



AUGUST WILSON'S

# TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Directed by Timothy Douglas

April 16 -  
May 12, 2019

Quadracci  
Powerhouse

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

Written by Lindsey Hoel-Neds, *Content Writer*

Edited by Jenny Toutant, *Education Director*  
Joshua Pohja, *School Programs Coordinator*

### SUGGESTED TEACHING & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. The Civil Rights Movement
2. African-American Writers
3. Gender Dynamics

This Teacher's Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's PlayGuide for *Two Trains Running*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The PlayGuide is available online at

<https://www.milwaukeekep.com/Tickets--Events/201819-Season/Two-Trains-Running/Two-Trains-Running-PlayGuide/>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe in fate? How does that belief impact your life? How does playing the lottery or other games of chance tie into the idea of fate?
2. What is justice? What in this world is just or unjust? How do factors such as race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. factor into whether people experience justice?
3. August Wilson said, "All art is political. It serves a purpose." Do you agree or disagree with his statement? Why?
4. What social or political movements/ideas are or have been important to you? Why? How are or have you been involved?
5. What is success? How can it be measured? Think of someone you would consider successful. What makes them so?



Students prepare signs for the New York Public Schools boycott. Photo credit: WNYC.

### RESEARCHING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

*Two Trains Running* takes place during the Civil Rights Movement and its impact is felt by the characters in the play. Utilize the timeline included in the PlayGuide or other resources to share key events, people, and organizations during this period. Have each student choose one event, person, or organization to research. After all students have completed their research, create a large timeline in your classroom including the details students have discovered. Encourage students to traverse the timeline and discuss why and how these events and people changed our country.

### AFRICAN-AMERICAN WRITERS

August Wilson is one of the most prominent African-American playwrights of the 20th century. Create for your class reading circles of other black authors who are not already covered in your curriculum. Whether it be poets, novelists, or playwrights, have students do some research and choose books by black authors that interest them and that they have not read for school. Some examples might be favorite poets of August Wilson's like Langston Hughes or Amiri Baraka. After groups are formed, have students meet on a regular basis during class time to discuss their readings. Assessments can range from presentations to the entire class, essays, multi-media projects, or promotional materials for their books.

### RISA AND GENDER DYNAMICS

Risa is the only female character in the play that we meet in person; Aunt Ester is also a vital character, but she is not given stage time. During the course of the play, we see Sterling actively pursuing Risa, even as early in the play she shuns his advances. She has also scarred herself specifically to deter men. Gather the class to discuss the expectations placed on Risa due to her gender. Share with the students articles or videos about the #MeToo Movement, consent culture, rape culture, and other issues revolving around unwanted physical or verbal interactions.

Use this information to help frame your discussion of Risa. If the play were to take place today how might Risa's story be different? What about the time and place where she lives impacts her actions and her relationship with men? How might Sterling's pursuit of her be looked at differently through a modern lens?

CONNECT WITH  
US ONLINE:



Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @MilwRep to hear about the latest news, special offers, and happenings at The Rep!

## AUGUST WILSON

Show your class the PBS documentary *August Wilson: The Ground on Which I Stand* (available on DVD through your local library system or with a WPT Passport Membership). Utilize some of the supporting content for the documentary on the PBS website to help with learning activities. Have students do some extended research on an aspect of Wilson's life or one of his plays besides *Two Trains Running*. Create displays for your school or local library about America's preeminent African-American playwright.

## UNSEEN CHARACTER DIALOGUES

Several characters are never seen on stage in *Two Trains Running*: Lutz, Prophet Samuel, and Aunt Ester. Have students write short scenes where one of the characters we have met during the play has an interaction with one of the unseen characters. Students should pair up and rehearse and then share their scenes with the class.

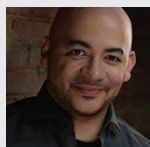
How would the presence of these characters onstage change the play? Do the new scenes make sense based on our knowledge of both characters? Why do you think Wilson chose to have these characters discussed, but not seen?

## CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS, CHANGING LIVES

In the play, we see how the Hill District is changing due to several different factors. Have students reflect on changes they have seen in their own neighborhoods in their lifetimes. Encourage students to also speak to someone in their neighborhood who has lived there longer to get a larger perspective on the changes. Students can then use their own thoughts and the thoughts of others to create a performance art or spoken word piece about their neighborhood. Allow students the opportunity to incorporate music, movement, or other modalities into their performances. Share and record their performances and make them available to your community through social media or a showcase at a local venue.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

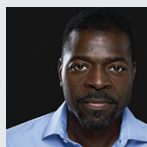
FEATURES



Frank Britton



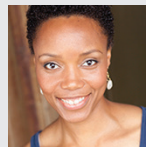
Doug Brown



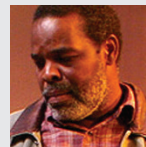
Chiké Johnson



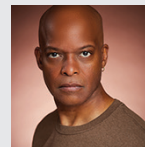
Jefferson A. Russell



Malkia Stampley



Raymond Anthony  
Thomas



Michael Anthony  
Williams

If you utilize any of the activities above, please share them with us at The Rep! We would love to see your students' work. Email Auburn at [amatson@milwaukeeep.com](mailto:amatson@milwaukeeep.com) with any work samples you would love for us to see.



## MILWAUKEE REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The Education Department offers backstage tours, pre- and post-show workshops and classroom residencies.

### Contact Us:

Milwaukee Repertory Theater  
Education Department  
108 E. Wells Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

### For questions or to schedule a workshop, please contact:

Auburn Matson, Education Administrator  
414-290-5393 • [amatson@milwaukeeep.com](mailto:amatson@milwaukeeep.com)  
[www.MilwaukeeRep.com](http://www.MilwaukeeRep.com) | 414-224-9490

### Standards

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7:** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**NCAS Anchor Standard #7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

**NCAS Anchor Standard #11:** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

**WI SEL Self-Concept 9.9-10:** Learners will be able to reflect on their own beliefs relative to different familial and societal norms.

**WI SEL Social Competence 18.9-10:** Learners will be able to formulate group goals and work through an agreed upon plan.

## PROGRAMS IN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT RECEIVE GENEROUS FUNDING FROM:

Bader Philanthropies  
Patty & Jay Baker Foundation  
Clarice S. Turer Charitable Fund  
Mae E. Demmer Charitable Trust

The Einhorn Family Foundation  
Ralph Evinrude Foundation  
Gardner Foundation  
Greater Milwaukee Foundation  
GMAR Youth Foundation

The Harley-Davidson Foundation  
The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation  
Frieda & William Hunt Memorial Trust  
Dorothy Watkins Inbusch Foundation  
Johnson Controls Foundation

Herb Kohl Philanthropies  
Kohl's Foundation  
Lubar Family Foundation  
MPS Community  
Grant Program

MPS Partnership for the Arts & Humanities  
Northwestern Mutual Foundation  
Townsend Foundation  
Wisconsin Energy Corporation Foundation