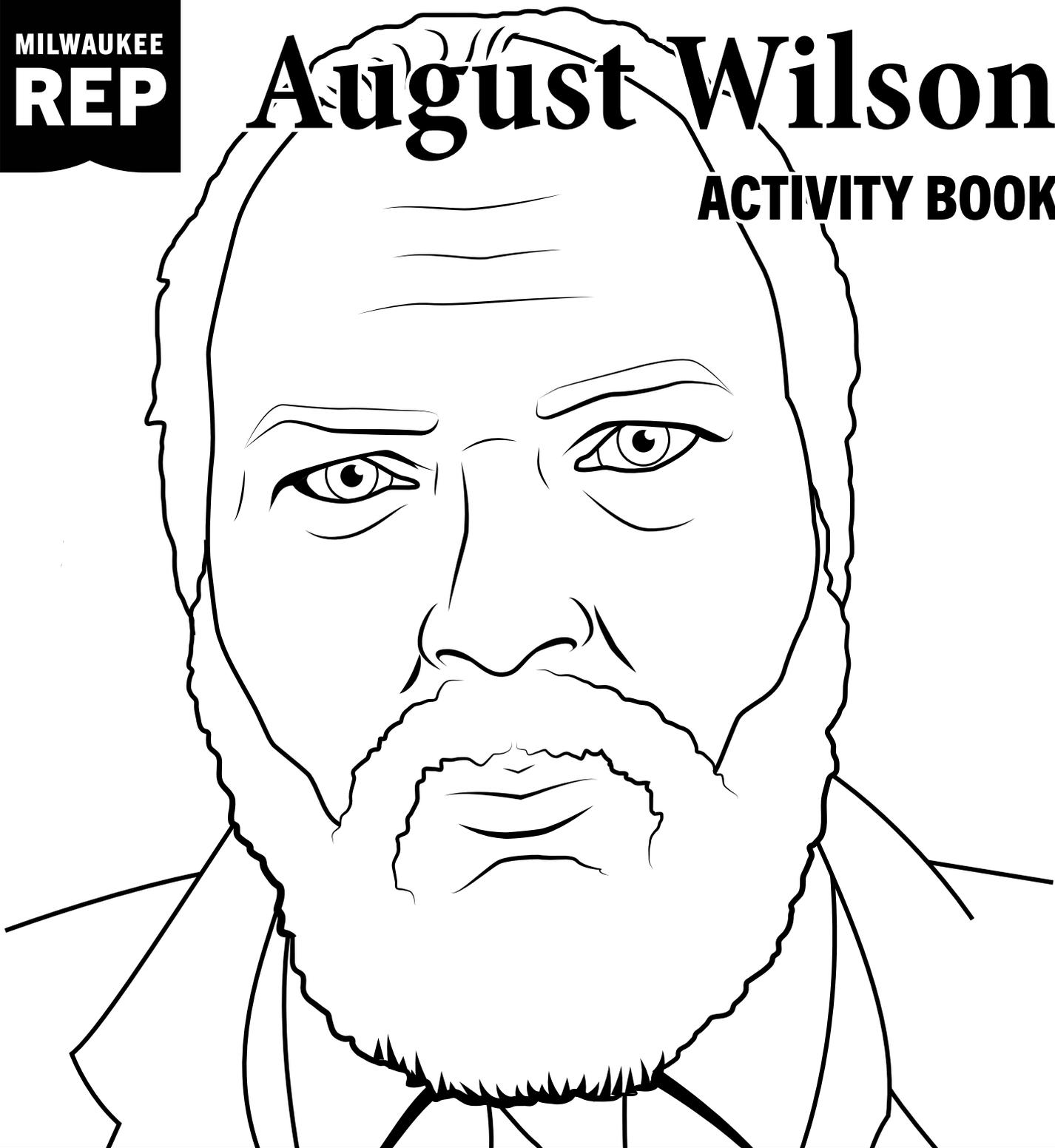


MILWAUKEE  
**REP**

# August Wilson

**ACTIVITY BOOK**



Milwaukee Rep believes that **BLACK LIVES MATTER**. We say it as an organization that speaks to our shared humanity and believe those words are in alignment with our mission to ignite positive change in our community.

August Wilson was a prolific American playwright, poet, and activist, whose work encompasses a variety of themes, including identity, honor, and love; themes that universally weave in and out of the collective human experience. He was a critical voice in the Civil Rights and Post-Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s; pushing the boundaries of American Theater and contributing to the honor and authentic representation of Black American culture. Wilson believed that “those who would deny black Americans their culture would also deny them their history and the inherent values that are a part of all human life.”

