

# The Piano Lesson Resource Guide

Prepared by August Wilson Fellow Stephanie Lein Walseth

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## Piano Lesson critical essays, chapters, sections

- “Ghosts on the Piano: August Wilson and the Representation of Black American History” – Michael Morales (in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. By Alan Nadel)
- “*The Piano Lesson: From Discord to Harmony*” – Kim Pereira (in *August Wilson and the African-American Odyssey*)
- “August Wilson as Teacher: *The Piano Lesson*” – Sandra G. Shannon (in *The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson*)
- “*The Piano Lesson*” – Mary L. Bogumil (in *Understanding August Wilson*)
- “Phantom Limbs Dancing Juba Rites in August Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* and *The Piano Lesson*” – Reggie Young (in *August Wilson and Black Aesthetics*, eds. Dana A. Williams and Sandra G. Shannon)
- “Notes From the Past” by Peter Wolfe in *August Wilson*

## Piano Lesson Articles

- Dec 1987 – “Wilson’s ‘Piano Lesson,’” *New York Times* (C25)
- Dec 3, 1987 – Margaret Spillane, “Wilson’s Haunted Family,” *New Haven Independent*
- 1988 – David Byrne, “August Wilson’s ‘The Piano Lesson,’” *Theater* (19)
- Sept 5, 1989 – Mervyn Rothstein, “Helping a Serious Play on Broadway,” *New York Times* (C13, C15)
- Sept 10, 1989 – Mel Gussow, “Fine-Tuning ‘The Piano Lesson,’” *New York Times*
- April 13, 1990 – Nancy Furman, *After Hours* (Pulitzer)
- April 13, 1990 – Robert McFadden, *New York Times* (Pulitzer)
- April 13, 1990 – Laurie Goodstein and Megan Rosenfeld, *Washington Post* (Pulitzer)
- April 13, 1990 – Peter Vaughan, “St. Paul Dramatist’s Award Is His Second,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (1A, 14A)
- April 13, 1990 – Frank Rizzo, “State-Nurtured Drama Earns Author Pulitzer,” *Hartford Courant* (A10)
- April 13, 1990 – “Wilson Awarded Pulitzer Prize for *The Piano Lesson*,” *Yale Herald* (2)
- April 13, 1990 – “Wilson Captures 2<sup>nd</sup> Pulitzer; Drama Premiered at Yale Rep,” *New Haven Register* (1, 4)
- April 15, 1990 – “Second Wilson Pulitzer Honors Yale Rep,” *New Haven Register* (B2)
- April 16-22, 1990 – Herb Scher, “Turning ‘Profit’: The Yale Rep on Broadway,” *Theater Week* (20-25)
- April 17, 1990 – “A Family Confronts Its Ties in August Wilson’s ‘Piano Lesson,’” *New York Times* (C13, C15)
- April 20, 1990 – Enid Nemy, “After the Pulitzer,” *New York Times*
- April 22, 1990 – Robert Viagas, “New Haven Audiences Had a Hand in Wilson’s ‘Piano Lesson’ Pulitzer,” *New Haven Register* (D1, D2)
- April 23, 1990 – “Two Timer,” *Time* (99, Wilson one of 7 to win 2 Pulitzers)
- May 8, 1990 – “Wilson, Richards in Running for Tonys,” *Hartford Courant* (D1, D3)
- May 8, 1990 – “Tonys: Wilson Play ‘Piano Lesson’ in Contention after Yale Rep Start,” *New Haven Register* (3, 5)
- May 15, 1990 – “Critics Honor ‘Piano Lesson,’” *New York Times*

- May 16, 1990 – “Campaign Revamped...”, *Variety* (ad campaign for Broadway)
- May 17, 1990 – “Tony Lunch Abuzz over Criticism Aimed at Yale Rep,” *New Haven Register* (59, 61)
- June 3, 1990 – Frank Rich, “Broadway’s Bounty: Dramas Brimming With Life,” *New York Times* (sec. 2:1,8)
- June 3, 1990 – Mervyn Rothstein, “The Tony vs. the Pulitzers,” *New York Times* (sec. 2: 8)
- June 18, 1990 – Alexis Greene, *Theater Week*, “Charles S. Dutton: Not Ready to Accept Defeat.”
- Oct/Nov 1990 – Caroline Jackson, *Black Masks*, “‘The Piano Lesson’: A Chronicle Continued.”
- Winter/Spr 1996 – Claude Purdy, “Director’s Notes,” *Syracuse Stage View* (2)

### Plot Summary and overviews

- The Piano Lesson – Yvonne Shafer (in *August Wilson: A Research and Production Sourcebook*)
- The Piano Lesson – Mary Ellen Snodgrass (in *August Wilson: A Literary Companion*)

### Character summaries

- Mary Ellen Snodgrass (in *August Wilson: A Literary Companion*)

