

WELCOME

Center Theatre Group is very excited to bring you access to our archival performance of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson, which was presented live at the Mark Taper Forum in spring 2013.

We believe a great play raises questions about the human condition, and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers.

We have designed these activities and the companion videos to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow up the performance with options for discussion, reflection, and creativity. During the videos, you can have your students follow the Teaching Artists and just pause the video when needed.

PRE-SHOW GOALS

Introduce the play, playwright and themes of play

Build curiosity about some of the big ideas in this play

Provide information about the story, style and Inspiration for the piece

Activities (pages 2-13)

01—Introduction and Overview (4:34)

02—Journey (14:00)

03—Boarding House (16:08)

04—Lost/Found (20:49)

05—Closure (1:21)

POST-SHOW GOALS

Reflect on the art. What is staying with you?

Examine how this play connects to our lives and world

Artistically explore ideas from the play

Activities (pages 13-21)

06—Reflection (5:21)

07—Song Lyric Collage (4:59)

08—Song Lyric Poem (3:12)

09—Song Through Gesture (9:34)

10—Song and Music-Juba (14:19)

11—Closure (1:17)

INTRODUCTION TO AUGUST WILSON AND THE AMERICAN CENTURY CYCLE

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson is one of the most influential writers in American theatre.

He is best known for the American Century Cycle. In 10 plays— each set in a different decade of the 20th century— August Wilson captured the daily lives and challenges of African Americans one decade at a time. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, set in 1911, is the second play in the cycle.

Wilson is quoted as saying *“I am not a historian. I happen to think that the content of my mother's life – her myths, her superstitions, her prayers, the contents of her pantry, the smell of her kitchen, the song that escaped from her sometimes parched lips, her thoughtful repose and pregnant laughter - are all worthy of art.”* With these words he lets us all know that we are the expert of our experiences and our experience is worthy of being shared.

A writer himself, Wilson was influenced heavily by different arts forms. His influences are known as the four B's. They are the writing of Amiri **Baraka**, the artwork of Romare **Bearden**, the music of the **Blues**, and writer Jorge Luis **Borges**. This play in particular is based on a painting by Bearden and a blues song called [“Joe Turner.”](#)



INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

August Wilson said that *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* was his favorite of all his plays, explaining that the play is about “people searching, emerging from the 300-year experience of slavery dazed and stunned, just trying to get your bearings, finding out who you are and what happened to you”.

The play starts in 1911 at Seth and Bertha Holly's boarding house in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (49 years after The Emancipation Proclamation).

The Great Migration has just begun and thousands of former slaves are pouring into the North searching for a better life.

We meet travelers – people migrating to the industrial north – in search of work, a new life, and somewhere to belong.

For each character we meet, the boarding house provides food, shelter, conversation, song, and a sense of community before they continue on their journey.

JOURNEY

Objectives

- Plant the idea of journey and how both the personal and ancestral journeys shape these characters' lives
- Explore our personal journeys and ancestral journeys and how these journeys get us to where we are today
- Discover our next/future journey

Activity

Joe Turner's Come and Gone takes place in 1911, during a time period that came to be known as the Great Migration.

The Great Migration lasted from approximately 1910 until 1970 and it refers to the exodus of more than six million African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North, Midwest and West. Large metropolitan cities held the promise of good jobs, freedom and a better quality of life.

<http://metrocosm.com/great-migration-visualization/>



These journeys took their toll—physically and emotionally. Most people didn't have cars and their resources for travel were limited. Those who could afford it caught trains and boats, or used horse-drawn carriages, but the majority were on foot much of the time.

Many of the characters we meet in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* are part of this migration.

In the opening stage directions, August Wilson writes:

"From the deep and the near South the sons and daughters of newly freed African slaves wander into the city. Isolated, cut off from memory, having

forgotten the names of the gods and only guessing at their faces, they arrived dazed and stunned, their heart kicking in their chest with a song worth singing. They arrive carrying Bibles and guitars, their pockets lined with dust and fresh hope, marked men and women seeking to scrape from the narrow, crooked cobbles and the fiery blasts of the coke furnace a way of bludgeoning and shaping the malleable parts of themselves into a new identity as free men of definite and sincere worth.”