We acknowledge that, as an institution of privilege, we have more work to do and action to take to amplify Black voices, and dismantle systemic oppression. Our Activity Book series and participation in the August Wilson Monologue Competition are only a few ways we pledge to move forward in the name of access, inclusion, representation, and in celebration of Black authorship, creativity, and artistry.

# AUGUST WILSON'S BIO

August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel on April 27, 1945 in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. He was the son of Daisy Wilson, a Black American woman, and Frederick Kittel, a German immigrant, who was not an active part of Wilson's life. Wilson's mother, who earned a living cleaning houses, raised him and his siblings in a two-room flat, and later remarried and moved her children to a predominantly white neighborhood where Wilson and his siblings were the targets of racism and bullying.

Wilson dropped out of high school and took his education into his own hands after a teacher accused him of cheating on a paper. He spent most of his time in his childhood neighborhood at the Carnegie Library, where he discovered and devoured the works of great Black American authors. His voracious reading quickly evolved into writing poetry and listening to the voices and stories of the people of the Hill District, which would later inspire his most famous plays.

After his father's death in 1956, Wilson changed his name to honor his mother. He also bought his first typewriter, and began his long career as a playwright and author. In 1969, he founded an activist theater company called Black Horizons on the Hill with playwright Rob Penny.

Wilson moved from Pittsburgh to Minneapolis in 1978 and began to channel the voices of the people of The Hill into his work. He earned a fellowship at the Minneapolis Playwrights Center for an early draft of his play, *Jitney*. This fellowship led to his acceptance into the National Playwrights' Conference at the O'Neill Theater Center, where he met his longtime collaborator, director Lloyd Richards. Richards would go on to direct Wilson's first six plays when they premiered on Broadway.

Wilson is a vital figure in the American theatrical canon, and his works are among the most highly produced and regarded plays in American theater. Both *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson* won Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Wilson's plays have won Tony awards, New York Drama Critics Circle Awards, and numerous other honors. Wilson even earned the sole honorary degree given out by his beloved Carnegie Library.

Shortly after the premiere of *Radio Golf* in 2005 (the final play in his Pittsburgh Cycle), Wilson was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer. He died on October 2nd of that year. Wilson's legacy continues on in his work: lyrical, yet grounded representation of the Black American experience that has graced so many bookshelves, screens, stages, and communities.





## August Wilson Word Search

Find and circle each of the words from the list below. Words may appear forwards or backwards, horizontally, vertically or diagonally in the grid. Good luck!

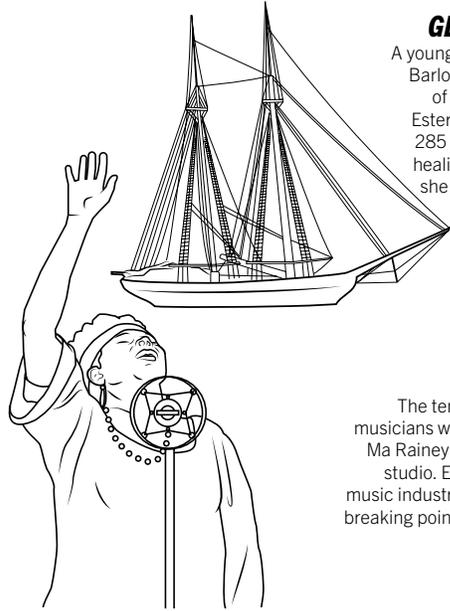


- |                     |                   |               |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Civil Rights        | Mortality         | <i>Fences</i> |
| Century Cycle       | Pulitzer Prize    | King Hedley   |
| Broadway            | <i>Radio Golf</i> | August Wilson |
| <i>Piano Lesson</i> | Aunt Ester        | Ma Rainey     |
| Race Relations      | Blackness         | <i>Jitney</i> |
| Boy Willie          | Racism            |               |

# CENTURY CYCLE TIMELINE

Ten of Wilson's most famous plays make up the "Century Cycle", also known as the "Pittsburgh Cycle". This collection chronicles the Black American experience through his lens, with each play representing a different decade of the 20th Century.