### Glossary terms

- Mary Ellen Snodgrass (in *August Wilson: A Literary Companion*)

### Photos/Images

- From online sources
- In *The Past as Present*

### Production History and Reviews/Articles

- Nov-Dec 1987 – Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven – Directed by Lloyd Richards
  - Dec 1987 – Markland Taylor, *New Haven Register*
  - Dec 1987 – Jennifer Mirsky, “The Natural Voice,” *Yale Daily News Magazine* (interview with Wilson prior to opening)
  - Dec 4, 1987 – Ted Friedman, *Yale Daily News*
  - Dec 7, 1987 – David Wilson, *New Haven Advocate* (34)
  - Dec 8, 1987 – Tom Caruso, *Journal Inquirer*
  - December 18, 1987 – Edwin Wilson, *Wall Street Journal*
- Jan 1988 – Huntington Theatre, Boston – Directed by Lloyd Richards
  - Jan 15, 1988 – William Gale, *Providence Rhode Island Journal*
- Jan 1988 - Chicago?
  - Jan 18, 1989 – Richard Christiansen, *Chicago Tribune*
  - Jan 18, 1989 – Hedy Weiss, *Chicago Sun Times* (36)
- Fall 1989 – Kennedy Center, Washington D.C.
  - Oct/Nov 1989 – Kennedy Center Newsletter
- April 1990 – Walter Kerr Theatre, New York – Directed by Lloyd Richards
  - February 19, 1990 – Jack Kroll, *Newsweek*, (Playing at UCLA before New York)
  - April 17, 1990 – Frank Rich, *New York Times*
  - April 17, 1990 – Clive Barnes, *New York Post*
  - April 17, 1990 – Howard Kissel, *Daily News*
  - April 17, 1990 – David Patrick Stearns, *USA Today*
  - April 17, 1990 – Linda Winer, *New York Newsday*
  - April 18, 1990 – “The Piano Lesson”, *Variety*
  - April 20, 1990 – Douglas Watt, *Daily News*

- April 23, 1990 – John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor
- April 23, 1990 – Edwin Wilson, Wall Street Journal
- April 30, 1990 – Mimi Kramer, New Yorker
- May 7, 1990 – Margaret Spillane, Theater Week
- Nov 1990 – Yale Rep?
  - Nov 29, 1990 – Malcolm Johnson, Hartford Courant
- Sept-Oct 1992 – Grandel Square Theatre, St. Louis Black Repertory Theatre, St. Louis
- Oct-Nov 1992 – Theatre Three, Dallas – Directed by Laurence O’Dwyer
- Jan 1993 – Goodman Theatre, Chicago (before NY premiere)– Directed by Steven Billington
  - Jan 20, 1993 – Richard Christiansen, Chicago Tribune (20)
  - Jan 28, 1993 – Andrew Patner, Chicago Sun-Times (sec 2: 35)
- May-July 1993 – Penumbra Theatre Company, St. Paul – Directed by Marion McClinton
  - May 7, 1993 – Peter Vaughan, Minneapolis Star Tribune (14E, 15E)
  - May 8, 1993 – Jayne M. Blanchard, St. Paul Pioneer Press (5C)
- Oct 1993 – Tricycle Theatre, London – Directed by Paulette Randell
  - Oct 9, 1993 – Michael Billington, The Guardian (n.p.)
  - Oct 9, 1993 – Paul Taylor, The Independent (30)
  - Oct 13, 1993 – Sheridan Morley, International Herald Tribune
- Jan 1995 – TV Production by Hallmark Hall of Fame on CBS – Directed by Lloyd Richards
  - Jan 30, 1995 – “Charles Dutton, Alfre Woodard Star in TV Production of ‘The Piano Lesson’”, Jet (63)
  - Jan 30, 1995 – Paul Droesch, TV Guide (43)
  - Jan 30, 1995 – Jonathon Taylor, Variety (41)
- Feb 1996 – Syracuse Stage – Directed by Claude Purdy
- More to be added here...

## **Chronologies/Timelines**

### **Wilson**

- August Wilson’s Life and Works – Mary Ellen Snodgrass (in August Wilson: A Literary Companion)
- Wilson’s Genealogy - Mary Ellen Snodgrass (in August Wilson: A Literary Companion)
- August Wilson’s Life – Marilyn Elkins (in August Wilson: A Casebook)
- Chronology – Sandra G. Shannon (in The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson)
- Chronology – Peter Wolfe in August Wilson
- Chronology – Yvonne Shafer in August Wilson: A Research and Production Sourcebook

### **Wilson’s Characters/Plays**

- Time Line of Hill District Residents and Events - Mary Ellen Snodgrass (in August Wilson: A Literary Companion)