In breakout groups of 4-6, access the above world map image via share screen in Zoom or via this external Google jamboard link:

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1M-h3PvdnvF6Y-TWGoBpvbXL9QopaO8XFgPeCJ2XIS0E/copy>

One at a time, students may use the creative visual tools on the screen to share their migration journeys. Draw, stamp, highlight, etc.

To the best of your knowledge, please share any part of your migration journey. This can be a personal journey you’ve taken in your life or it can be the journey of your known ancestors. What physical journey has brought you here to this present location? Who left their home and set out on a journey that has shaped the journey that you’re currently on?

Private Reflection Questions:

- What did it take for you to be here taking this workshop right now?
- How many miles have been crossed to get you here?
- How has your journey separated you from people? If it has, who?
- If there is someone from your journey in the past that you would want to meet, who would that be? Why?

Future Journeys

Let's look to our future journeys. This journey can be literal or figurative. It can be a creative journey, or professional, or spiritual, etc. You choose.

- What is a journey you want to take in your future?
- Where do you want to go?
- What do you want to do?
- What kind of experiences do you want to have?

Imagine you are going to start that journey now.

- What excites you about this journey?
- What frightens you about this journey?
- If you could only bring one object with you on this journey to remind you of where you've been, what would you bring?

**Note to Educators: You can keep these questions as private reflections for students and can also use them as inspiration for creative writing and/or other art-making activities.*

BOARDING HOUSE

Objectives

- Introduce the setting and concept of Boarding House to students
- Introduce some of the characters they will meet in this play by creating characters physically
- Build curiosity about the characters
- Imagine life for these individuals under one communal roof

Activity

The setting for *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is in and around Seth and Bertha's Boarding House in Pittsburgh in 1911.

A Boarding House was a crossroads of society. People from all different experiences and walks of life could find themselves renting rooms for a night, for months, or even years. The common areas, like kitchens and bathrooms, are typically shared. It's almost like a dorm room for the real world. These types of living quarters were very popular in northern cities that were hubs for Black folks escaping the south through the great migration. They provided community and safety.

Each character we meet in this play arrives from their journey at the door of this Boarding House. Some have been traveling for a long time, or just came from next door, some have lived here all their lives. Some stay for a long time, others a few days. Some get along, others don't.

In the play, a room cost \$2 a week. \$8 a month, a little over one quarter a day. \$1 in 1911 is equivalent to about \$27 today.

- \$2 a week = \$54 a week today.
- \$8 a month = \$216 a month.
- .25 a day = \$7 a day.

Character Exploration

Ask the class to stand up and move around their zoom screens. They might have a lot of space or very little. Both are fine. Ask them to move in whatever space they have.

Start walking around, shake out your arms and legs.

- Begin to cover the space taking up a LOT of space (big steps, stretch out arms)
- Now cover the space taking up very LITTLE space (tiny steps, contract body)
- Next cover the space HEAVY (stomping into the ground - only if this won't bother anyone around or below you)
- Cover the space LIGHT (floaty, as if no gravity)
- Now cover the space with your REGULAR walk
- Shake out

Introduce some different characters from the play using the characteristics listed below. Move through the space exploring how these characters might walk or move through the world physically. You can't get it wrong. We are just exploring.

Physical Exploration Questions:

- Does this character move fast, slow, heavy, light, skip etc.?
- Do they make eye contact with other characters or look at the ground?
- Do they smile/frown?

Imagine you are a person...

- who is grumpy and gossipy
- with a broken heart
- with big dreams who knows those dreams are coming true
- who has been broken down by injustice
- who is a spiritual healer
- who only looks out for themselves
- who loves life and laughs a lot

After exploring all of the characters physically, pick one of these characters to focus on:

- Maybe it is the character that most intrigues you.
- Maybe you pick the character who is the most fun.
- Maybe you pick the character who is the most challenging.
- Do you know anyone like this in your real life?

Cover the space as that character exploring what it feels like to move as that character.

Stop and Imagine this character arriving at the Boardinghouse. How does this character feel right before they knock on the door? Are they excited? Scared? Bored? What do they hope they find on the other side of the Boardinghouse door?

Knock. Make your entrance as your character and sit down in front of the Zoom screen.