**Pop Quiz!** Which of August Wilson's plays has Milwaukee Rep produced?



## GEM OF THE OCEAN

A young Black American, Citizen Barlow, travels north in search of a purpose. He visits Aunt Ester, a woman rumored to be 285 years old and possessing healing powers, in hopes that she will help him on his path. (Written in 2003)

1904

## JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

While a man searches for his wife he arrives at a boarding house that offers room and nourishment to those who have been mistreated or abused by white society. He sets out to rediscover his identity. (Written in 1988)



1911

## MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

The tension builds as a group of musicians wait for (real blues legend) Ma Rainey to arrive at the recording studio. Exploited by the white-run music industry, they are pushed to the breaking point. This is the only play set outside of Pittsburgh. (Written in 1984)

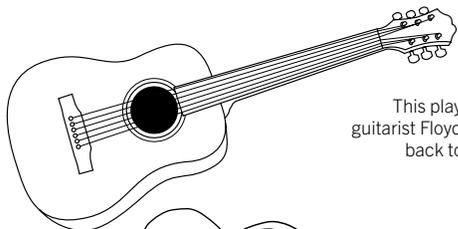
1927

## THE PIANO LESSON

A piano that has been passed down through the generations becomes the source of conflict as members of the Charles family argue whether to keep it or sell it, despite its significance and historical background. (Written in 1990)



1936



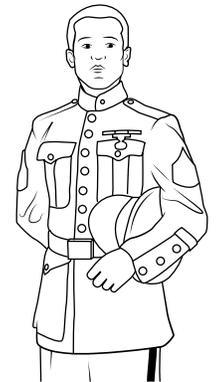
## SEVEN GUITARS

This play begins with the death of guitarist Floyd Barton and then flashes back to the final week of his life. (Written in 1995)

1948

## FENCES

A former baseball hero now turned trash collector holds a grudge against his son for winning an athletic scholarship. It focuses on the struggle for justice and fair treatment for Black Americans in the 1950s. (Written in 1987)



1957



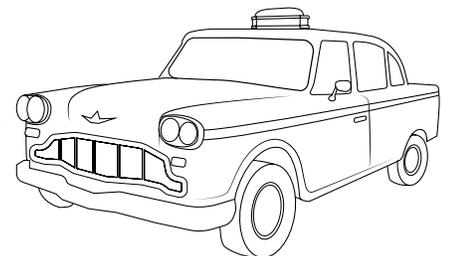
## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

As a group hangs out at a café, romance grows between a waitress and an ex-convict trying to salvage his life; however, many of the characters are too hooked on the past to realize the potential for the future. (Written in 1991)

1969

## JITNEY

Set in a cab driver's station, the owner of the station and his son, who has been recently released from prison, try to rekindle their relationship. (Written in 1982)



1977

## KING HEDLEY II

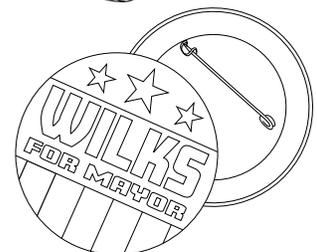
After being in jail for seven years, the main character hopes to open a video store in the Hill District. Despite his good intentions, he ends up becoming an armed robber and wrecks any chance he has at redemption. (Written in 1999)

1985



## RADIO GOLF

The final play tells the story of real estate developer Harmond Wilks, his quest to become the first black mayor of Pittsburgh and his plan to rejuvenate the Hill District, which would require tearing down Aunt Ester's house. (Written in 2005)



1997

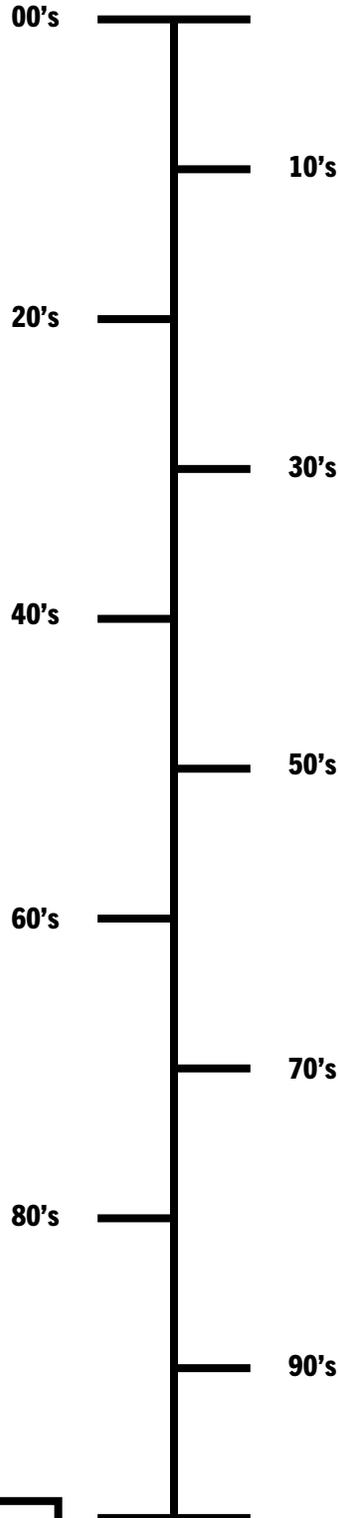
**Answers:** *Fences* (1989/90 & 2015/16), *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1993/94), *Jitney* (2001/02), *Gem Of The Ocean* (2006/07), *Radio Golf* (2009/10), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (2010/11), *Two Trains Running* (2018/19).