## **Interviews with Wilson and Directors, Actors, and Designers of Wilson’s work**

- “The Historical Perspective: An Interview with August Wilson” by Richard Pettengill in August Wilson: A Casebook, ed. Marilyn Elkins (Interview Date – Jan. 25, 1993, focus mostly on Joe Turner)
- “The Ground on Which He Stands: Charles S. Dutton on August Wilson” by Yolanda Williams Page in August Wilson and Black Aesthetics, eds. Dana A. Williams and Sandra G. Shannon (Interview Date – Oct. 2002, focus on four plays, including Piano Lesson, and Wilson’s ideas for a black theater)
- “A Conversation with August Wilson” by Sandra G. Shannon and Dana A. Williams in August Wilson and Black Aesthetics (Interview Date – Sept. 26, 2003, focus black aesthetics, black theater, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Cycle)

- “August Wilson Explains His Dramatic Vision: An Interview” by Sandra G. Shannon in *The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson* (Interview Date – Nov. 1991, focus Blues, History, Dramaturgy)
- “Starletta DuPois: On the August Wilson Express,” by Caroline Jackson in *Black Masks*, Apr/May 1988 (Interview with actress on her role in *Piano Lesson*)
- *In Their Own Words* by David Savran (Interview date – 1987, focus –plays, characters, critics’ response)
- “August Wilson’s America” by Bill Moyers in *American Theatre*, June 1989 (life, culture, attitude)
- “Charles S. Dutton: Not Ready to Accept Defeat” by Alexis Greene in *Theater Week*, June 18, 1990: 36-39. (talks about playing roles including *Boy Willie*)
- “Christopher Akerlind” by Karl G. Ruling in *Theatre Crafts*, Jan 1992 (35, 54) (Lighting Designer)
- “On Listening: An Interview with August Wilson” by Susan Johann in *American Theatre*, April 1996: 22

**Other books, articles, chapters on August Wilson, the Wilson Cycle, Black Aesthetics, etc.**

- “Members and Lames: Language in the Plays of August Wilson” by William W. Cook, in *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora*, eds. Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker II, Gus Edwards
- *The Past as Present in the Drama of August Wilson* by Harry J. Elam Jr. (excerpts from)
- “August Wilson and the Four B’s: Influences” by Mark William Rocha, in *August Wilson: A Casebook*, ed. Marilyn Elkins
- “Ghosts from ‘Down There’: The Southernness of August Wilson” by Patricia Gantt in *August Wilson: A Casebook*, ed. Marilyn Elkins
- “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: From the Local to the Mythical in August Wilson” by Pamela Jean Monaco in *August Wilson: A Casebook*, ed. Marilyn Elkins
- “Ma Rainey and the Boyz: Gender Ideology in August Wilson’s Broadway Canon” by Kim Marra in *August Wilson: A Casebook*, ed. Marilyn Elkins
- “Understanding August Wilson as an African American Playwright” by Mary L. Bogumil in *Understanding August Wilson*
- “The History Lesson: Authenticity and Anachronism in August Wilson’s Plays” by Anne Fleche in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. Alan Nadel
- “August Wilson’s Burden: The Function of Neoclassical Jazz” by Craig Werner in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. Alan Nadel
- “Romare Bearden, August Wilson, and the Traditions of African Performance” by Joan Fishman in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. Alan Nadel
- “The Ground on Which I Stand: August Wilson’s Perspective on African American Women” by Sandra G. Shannon in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. Alan Nadel
- “August Wilson’s Women” by Harry J. Elam Jr. in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. Alan Nadel
- “August Wilson’s Gender Lesson” by Missy Dehn Kubitschek in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. Alan Nadel
- “In Lieu of Justice” by Peter Wolfe in *August Wilson*
- “Forever Under Attack” by Peter Wolfe in *August Wilson*
- “The August Wilson Experiment: Buying Time” by Benjamin Mordecai in *American Theatre*, Jan 1987

- “The Good Christian’s Come and Gone: The Shifting Role of Christianity in August Wilson Plays” by Sandra G. Shannon in *Melus*, Fall 1989-90: 127-142
- “August Wilson” by Addell A. Anderson in *Contemporary Dramatists*, Washington: St. James Press, 1993: 717-719
- “Blues, History, and the Dramaturgy of August Wilson” by Jay Plum in *African American Review*, Winter 1993: 561-567
- “Blues, History, and Dramaturgy” by Sandra G. Shannon in *African American Review*, Winter 1993: 539-559
- “Breaking Barriers: August Wilson” by Yvonne Shafer in *Staging Difference: Cultural Pluralism in American Theatre and Drama*, ed. Marc Maufort. New York: Peter Lang, 1995. 267-285
- “Life and Career” in *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, ed. Alan Nadel
- “A Song in Search of Itself” by Hilary DeVries, *American Theatre*, Jan 1987 (Wilson’s life, outlook, plays)
- “A Voice From the Streets” by Samuel G. Freedman, *New York Times Magazine*, March 1987
- “Cool August” by Dinah Livingston, *Minnesota Monthly*, Oct 1987 (Wilson’s relationship with St. Paul)
- William A. Henry, *Time*, Jan 1989 (Wilson)
- “August Wilson’s Journey” by Laurel Saiz, *Syracuse Stage View*, Winter/Spr 1996 (2)