Imagine our Zoom room is one big kitchen table. All these different people are sitting down to eat a meal. Look around at the different people sitting at this virtual table.

Reflection Questions:

- Imagine you were quarantined with all these people. What do you think it would be like to live under one roof with so many different people?
- Can you create a family from strangers?
- Is there anyone here you think might share your same story?
- How will your life be different from living with these people? How will you be different?
- What are the similarities and differences between your real home and this boarding house?
- What will you discover from living with these people under this roof?

As you watch the show notice what happens to the different characters after they arrive at the boarding house.

LOST/FOUND

Objectives

- Introduce the idea of not being able to easily stay in touch with people
- Have students connect with this idea emotionally and physically
- Introduce the idea of the People Finder and what it took to locate someone you had lost, gotten separated from
- Contrast the time of the play and our present day ability to stay in touch

Activity

Private Reflection

To yourself (and this is just for you), think of someone or something important to you that you've lost. How did you lose them? How does it feel to be separated from them?

Now, imagine that you are reunited with them. How did you find them? Or how did they find you? How does it feel to be reunited? It is joyous, intimidating, disappointing? Is it a relief?

Discussion

Imagine that a friend of yours, someone you care about, has to move to another state or country. How will you stay in touch?

(Possible answers: Text messages, email, social media, phone calls, etc.)

What if you were not able to stay in touch any of those ways? It's not so easy to connect. That technology doesn't exist. There are no passenger planes; there are no cars. There is no internet; there are no home phones.

(Possible answer: send a letter)

What if you were not sure where your friend was living now? How could you find them?

In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the character Herald Loomis and his daughter Zonia are searching for Martha Pentecost, his wife/her mother. The family was separated when Joe Turner and his men captured and imprisoned Loomis. (Loomis has not seen Martha in 11 years, Zonia has not seen her in 6, and they have been searching for her together for 4). When we meet them in the play, Loomis and Zonia are traveling the country in search of Martha. They ask around and eventually hire Rutherford Selig, a self-declared "People Finder," also known as someone particularly good at tracking down people.

People Finder

**Note to Educators: This activity requires assigning secret numbers to individual students in advance (unless you happen to be really fast at private chatting!). [See example](#). You'll also want to be sure to prep whatever online tool you are using to have students create their character cards. Example: <http://note.ly/CTGpeoplefinder>*

Set-up/Character Cards

Think about someone who means a lot to you, someone you have a close connection with. It can be a best friend, a close family member, a favorite coach, etc. Once you have that person in mind, find your *Who I'm Looking For* number (e.g. Someone #17) and complete that character card based on that person.

IMPORTANT: Keep your numbers private! Do NOT reveal your numbers to anyone.

Sample character card [does NOT include name]:

SOMEONE #17

Age: 0-20, 20-40, 40-60, 60-80, 80-100

Hair: Black, Brown, Blonde, Red, White, Grey, Other

Eyes: Brown, Green, Blue, Hazel, Amber, Red

Height: Short, Medium, Tall



Once you've completed your character cards, find your *Who I Am* number and write down the information from that card.

NOTE: Do not share any information until asked, and NEVER share your numbers.

Student	Who I'm Looking For (Original Character Card)	Who I Am (Assigned Character Card)
Ramy	1	15
Tara	2	4
Traci	3	8
Deb	4	12
Johnathan	5	1
Rebecca	6	5
Jessica	7	9
Carissa	8	13
Michael	9	2
Robert	10	6
David	11	10
Darrien	12	14
Jesus	13	3
Mara	14	7
Stan	15	11

NOTE: Numbers must be shared with each student privately so that no one knows who has which numbers. Be sure each student has two different numbers.

In this next part, you'll have two tasks:

1. Answer questions truthfully, based on your *Who I Am* character card.
2. Ask "yes" or "no" questions to try to track down the person who has your original *Who I'm Looking For* character card.

The Search

For this activity, we're going to imagine that each of you have somehow been separated from your "someone"—the person you wrote about on your first character card.

Each of you is now looking for your special "someone". You will be put into timed breakout rooms. Once in the room, each person may ask one other person a "yes" or "no" question. Each person will respond with "yes/no" based on the information given on their assigned character card. You may continue asking/answering questions one at a time until time runs out. When/if you think you are sure that you have found your "Who I'm Looking For" person, then you should immediately return with that person to the main room. The objective: be the first to find your someone. (NOTE: You may not use the chat feature during this activity.)

