs.

In 1955, however, the federal government approved a redevelopment plan which cleared out 95 acres of homes and business in the area, forcing out more than 8,000 residents. Meanwhile, the federal government built federally-funded public housing in the same area, causing the Hill District to host more public housing than any other neighborhood in Pittsburgh. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Pittsburgh steel industry collapsed, causing rampant unemployment. The crime rates in the Hill District rose and buildings deteriorated from lack of upkeep.

A 1998 photograph by Dick Bernard of Eddie’s Restaurant, an establishment that Wilson frequented that some believe inspired Two Trains Running.

- How do you feel that August Wilson’s experience living in the Hill District might have inspired Two Trains Running?
- How did urban development change The Hill District? How does urban development affect the characters of Two Trains Running?
- Where else do we see urban development? What does that look like? How does it affect people who live in the communities where it takes place?
HISTORY: WHAT WAS HAPPENING DURING THE TIME PERIOD OF TWO TRAINS RUNNING?

*Two Trains Running* takes place during the American Civil Rights movement, and events from this period are mentioned throughout the play. Some key events from the movement are noted below:8

**December 1st, 1955**   Rosa Parks wouldn’t give up her seat to a White man on a bus in Montgomery, AL, sparking the year-long Montgomery Bus Boycott.

**September 4th, 1957**   In Little Rock, AK, the “Little Rock Nine” became the first Black students to integrate into an all-White school.

**September 9th, 1957**   President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

**February 1st, 1960**   The sit-in movement began at a Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, NC (the site of which is now the International Civil Rights Museum).

**September 15th, 1963**   Bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL.

**February 2nd, 1964**   Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act.

**February 21st, 1965**   Malcolm X was assassinated.

**March 7th, 1965**   Protesters marched the 54 miles from Selma, AL to the state capital of Montgomery, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**August 6th, 1965**   President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

**April 4th, 1968**   Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

**April 11th, 1968**   President Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act.
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: TWO LEADERS

During this period, there were a few different schools of thoughts about how to pursue equitable rights for Black people. Two leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for equality through non-violent protests, such as the Selma to Montgomery March and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. He is perhaps most famous for his “I have a dream” speech, which was delivered at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. He was tirelessly pro-Black and would not accept passivity on racial justice issues, expressing frustration with White moderates. It wasn’t until after his assassination in 1968 that his legacy became widely accepted in America.

Malcolm X promoted a different perspective about achieving equality for Black Americans. He advocated for Black Pride and Black Nationalism. Black Nationalism is a movement originating with the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which focused on seeking economic power and solidarity for Black Americans. Black Nationalists resisted the idea that they needed to be more like White Americans.

His methods were especially resonant for young Black people, particularly students. He was a leader in the Nation of Islam until he was assassinated in 1965. His beliefs contributed to the birth of the Black Power Movement. Sterling talks about how he identifies with Malcolm X in Two Trains Running.

The Black Power Movement

In Two Trains Running, Sterling hangs up a flyer for a Black Power rally which upsets Memphis. There’s a generational conflict between Sterling and Memphis, who approach surviving in the Hill District in the 1960’s in very different ways.

The Black Power Movement was a social and political movement in which members believed that “desegregation was not sufficient,” and that the fight for equality could not be complete until White power structures were torn down and space was created for Black voices in leadership positions.

The Black Power Movement also focused on celebrating Blackness and deconstructing negative stereotypes of Black people. During this movement the famous phrases “Black is beautiful” and “Say it loud, I’m Black and I’m proud” became popular.
SCENIC DESIGN
Memphis’s diner in Two Trains Running serves as both the sole location that the audience sees in the story and a central metaphor of many themes that appear throughout the play. This rough sketch of the scenic model by designers Moriah and Isabel Curley-Clay shows the initial stage of how the diner will come to life in The Pyrle Theater. As you can see in the drawing, the audience will be seated on three sides, each with a unique view of the action onstage.

COSTUME DESIGN
Costume design helps us to learn more about the characters’ personalities based on their clothing. The costume designer’s process begins with finding research images that provide insight into what characters should be wearing. From there, costume designers create renderings to communicate what that costume will look like. Below are costume renderings for Two Trains Running from costume designer Grace McEwan.

