

Fences - Context Clues

Pre-Show Activity for Grades 6-12

Goals

- Students will analyze historical, social, and moral contexts from *Fences* by matching textual evidence with historical clues.
- Students will use research and reasoning to articulate in writing or speech how each selected quote reflects different aspects of the time period or author's life.

NOTE: This activity has been aligned with TEKS and [Universal Design for Learning](#). TEKS can be found at the end of this document. [Artful Thinking Routines](#) are regularly referenced and utilized to encourage critical thinking.

Materials

- *Fences*: Clues and Quotes handout (included).
- *Fences* Who's Who handout (included).
- Chart paper or whiteboard space for each group.
- Research devices (optional – for digital reasoning extension).
- Access to Alley Re-Sourced guide.

Introduction

- Begin by reviewing the time period and setting, outlined on Alley Re-Sourced.
- Discuss: “How does an author's world impact how they write? How does an author's writing tell us about their world?”
- Use this line from Troy as an example:
 - TROY: “I don't want him to be like me! I want him to move as far away from my life as he can get.”
- Ask: “What might have inspired the playwright to write that? What does this tell us about how honesty works in this world?”

Note for UDL alignment: Students can Think-Pair-Share, write answers in a journal, or discuss answers in small groups before sharing with the class.

Reviewing the Clues

- Students can work in pairs or small groups. Each group should receive a few “Clue” cards from the handout. If working in groups, each group may receive their own complete set.
- Give students a few minutes to examine their cards, using “See-Think-Wonder” as a framework.
 - *What do you see?*

- *What do you think this tells you the world of the play? The playwright's life? Their point of view?*
- *What do you wonder?*

Matching Clues with Quotes

- Give each group a set of “Quote” cards from the included handout.
- Students match each quote with one or more clues they believe align thematically.
- They use reasoning or additional research to justify their pairing. Example:
 - Clue: “The Negro Leagues in Baseball”
 - Quote:
 - TROY: “If you could play...then they ought to have let you play.”
 - Reasoning: Troy expresses his frustration that there were plenty of other Black baseball players who were kept out of the league that were just as good or better than Jackie Robinson.

Reflection and Reasoning

- Each group selects one or two pairings to present.
- Use the Artful Thinking Routine “*What makes you say that?*” to encourage critical reasoning.
 - “What evidence supports your match?”
 - “How does this reflect the author’s point of view or time period?”

Note for UDL alignment: Encourage multiple expression modes: oral presentations, visual charts, digital slides, 1-on-1 reports.

Closure

- Revisit: “How does an author’s world impact how they write? How does an author’s writing tell us about their world?”
- Invite brief, one-sentence reflections from each group using one of these sentence frames:
 - “I used to think...now I think...”
 - “The story connects to the past because....”
 - “What surprised me was....”

Optional Extensions

- Gallery Walk: Display quote–clue pairings; students use sticky notes to leave feedback or alternative interpretations.
- Research Challenge: Students choose one category from the “Clue” cards and find one new fact that deepens understanding.
- Performance Connection: Have students stage a brief tableau illustrating one of their matched quote–clue pairs.

TEKS

- ELA 6–12
 - (6A–C), (7A–B), (8A–C) – Analyze how historical, cultural, and social contexts influence literature; draw connections between themes and author perspective; use textual evidence to support interpretation and discussion.
- Theatre I–IV
 - (2A–B), (3A–C), (4A–B), (5A–B) – Interpret characters and social context through performance; collaborate to express narrative meaning; analyze dramatic structure and moral themes.

Who's Who: The Cast and Character Descriptions of Alley Theatre's *Fences*



David Rainey
Troy Maxson

Troy Maxson

Troy is the head of the Maxson household. He is a hardworking man who takes pride in providing for his family. Shaped by a lifetime of missed opportunities, Troy believes survival matters more than dreams. He loves his family but struggles to show it in supportive ways. His need for control often creates distance between himself and those he wants to protect.

Key Traits:

Proud	Stubborn
Charismatic	Guarded

"I done learned my lessons. I don't need no second chances."



Michelle Elaine
Rose Maxson

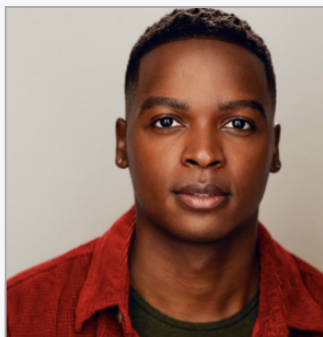
Rose Maxson

Rose is Troy's wife and the emotional center of the family. She is loving, patient, and deeply committed to keeping her family together. Rose believes in hope, forgiveness, and building a better future for her children.

Key Traits:

Loyal	Strong
Nurturing	Resilient

"You take and don't give."



Aramie Payton
Cory Maxson

Cory Maxson

Cory is Troy and Rose's teenage son. He is determined, hopeful, and eager to create a future different from his father's. Cory dreams of playing football and believes opportunity should be pursued, not feared. His conflict with Troy reflects a larger struggle between generations.

Key Traits:

Ambitious	Hopeful
Defiant	Sensitive

"I don't want to be like you."



Kendrick "KayB" Brown
Lyons Maxson

Lyons Maxson

Lyons is Troy's older son from a previous relationship. He is a musician who values creativity and self-expression. Lyons chooses passion over security, which puts him at odds with his father. He remains respectful toward Troy but refuses to give up his dream.

Key Traits:

Creative Optimistic
Independent Idealistic

"I got to live my life the way I believe in."