# MILWAUKEE CENTURY CYCLE TIMELINE

**Let's Create!** Milwaukee is a community rich in history, culture, and conflict. Choose and research a century of Milwaukee's history, and document at least one major event per decade on your blank timeline. Include the relevant year(s) and a brief summary of what took place (setting, people, etc.)

**CENTURY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reminder:** Century: 1900s (100 year period)  
Decades: 1910, 1920, etc. (10 year period)



**Example:**

***1960s - Civil Rights Movement***

The Civil Rights movement took time to gain traction in Milwaukee. In 1963, residents occupied the mayor's office and even participated in a sit-in at the Milwaukee County Courthouse. In 1967, Milwaukee's racial confrontations sparked the Open Housing Marches, which included a series of marches that spanned over 200 consecutive days.

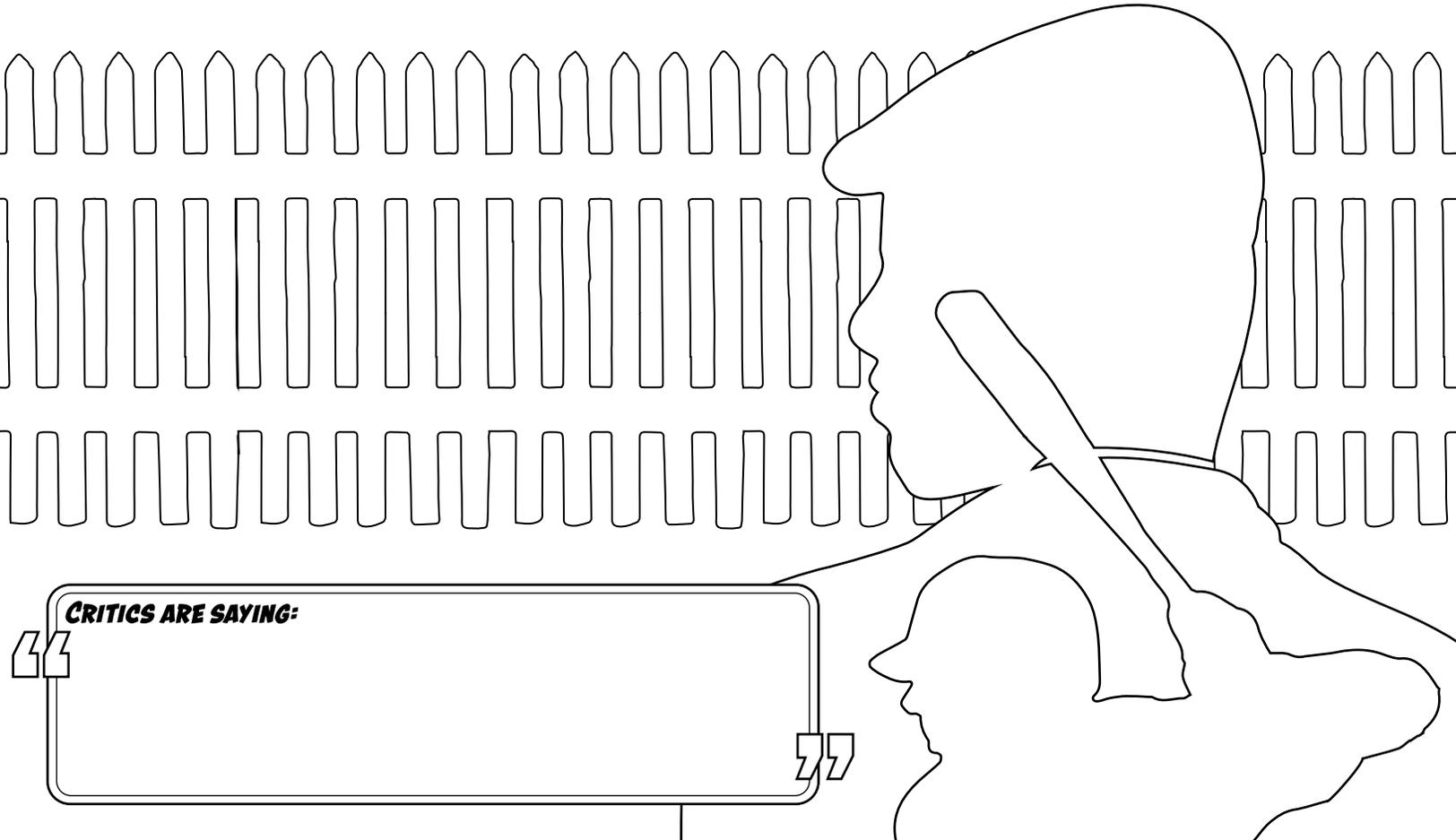
**Want to learn more?** You can check out more about the Open Housing Marches at: <https://www.milwaukeeenns.org/open-housing>