**Memphis:** The owner of the diner. City wants to buy his diner for $12,000, but he wants $25,000.

**Risa:** Young woman, works as a waitress for Memphis at the diner.

- What inferences can you make about the characters based on their clothing?
- What can you predict about the diner or the people who eat there regularly, just by looking at the scenic sketch?
- How do design choices affect the way audience members understand or interpret the play?
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: POSTER DIALOGUE

Overview: Students will reflect about their experience viewing the production of Two Trains Running.
Age Group: 9th-12th
Content Area: English/Language Arts
Materials: Butcher Paper, Markers, Blue Tape
Approximate Time: 20-30 min
Standards:
- SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- B.A.1.2 Analyze informal or formal theatre productions in terms of the emotions or thoughts they evoke, characters, settings, and events.

Directions:
Invite students to reflect about their experience coming to see Two Trains Running. Explain that there are posters with different prompts around the room. Students will travel around the room, responding to these prompts. With a verbal prompt, or when music played in the background stops, they will move to the next poster. As they travel to different posters, they may notice that their peers have already written down their thoughts. Invite students to place a star or checkmark near comments that they agree with.

Some examples of prompts students could respond to are included here:
- A moment from the play that I’m still thinking about is…
- A moment from the play that surprised me…
- A question I still have is…
- I’d want to have a conversation with (Character, Playwright, Creative Team) about…
- A word or phrase to describe Two Trains Running is…

After students have made their way around the room, read responses from each poster aloud to the group, and invite students to discuss their responses.

Reflection Questions:
- What are the big ideas or themes that you see on this poster? What idea(s) do you see noted more than once?
- What questions do we still have as a group? Would anyone like to respond to these questions?

When should I use this activity?
This activity is best completed after attending the performance to allow students to reflect about their experience.

Extension:
Invite students to write a letter to the creative team of Two Trains Running expressing their thoughts about the production and asking any questions they still have about the play or the performance.

Credit: The Drama-Based Instruction Network
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: VISUAL MAPPING

Overview: Students will reflect about their experience with *Two Trains Running* by creating a visual map of their thoughts/responses.

Age Group: 9th-12th

Content Area: English/Language Arts

Materials: None

Approximate Time: 20 min

Standards:
- SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- B.A.1.2 Analyze informal or formal theatre productions in terms of the emotions or thoughts they evoke, characters, settings, and events.
- Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

Directions:
Invite students to stand in a circle. Explain that they will reflect on their experience with *Two Trains Running*. Ask students to come up with one word or phrase to describe their thoughts after seeing this production. This can be anything: a character, an idea from the play, a quote they remember, etc. Once everyone has come up with a phrase, ask students to write down on an index card. Ask students to read their phrase aloud. After students have read through their phrase, they will place it down on the floor. Invite students to categorize their thoughts, moving related ideas to form groupings and creating a visual map. When students are done, invite students to share what they notice about these categories and title each grouping of ideas.

Reflection Questions:
- What big ideas or categories do you notice?
- How did you decide which ideas should be grouped together?

When should I use this activity?
This activity is best completed after attending this production to allow students to reflect about their experience.

Extension:
Free Write or Journal Prompt: Invite students to pick an idea or theme from Visual Mapping and expand on it. Where do these ideas or themes emerge in *Two Trains Running*? Where do these ideas exist today?

Credit: The Drama-Based Instruction Network
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: TOUR OF A SPACE

Overview: Students will lead a peer through a tour of a location using movement and sensory details
Age Group: 9th-12th
Content Area: Theatre
Materials: None
Approximate Time: 15-20 min
Standards:
  B.C.1.2 Apply vocal elements of volume, pitch, rate, tone, articulation, and vocal expression.
  B.C.2.1 Use improvisation and acting skills, such as observation, concentration, and characterization in a variety of theatre exercises.

Directions:
Ask students to close their eyes and envision a place that they like to visit. This place could be real or imaginary. Ask them to visualize details about this place. What does it look like? What colors are there? What textures? What does it feel like? Smell like? Who else is there?