Timothy Eric
Gabriel Maxson

Gabriel Maxson

Gabriel is Troy's brother and a World War II veteran who suffered a brain injury. He believes he is the angel Gabriel, sent to open the gates of heaven. Gabriel brings moments of joy, innocence, and spiritual symbolism to the play. His presence reminds the audience of the cost of war and the fragility of dignity.

Key Traits:

Innocent Spiritual
Joyful Vulnerable

"I'm gonna tell St. Peter to open them gates."



Alex Morris
Jim Bono

Jim Bono

Bono is Troy's longtime friend and coworker. He is loyal, observant, and often serves as the voice of reason. Bono understands Troy's flaws but tries to guide him toward better choices. He values honesty and respect, especially within family relationships.

Key Traits:

Loyal Thoughtful
Honest Grounded

***“Some people build fences to keep people out...
and others build fences to keep people in.”***



Mila Glenn
Raynell Maxson



Paisley Rayne Richmond
Raynell Maxson

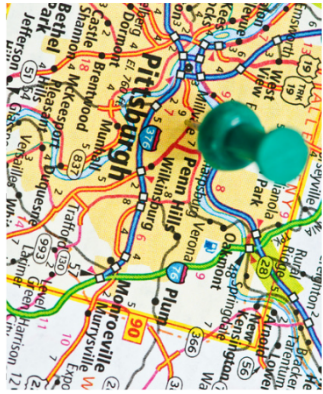
Raynell Maxson

Raynell represents new beginnings and hope for the future. Raynell's innocence and love for music help reconnect the family.

Key Traits:

Innocent Hopeful
Gentle Symbolic

“This here's my daddy's garden.”



Life of August Wilson

He was a Pittsburgh native

August Wilson grew up in Pittsburgh's Hill District, a historically Black neighborhood filled with music, storytelling, and strong community life.

Life of August Wilson

The American Century Cycle



Wilson wrote a series of plays (The American Century Cycle) to show the lives, struggles, and triumphs of Black Americans across different decades of the 1900s.

Life of August Wilson

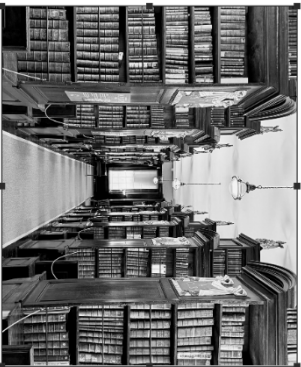
The voice of the neighborhood



August Wilson is known for the realistic and rhythmic dialogue in his plays. He referenced the Hill District, barbershop, and everyday Black community spaces as major influences on his writing.

Life of August Wilson

A Self-Educated Man



After facing discrimination and leaving school as a teenager, Wilson educated himself by reading extensively at the Carnegie Library. He studied history, literature, and Black culture.



CLUE

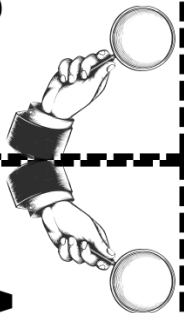
from

America in the 1950s

Segregation Limited Opportunities



Even after some barriers began to fall, Black Americans still faced discrimination in jobs, housing, and education, limiting their opportunities. Black workers were often excluded from promotions and better-paying jobs.



CLUE

from

America in the 1950s

The Negro Leagues in Baseball



Before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, Black players were excluded from Major League Baseball. Many great players never got the chance to play at the highest level.



CLUE

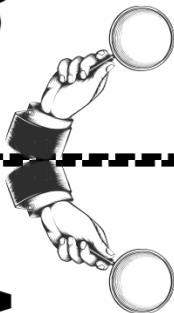
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America in the 1950s

Generational Shifts



As more opportunities arose for the new generations, older generations of Black Americans were wary and distrusting of systemic changes. Things like integrated teams were at odds with the lifelong discrimination they faced.



CLUE

from

America in the 1950s

Working Class Labor



Many Black men worked physically demanding jobs like sanitation or factory work. Providing for family was often seen as the primary responsibility of a man.





QUOTE

from

Fences

TROY:

It's my job. It's my responsibility! You understand that? A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house...sleep you behind on my bedclothes...fill you belly up with my food...cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not cause I like you!



QUOTE

from

Fences

ROSE:

...He's just trying be like you with the sports.

TROY:

I don't want him to be like me! I want him to move as far away from my life as he can get... I decided seventeen years ago that boy wasn't getting involved in no sports. Not after what they did to me in the sports.



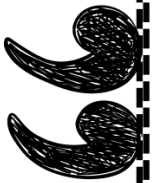
QUOTE

from

Fences

ROSE:

You always talking about what you give . . . and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take . . . and don't even know nobody's giving!



QUOTE

from

Fences

BONO:

Some people build fences to keep people out . . . and other people build fences to keep people in.





QUOTE
from
Fences

(Cory confronts his father for forcing him to quit football.)

TROY

I ain't done nothing to you. You done it to yourself.

CORY

Just cause you didn't have a chance! You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all.



QUOTE
from
Fences

TROY
He's got to make his own way. I made mine. Ain't nobody gonna hold his hand when he get out there in that world.

ROSE

Times have changed from when you was young, Troy. People change. The world's changing around you and you can't even see it.



QUOTE
from
Fences

TROY

Hell, I know some teams Jackie Robinson couldn't even make! What you talking about Jackie Robinson. Jackie Robinson wasn't nobody. I'm talking about if you could play ball then they ought to have let you play. Don't care what color you were. Come telling me I come along too early. If you could play...then they ought to have let you play.



QUOTE
from
Fences

CORY
I get good grades, Pop. That's why the recruiter wants to talk with you. You got to keep up your grades to get recruited. This way I'll be going to college. I'll get a chance...

TROY

First you gonna get your butt down there to the A&P and get your job back.

