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# *Fences*

By August Wilson  
Directed by Lou Bellamy  
Presented by Cargill

August 21 through September 21, 2008  
Previews August 19 & 20

## INTRODUCTION

Penumbra Theatre Company is honored to dedicate the next four years exploring the 20<sup>th</sup> Century through the eyes of two time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson. We begin this year with *Fences*.

August Wilson is one of the most celebrated playwrights of the day. His accomplishments include a cycle of ten plays each devoted to a different decade in black American history through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He was awarded two Pulitzer Prizes, witnessed countless Broadway stagings of his work, procured film deals and the respect and admiration of artists, theorists and theatre-goers alike. His work offers students a special opportunity to deeply research the cultural nuance, specificity and experience of black Americans struggling for autonomy and a place within a country rent by its history of racialized slavery.

Because this playwright set himself about depicting African American life decade by decade through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, August Wilson's cycle presents a unique opportunity to explore the social and historical context for the drama. Each play becomes a window into American history, told by the disenfranchised, those that were all too often written out of the history books. Contemporary audiences witness the reanimation of our uniquely American history, situated always against the legacy of slavery that built this great nation. Wilson portrays the dogged determination, the abiding hope, and the deafening disappointment experienced by black Americans who found the rules changing to exclude them. The message came home clearly each time: the wealth, prosperity and justice of this great nation is available to the racial and economic elite. Poor black people would always have a hard row to hoe, but it was made doubly hard by those who were determined to maintain the old regime of subservience and domination.

Wilson's plays share black American pain and frustration but also ingenuity and efforts toward success in spite of seemingly insurmountable odds. What emerges is a richly nuanced visit with the American historical archive, a place to sit with old ghosts as well as old friends and both honor and reconcile the past.

The study guides will offer deep historical contextualization of each decade, while knitting together the larger American story of the birth of our nation and its rise to global dominance.