Invite students to find a partner and their own space in the room. Explain that students will be taking their partner on a tour of a space. Students can choose which space they want to give a tour of (Some possible options: It can be their favorite place or a place that is important to them). Encourage students to give as much sensory detail as possible, focusing on making their partner feel like they are actually there. Students will give their tour for five minutes and then switch. Afterwards, invite students to share one thing they remember from the tour.

Reflection Questions:
- What was it like to go on a tour of a space? What details did your partner add that made you feel like you were there?
- What was it like to give the tour? How did you communicate important details with your partner?
- Why are places or settings important in stories?
- How did the setting of Two Trains Running inform the story?

When should I use this activity?
This activity is best completed before the performance to allow students to think about how specific places hold significance.

Extension:
Creative Writing: Have students write down their descriptions (or as close as possible), translating it into written prose.

Creative Writing: Have students consider the place they choose and tell a story that could take place there. Use this as a journal prompt or extended writing assignment.

Credit: The Drama-Based Instruction Network
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: ROLE ON THE WALL

Overview: Students will identify the idea of urban development within Two Trains Running.
Age Group: 9th-12th
Content Area: English/Language Arts
Materials: Butcher paper, Markers
Approximate Time: 15-20 min
Standards:
- SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details.
- B.A.1.1 Interpret the plot structure and the thematic, technical, and dramaturgical elements within scenes from plays.

Directions:
Explain to students that one of the major themes of Two Trains Running is urban development. Ask students what they know about urban development. Where is urban development present in Two Trains Running? Who is affected by urban development, and how?

Explain to students that they will discuss the idea of urban development from the perspective of Memphis. Review information about Memphis that students remember from the performance. Draw an outline of a head and shoulders.

Explain that on the outside of the body, students will write messages that Memphis hears from the outside world (these could be direct quotes from the play, events, or paraphrases). What might some of those messages be? On the inside of the body, write how these messages make Memphis feel and how they might inform the choices that he makes. Invite students to repeat this process for the character of West. This can be a whole class activity or students can split up into groups and make their own.

Place Memphis and West side by side. What do you notice? How are the messages similar and different? What about the reactions to those messages? How do these characters reflect the larger conflicts occurring in the Hill district?

Reflection Questions:
- Do we see urban development happening today? Where? How is this similar or different to what we see in Two Trains Running?

When should I use this activity?
This activity is best completed after attending the performance, unless students have read the play before coming to see Two Trains Running.

Extension:
Invite students to find a partner. Explain that they will be having a conversation from the perspective of Memphis and West (after the conclusion of the play) about the possibility of West and Memphis going into business together in another neighborhood, using the Role on the Wall as inspiration. Consider what Memphis and West want to say to each other about this issue.

Credit: The Drama-Based Instruction Network
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: COMPARE AND CONTRAST: URBAN DEVELOPMENT THEN AND NOW

Overview: Students will explore urban development by comparing and contrasting the events of Two Trains Running with events of gentrification in North Carolina.

Age Group: 9th-12th

Content Area: English/Language Arts

Materials: Winston-Salem Journal Article, Board, Discussion Questions

Approximate Time: 30 min

Standards:
- SL.9-10.1 d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
- RI.11-12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, and/or persuasiveness of the text.
- I.A.1.1 Analyze the plot structure and the thematic, technical, and dramaturgical elements within plays.

Directions:
Explain to students that one of the major themes of Two Trains Running is gentrification. Ask students what they know about gentrification. Where do we see gentrification in Two Trains Running? Who is affected by gentrification and how? What does gentrification look like in the play?

Now invite students to think about where they see gentrification today. Pass out copies of the article: Crystal Towers Sale Ushers in Debate Over Gentrification, Safety Nets. Split students into groups and have them read the article out loud, jotting down major points.

Create a Venn Diagram on the board with Memphis’s diner on one side and leave the other side blank for now. Document students’ responses to the above questions in the “Memphis’ Diner” section.

Bring students back together and brainstorm what urban development looks like in this article. Write “Crystal Towers” on the other side of the Venn Diagram. Finally, invite students to consider what the diner and Crystal Towers have in common.