Discussion

Were you able to find your someone? If so, how? If not, what made it difficult? What was it like not being able to find them?

Based on our previous discussions and this activity, what do you think searching for someone in 1911 America would have been like? How might a professional "People Finder" have been helpful?

Activity Variation

Assign someone to be the official "People Finder", granting them access to move from breakout room to breakout room.

CLOSURE

While you watch the play...

In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, playwright August Wilson explores the idea that every person has a song worth singing but that life often causes us to lose or forget our song. Wilson said "understanding and knowing who you are, is, in essence, your song."

While you watch the play think about this idea of SONG. What does it mean to have a song worth singing? Can knowing your song help you be free?

We will explore the idea of Song in our post-show activities.

Enjoy *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*!

POST-SHOW REFLECTION

Objectives

- Reflect on the experience of seeing the play for each individual student and for the whole class
- Notice the commonalities and differences in each person's theatre-going experience

Activity

What's staying with you from seeing *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*? An image, a moment, a feeling, a line from the play?

Which character would you want to sit down and eat a meal with? Why? What would you ask them? What would you talk about?

We explored the idea of journeys in our pre-show workshop. Is there a specific character's journey that really spoke to you? Why? What do you think is the next journey for the different characters?

Discussion

In the play, Bynum shares that each character has a song worth singing, but that life often causes us to lose or forget our song. August Wilson believed that "understanding and knowing who you are... is in essence your song.... You in fact need that, and you must not ever let anyone take that away from you."

Bynum says, "You bound onto your song.... All you got to do is sing it. Then you be free." Bynum's song is the binding song—bringing together people/objects who are supposed to be together. What do you think are the songs for some of the other characters we met in the play?

Reflection

Let's take a few minutes and think about our own songs. If you are comfortable, close your eyes, or keep a soft focus. Take a deep breath in and out.

As Wilson said, your song is "understanding and knowing who you are." A song can be a quality you have inside, a job you do in the world, a belief, a mission, something you value. What is your song? Don't worry if you are not sure what your song is. What would you like it to be?

Is there someone who helps you know that you have "a song worth singing?" Someone who believes in you and your song even when you can't? How does your song help the world around you? How would you like it to help the world? How will you share your song with the world? How do other people's songs help you sing your song? What does it/will it feel like to sing your song?

Take another deep breath and open your eyes.

SONG LYRIC COLLAGE

Objectives (for all song activities to follow)

- Explore the theme of Song in the play and in our lives
- Understand how Song is valuable to the individual and to the larger community.
- Create individual and group art from each person's song through a variety of activities (including writing, movement and music.)

Activity

What is a song or song lyric that represents you right now, that expresses your song?
Write down the lyric, song, and the artist.

Is there a different song lyric for your future or is it the same one?
Write down the lyric, song, and the artist.

Share your lyrics (in the chat room, in partners, small groups) and eventually with the whole group. As you listen, notice which of your classmates' lyrics also speak to you or inspire you. How do their lyrics add to your song?

As a class, combine your "songs" into a group song or poem from the lyrics.

As a class, make a visual collage, poster, or word cloud of the words that stick out to you the most.

As a class, create a playlist of all the songs.

**Note to Educators: The class could create two different versions of any of the above activities, one for the present lyrics and one for the future.*

SONG LYRIC POEM

Activity

This fill in the blank poem combines the ideas of journey (past, present, future) and song from *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*.

I come from the song of...

I sing the song of...

I'll write the song of...

Share your poems (in the chat room, in partners, small groups) and eventually with the whole group.

As you listen, notice which of your classmates' poems also speak to you or inspire you. How do their poems add to your song?

As a class, how do you want to combine your poem "songs" into a group song?

How do you turn your poems into lyrics? Do you add movement or music?

How else can you take the individual poems and create a community song?

SONG THROUGH GESTURE

Activity

Gesture is a simple physical movement that represents your song. Sometimes movement can express better than words the essence of your “song.”

Warm-Up

Share your name and a gesture and ask the class to repeat each students’ name and gesture back to them 3 times. You can also start with a non-verbal check-in with each participant sharing a physical gesture that expresses how they are right now.

