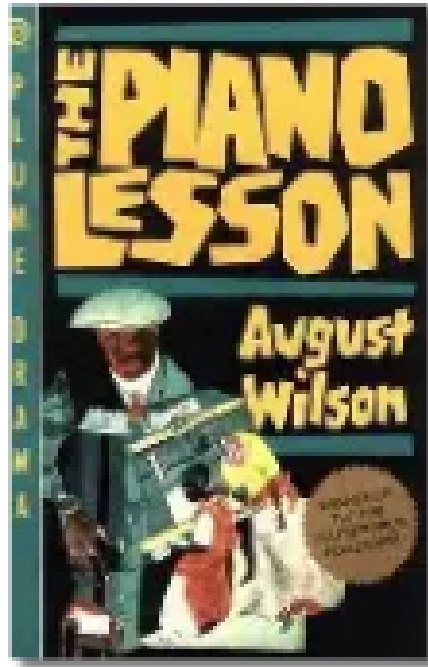


THE PIANO LESSON

August Wilson



RESOURCE GUIDE

Reading + Writing + Analysis

NO PREP

PRINT & GO

HIGH SCHOOL ELA

About the Play

The Piano Lesson tells the story of a brother and sister, Boy Willie and Berniece, who disagree about what to do with a family piano that holds deep historical meaning. Set in the 1930s, the play explores how the past continues to shape the present.

Through their conflict, the play shows how history, memory, and identity are connected. The piano becomes a symbol of family legacy, forcing the characters to decide whether to preserve their past or use it to build a different future.

KEY THEMES

- Family legacy and history
- Memory and identity
- The value of the past
- Conflict between tradition and progress
- Ownership and responsibility

BEFORE YOU READ

- How important is it to hold onto family history?
- Can the past help or limit a person's future?
- What happens when family members disagree about something meaningful?
- What objects or traditions carry importance in your own family?

Section Breakdown

- **Section 1: Act 1, Scene 1**

Introduction to the family, the piano, and the central conflict

- **Section 2: Act 1, Scene 2**

Background of the piano and deeper family history

- **Section 3: Act 2, Scene 1**

Rising conflict and differing views on the piano

- **Section 4: Act 2, Scene 2**

Resolution, legacy, and understanding the past

Comprehension Questions:

SECTION 1

1. Where does the play take place, and how is the setting described?
2. Who are the main characters introduced at the beginning?
3. What is the significance of the piano?
4. Why does Boy Willie come to visit?
5. What early conflict is introduced?

Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

Why do objects from the past hold meaning for people?

Comprehension Questions

SECTION 2

1. What does Boy Willie want to do with the piano?

2. Why does Berniece refuse to sell it?

3. How do their views represent different ideas about the past?

4. What role do other characters play in the conflict?

5. How does tension build between the characters?

Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

Should the past be used to move forward or preserved as it is?

Comprehension Questions

SECTION 3

1. What deeper meaning is revealed about the piano?

2. How does the history of the piano connect to the family?

3. What emotional conflicts develop in this section?

4. How do the characters respond to these tensions?

5. What moment begins to shift the direction of the story?

Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

How does understanding history change the way people make decisions?

Comprehension Questions

SECTION 4

1. How is the conflict over the piano resolved?

2. How does Berniece change by the end of the play?

3. What role does the piano play in the final scenes?

4. How do the characters honor their past?

5. What message does the play leave the audience with?

Quick Discussion

Time to Reflect

What does the piano ultimately represent?

DRAMA ANALYSIS

Elements of Drama

- Dialogue reveals character conflict and perspective
- Stage directions shape mood and tension
- Conflict centers around values and decisions
- Symbolism plays a key role in meaning

HISTORICAL CONNECTION

Legacy After Slavery & The Great Migration

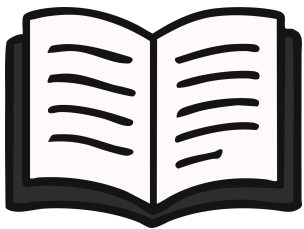
The Piano Lesson reflects the impact of slavery and how its legacy continues to shape future generations. Many families carried history through stories, objects, and traditions.

Connection to the play:

The piano represents family history, struggle, and the question of how the past should be remembered and used.

Extension Activities

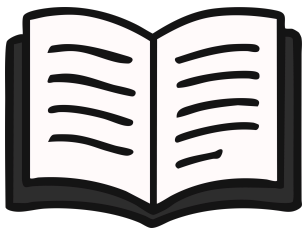
Choose one activity to complete.



- Analyze the symbolism of the piano



- Compare Berniece and Boy Willie's perspectives

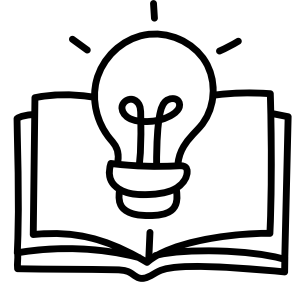


- Create a visual timeline of the piano's history

Understanding the Big Ideas

This story explores:

- **Heritage and legacy**
- **The importance of history**
- **Family and identity**
- **The past vs the future**



How does August Wilson use the piano as a symbol to represent history and identity? Use examples from the play to support your response.

Final Project

- Analyze how the piano represents the family's history
- Compare two characters and their views on the past
- Create a presentation on the themes of the play

Character Notes