# CREATE YOUR OWN SHOW POSTER!

**Let's Create!** You are tasked with designing a show poster for your theater company's production of *Fences*. On the poster, include your name and role, theater, and year of performance. You might also write a snippet of a glowing review about the performance, such as: "Critics are saying..." "It's not just a great night out at the theater, it's the must-see show of the year!" Embrace creative license to embellish and praise your show!

## AUGUST WILSON'S

# FENCES



# AUGUST WILSON MONOLOGUE COMPETITION

New to Milwaukee, the National August Wilson Monologue Competition is a free arts education program that celebrates and connects high school students to the works and legacy of one of the most prolific American playwrights. Founded in 2007 by Kenny Leon and Todd Kreidler at Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre Company in Atlanta, the program is produced in collaboration with the national presenting partners True Colors Theatre Company and Jujamcyn Theaters. Participating students select, develop, and perform a monologue from Wilson's Century Cycle compendium, and compete for the chance to perform on a Broadway stage in New York City.

Beginning in 2020/21, Milwaukee will be a host city for the national competition. The city's top two regional winners will receive an all-expenses paid trip to New York City to compete for distinction and financial scholarships on a Broadway stage.

**So, what's a Monologue?** It's a speech given by one character - a vocalization of a character's thoughts.

## AUNT ESTER

I know a man used to raise pigs. Great big old pigs. To him the pig was the beginning of everything. And it was the end of everything. Wherever he looked he saw pigs. He saw pigs in the sky and he saw pigs in the ground. To him the pig was the center of his life.

**Let's Create!** Grab a piece of paper and write a monologue grounded in your five senses. Notice the small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, the texture of an ordinary object, or faint smell in the air.

What are 5 things that you can see?	What are 4 things you can feel?	What are 3 things you can hear?	What are 2 things that you smell?	What is 1 thing you can taste?
Look for small details such as a pattern on the floor, an object you may have never noticed, or a reflection off a surface.	Notice the sun on your skin, the sensation of clothing on your body, your toes in the grass. Find an object and examine the texture, weight or other physical qualities.	Consider the sounds you may have normally tuned out. Maybe it's the distant sound of traffic, the leaves rustling on the ground, the air moving through your vents.	You can look around for something with scent, like a candle, or a flower, maybe the leftovers in the fridge.	Pop a piece of cheese, popcorn, candy, or other small snack and pay close attention to the flavors. Note the different complexities of taste!

Next, use the sensory information you've named to identify your character's setting, shape a strong plot (beginning, middle, and end) and grow your character's **R.O.O.T.S.** from the ground up. Don't forget to write your monologue in first person ("I statements") as if you're speaking directly to the audience or another character!

**Relationships** (with themselves or other characters)

**Objective** (goal)

**Obstacles** (what prevents them from reaching their goal)

**Tactics** (strategies to achieve their goal)

**Stakes** (how important it is they achieve their goal)

**Make it a game!** Play socially-distant monologue telephone: Video record yourself performing your original monologue (memorized or not) and send it to a friend. That friend, after watching your recording only ONCE, must record their own version as true to memory as possible to send to another friend. Continue the chain until all "storytellers" have recorded their version of your monologue. Convene to watch the original and final versions to see what has stayed the same, and what has changed!