### Wilson-Brustein Debate

- May 15, 1990 – Mervyn Rothstein, “Passionate Beliefs Renew Theater Fight Over Art and Profit,” *New York Times* (C13)
- May 16, 1990 – Richard Hummler, *Variety*
- May 21, 1990 – Robert Brustein, *New Republic*, “The Lesson of ‘The Piano Lesson.’”
- June 3, 1990 – Beth Dufresne, *New London Day*
- June 18, 1990 – Robert Brustein, *New Republic*, Reply to attack letters
- June 18, 1990 – Laura Kaminker, *New Republic*, “Letter to Editor.”
- June 18, 1990 – Jack Viertel, *New Republic*, “Letter to Editor” (3)
- July 1, 1996 – Greg Evans, “August a Scorcher at Nonprof Confab,” *Variety* (45)
- Aug 19&26, 1996 – Robert Brustein, “Subsidized Separatism,” *New Republic* (39-42)
- Sept 1996 – August Wilson, “The Ground on Which I Stand”, *American Theatre*
- Oct 1996 – “August Wilson Responds”, *American Theatre*
- Oct 1996 – Robert Brustein, “Subsidized Separatism,” *American Theatre* (26, 27, 100, 101)
- Nov 9, 1996 – Lou Bellamy, “Forum,” *American Theatre* (62, 82)
- Nov 1996 – Robert Brustein, “Forum,” *American Theatre* (62, 81)
- Nov 1996 – Patti Hartigan, “Forum,” *American Theatre* (63)
- Dec 1996 – Douglas Barnett, “Up For the Challenge,” *American Theatre* (60)
- Dec 1996 – Alan Gerstle, “Not Radical Enough. Forum,” *American Theatre* (59)
- Dec 1996 – Richard Schechner, “Forum,” *American Theatre* (58-59)
- Dec 1996 – Marion X, “Forum,” *American Theatre* (60)
- Dec 13, 1996 – William Grimes, “Face to Face on Multiculturalism,” *New York Times* (C2)
- Jan 22, 1997 – Paul Goldberger, “From Page to Stage: Race and the Theater,” *New York Times* (C11, 14)
- Jan 26, 1997 – Michael Riedel, “Guns of August,” *Daily News* (5)
- Jan 28, 1997 – Richard Goldstein, “Culture Shock: The Grudge Match as Kulturkampf,” *Village Voice* (46-47)

- Jan 28, 1997 – Roger S. Kuhn, “Black Theater Debate,” New York Times (A20)
- Jan 29, 1997 – William Grimes, “Face to Face Encounter on Race in the Theater,” New York Times (C9-10)
- Jan 31, 1997 – Robert Simonson, “Wilson v. Brustein: A Drama at Town Hall,” Back Stage (3, 41)
- Feb 1, 1997 – Frank Rich, “Two Mouths Running,” New York Times (19)
- Feb 2, 1997 – “Standing Room,” Variety (86)
- Feb 3, 1997 – Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Chitlin Circuit,” The New Yorker (44-55)
- Feb 4, 1997 – Margo Jefferson, “Oratory vs. Really Talking About Culture,” New York Times (C11, 14)
- Feb 5, 1997 – Jerry Tallmer, “A ‘Flagship’ for Black Theater? Douglas Ward Created It,” The Villager (11)
- Feb 10, 1997 – John Heilpern, “Nobody Wins, Everybody Loses, In Wilson-Brustein Race Debate,” New York Observer (39)
- Feb 11, 1997 – Eugene Nesmith, “Separate But Equal?” Village Voice (48)
- Feb 11, 1997 – Alisa Solomon, “Stock Characters,” Village Voice (46-47)
- Feb 12, 1997 – Frank Bruni, “From the Wings, a Prayer: A Black Troupe Improvises,” New York Times (C9, 18)
- Feb 14, 1997 – John Silvers, “Wilson-Brustein: Whither Multiracial?” Back Stage (8)
- Feb 17, 1997 – John Simon, “Black and Blue,” New York Magazine (57)
- Mar 1997 – “Wilson, Brustein & the Press,” American Theatre (17-19)

#### **Other resources**

- *Playing in the Dark* by Toni Morrison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992)
- *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America 1619-1964* by Lerone Bennett, Jr (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966)
- “An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional” in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* by bell hooks (Boston: South End Press, 1990)