Reflection Questions:
- Who is affected by the selling of the Crystal Tower? How?
- How is the Crystal Tower an example of gentrification?
- Who likely benefits from the selling of the Crystal Tower? Who might be harmed?
- What do you think the owners of the building should do? Why?
- How is what is happening in Winston Salem similar to what is happening with Memphis’s diner? How are they different?

When should I use this activity?
This activity is best completed after attending this production, unless students have read the play before coming to see Two Trains Running.

Extension:
Journal Entry: Where else do you see urban development and gentrification happening? What does it look like? Who might be benefiting? Who might be harmed?
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: EXPLODING ATOM

Overview: Students will express an opinion on different statements about themes in Two Trains Running.

Age Group: 9th-12th

Content Area: English/Language Arts

Materials: Open Space, List of Prompts, Water Bottle

Approximate Time: 30 min

Standards:

SL.9.10.1 Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

SL.9.10.1 Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

Directions:

Invite students to join you standing in a circle. Explain that you will be reading a list of statements. If students agree with the statement, they will step towards the center of the circle (where the water bottle is). Explain that there are different degrees of agreement. If a student doesn't agree at all, they stay where they are in the circle. If they agree to an extent, they can decide how many steps to take forward. Once the statement has been read and students have moved, invite students to share why they are standing where they are. Students can change their stance once they hear the justification of a different stance if they’d like to. Try a practice statement like “I like ice cream.”

Some statements you might consider are:

- New businesses coming to an area is always good for that area.
- You should do what it takes to survive.
- You should fight for what you believe in, even if there are consequences.
- Money is the most important part of surviving.

After students move to express their opinions, ask them to look around and note the range of opinions in the room. Invite them to discuss why they chose to stand where they chose to stand. You might have students turn to someone standing near where they are (so they are talking to someone with whom they likely agree) and Think/Pair/Share about their reasons for standing where they are before sharing with the full group.

Reflection Questions:

- What was it like to take a stance on these statements? Were there ones you felt strongly about? Why?
- How did you decide what your opinion is? Did your opinion change once someone justified their stance?

When should I use this activity?

This activity is best completed before attending this performance to introduce students to themes in Two Trains Running.

Extension:

Persuasive Writing: Ask students to pick one of the statements that they feel particularly strongly about and write a flyer, persuading someone else that their claim is correct.

Credit: The Drama-Based Instruction Network
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about the Hill District and check out some teaching resources
This site provides some insight into the Hill District and also offers some teaching resources for teaching August Wilson.

Get more context about Civil Rights Movement and check out some teaching resources
This is a resource all about how to approach teaching various parts of the Civil Rights Movement, broken down by topic.

Learn more about August Wilson’s home
If students would like to learn more about August Wilson and get more context about the Hill District, this is a great resource.

Learn more about Drama Based Pedagogy
The Drama Based Instruction Network, located at the University of Texas, Austin is a comprehensive resource for integrating theatre and theatre activities into other academic subjects such as English, Math, Science etc. This is a database of activities broken down by age group and category.

REFERENCES

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Triad Stage is a professional not-for-profit regional theater company based in downtown Greensboro and downtown Winston-Salem. All Triad Stage productions are created in the Piedmont Triad of North Carolina using the best of local and national talent. Triad Stage gratefully acknowledges the support of its Season Sponsors: Blue Zoom, the North Carolina Arts Council, ArtsGreensboro and The Arts Council of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.

All Triad Stage productions feature the bold acting and breathtaking design that have been nationally recognized by The Wall Street Journal and by the American Theatre Wing, founder of the Tony Awards, which named Triad Stage one of the top ten most promising theatres in the country as a recipient of the 2010 National Theatre Company Grant. Triad Stage has also earned accolades including “Best North Carolina Production of 2010” for The Glass Menagerie by Triangle Arts & Entertainment magazine; “One of the Best Regional Theatres in America”, New York’s Drama League; “Best Live Theater” (thirteen years running), Go Triad/News & Record; and “Professional Theater of the Year” (2003, 2011), North Carolina Theatre Conference.