Song Gesture

Ask the class to turn their backs to the camera on Zoom.

Think about your song. How does your song feel? Why does your song matter to you? How might singing your song set you free? What is a gesture or a movement phrase that expresses your song?

Countdown from 10. Everyone turns back to the camera and shares their gesture.

Go around the Zoom space and share the gestures one at a time.

Notice which of your classmates’ gestures most speak to you or inspire you. Which gestures are very similar in spirit to yours? Which gestures feel very different from your song gesture? How might their song add to your song?

Group Movement

Combine the individual gestures into group movement. The group repeats each student's gesture back to them like in the name warm-up. Ask them to add in their name or a word that reflects their SONG.

Put students into small groups in breakout rooms and have them combine their 4-5 gestures into one movement phrase or dance.

Have the whole class learn each individual's gesture and together create a movement phrase/choreography that you underscore with music. You could use the song lyric playlist created in a previous activity as your music.

Discussion

Discuss August Wilson’s belief that our songs are not just for us as individuals - we share them with the world. And that we are shaped by the songs of the people around us.

SONG AND MUSIC (JUBA)

Activity

Bynum says, "You bound onto your song.... All you got to do is sing it. Then you be free."

Group Discussion or Think/Pair Share

Does music make you feel free?

Do you think humans need music in our lives? Why or why not?

What's the power of music?

In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the characters share music and dance as they "Juba". In Act 1, Scene 4, we see them create music together using instruments, movement, rhythm, and words.

Let's take a look at how we might add music to our own "songs", incorporating the words and/or gestures we created in the previous activities.

Don't worry. We're not going to ask you to sing out loud in front of everyone (unless you want to!), but we are going to ask you to have fun and make some noise.



The infographic features a black background with colorful musical notes (pink, teal, yellow) and a sheet of music with a treble clef. The text is white and pink.

SINGING YOUR SONG

SONG & JUBA

SONG

- THE ACT OR ART OF SINGING
- POETICAL COMPOSITION
- SHORT MUSICAL COMPOSITION OF WORDS AND MUSIC
- DISTINCTIVE OR CHARACTERISTIC SOUND OR SERIES OF SOUNDS
- A MELODY FOR A LYRIC POEM OR BALLAD

SOURCE: MERRIAM WEBSTER DICTIONARY ONLINE

JUBA

- **AUGUST WILSON:** THE JUBA IS REMINISCENT OF THE RING SHOUTS OF AFRICAN SLAVES. IT IS A CALL AND RESPONSE DANCE.
- **OXFORD LANGUAGES:** A DANCE ORIGINATING AMONG PLANTATION SLAVES IN THE SOUTHERN US; FEATURING RHYTHMIC HAND-CLAPPING AND SLAPPING OF THE THIGHS

Zoom Instructions

Go to Zoom Settings and open Audio Settings. Uncheck the box marked “auto adjust mic volume.” Change Suppress Background Noise from Automatic to “Low” or OFF.

Song/Juba: Low Tech

Keep the ideas of song and Juba as inspiration as you create something musical together. In this activity, we’ll focus on rhythm. In order to do that, we’re going to begin by creating a musical machine using our bodies and voices as our instruments. One person at a time, we’ll build this machine until everyone forms a part of it. Just start with a noise or sound and keep repeating it as others join in.

Focus on finding the rhythm as a group. [Do this as one large group before asking students to create their own song in breakout groups].

What happens when the machine speeds up? What happens when it slows down? What happens if we leave out (mute) certain parts? How would you describe our machine?

Add found objects to use as “instruments”. Also, do you have any special skills? Are you a secret beatboxer? Do you do step?

Breakout Groups: Collaborative song creation ([guidelines](#)):



Return to the main room. Ask for a group volunteer to share. All other groups turn their cameras off. Each group nominates the next group to share.

Collaborative Song Variation: High-tech version

If you have students who are tech savvy and want to create a more polished product, invite them to use tools such as Music Maker JAM, Figure, or GarageBand to build their own songs.

Reflection

How did each individual's song and/or musical contributions shape or influence the group song you created together?

CLOSURE

Activity

Ask the students to check-out by sharing a word or a movement from the song activities or the play.