

THE PIANO LESSON

LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

AUGUST WILSON

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

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SYNOPSIS

Act I, Scene 1: At 5:00 A. M. in Pittsburgh, Boy Willie arrives from Mississippi to awaken uncle Doaker, a railroad cook, and Boy Willie's 35-year-old widowed sister Berniece, whom he hasn't seen in three years. At age 30, Boy Willie behaves rudely with no respect for the family. He brings with him a partner, Lymon, to sell a load of watermelons purchased from a man named Pitterford and has weathered three truck breakdowns, two in West Virginia. Berniece has mourned her husband Crawley for three years. Boy Willie has been working in Stoner County cutting timber on Lymon's cousin's land. Lymon sleeps in the truck to avoid Sheriff Stovall, who is looking for him.

Boy Willie reports that Cleotha died. Doaker heard the news from his older brother, Wining Boy, the piano player who arrived a year ago for a two-week stay. He visited Mississippi two years before, when Boy Willie and Lymon were finishing three-year sentences at Parchman farm. Wining Boy returned to Doaker's house eight months before.

Lymon is interested in women; Boy Willie is eager to sell the family piano to buy land from Sutter's brother, who came from Chicago to take charge of the estate after Sutter died. He offers it to Boy Willie for \$2,000 rather than sell to Jim Stovall and gives Boy Willie two weeks to locate the money. Boy Willie wants to plant cotton, tobacco, and oats. Doaker says that Berniece stopped playing piano after Mama Ola died seven years before. Berniece hopes that her daughter Maretha will profit from Irene Kaufman's Settlement House and become a teacher.

Doaker relates that for two years Avery Brown, the preacher, has been badgering Berniece to marry him. Doaker knows that Berniece has already refused to sell the piano to a buyer and is seeking a loan to start Avery's church. Berniece yells that Sutter's ghost is at the top of the stairs. She turns on Boy Willie and orders him to leave for causing her husband's death. Doaker visits Mississippi once a month when the train passes through, but avoids women since Coreen left him. He takes pride in having lined the track of the Yellow Dog from Sunflower to Clarksdale.

Boy Willie demands some of Doaker's grilled bread. When Maretha arises, he asks her to play the piano. Avery, the elevator operator at the Gulf Building, arrives. He had a dream about seeing three hobos with sheep's heads and about hearing a voice call from across the valley of wolves telling him to lead the people. Avery founded the Good Shepherd Church of God in Christ. Berniece departs leaving Boy Willie declaring he will sell his half of the piano.

Act One, Scene 2: Three days later, Wining Boy arrives from Kansas City with the news that Cleotha Holman died on May 1. He has known her for thirty years. After marrying her, he rambled and caused the end of their marriage. Doaker

admits that he thought no more of Coreen after she left for New York. Boy Willie and Lymon have difficulty selling watermelons because their truck breaks down before they can get to white buyers at Squirrel Hill.

Boy Willie and Lymon experience another breakdown and must sleep in the truck to protect the watermelons. Wining Boy dislikes Doaker's house because Berniece is too bossy. Boy Willie says the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog got Sutter three weeks earlier. Wining Boy believes that the ghosts haunt the crossing of the Yellow Dog and Southern railroads. Boy Willie demands a drink and tells how he skimmed lumber from Jim Miller. When white men retaliated, they killed Crawley and imprisoned Boy Willie and Lymon. Stovall paid the hundred-dollar fine and forced Lymon to carry water on the Parchman farm. Wining Boy gave up piano because it wasn't fulfilling.

Doaker tells about the situation three generations back when Sutter's grandfather, Robert Sutter, bought the piano from the Nolander brothers as a gift for his wife Ophelia. Sutter paid for it by selling Nolander the pick of his slaves, Doaker's grandmother Berniece and her son, who was Doaker's father. Ophelia enjoyed the piano but missed Berniece, who cooked and cleaned and kept her company. After Nolander and Sutter quarreled, Ophelia got sick. Sutter had Berniece's husband Willie Boy (the original Boy Willie) carve portraits of Berniece and her son on the piano. Willie Boy also carved his parents, Mama Esther and Boy Charles, and scenes from their lives. Sutter was angry, but the carvings pleased Ophelia.

Doaker's brother, Boy Charles, who died in 1911 at age 31, wanted to remove the piano from Sutter's house because he believed the family could never be free as long as the piano belonged to the slave owner. On July 4 while the Sutter family was at the county picnic, Doaker and Wining Boy stole the piano on a wagon and took it to Mama Ola's family. Someone burned Boy Charles's house. He fled on the 3:57 Yellow Dog. Whites stopped the train and burned the boxcar carrying him and four hobos. Two months later, a suspect, Ed Saunders, fell down his well. The incident was the beginning of the ghost story and the start of Berniece's reverence for the piano for which her father died.

Lymon contends that Boy Willie should stay in Pittsburgh. Boy Willie declares that he feels suited to Southern farm life. Wining Boy plays a song about a rambling gambler. Berniece arrives and makes Wining Boy welcome, but snubs her brother. Boy Willie declares half ownership in the piano because of his father's death. He and Lymon move it and cause the ghost to sound. In the argument over selling the piano, Boy Willie claims that she ignores the instrument, but won't let him build his share into a better life. Berniece retorts that Mama Ola polished the case with her tears for seventeen years because of the thieving and killing of the men in the family. Berniece asserts that Boy Willie killed Crawley, who didn't know they were moving stolen wood. Boy Willie

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claims that Crawley caused his own death by shooting. Berniece slaps her brother until Doaker intervenes. Upstairs, Maretha screams.

Act Two, Scene 1: The next morning, Doaker irons his uniform as Wining Boy returns with a silk suit the pawnbroker valued at three dollars. Doaker saw the ghost three weeks before sitting at the piano. He believes Berniece should sell it to end the trouble. Wining Boy begs five dollars. Lymon and Boy Willie return from peddling half the watermelons. Wining Boy sells Lymon his suit, shirt, and shoes for six dollars. Lymon and Boy Willie plan to go to the movies. Wining Boy relates that he loaned Lymon's mother fifty dollars to get her husband, L. D. Jackson, out of jail. As repayment, she invited Wining Boy to spend the night. Jackson was later shot at a dance in a case of mistaken identity.

Act Two, Scene 2: Late that evening, Berniece is bathing in the kitchen when Avery arrives to tell her he can rent a building from Mr. Cohen for thirty dollars a month. Avery thinks he would be respected more if he married. Berniece rejects the proposal and asks Avery to bless the house to remove the ghost. She suspects Boy Willie murdered Sutter and believes Doaker blames himself for not staying with Boy Charles. Doaker did not want to bring the piano to Pittsburgh. Avery suggests putting the piano in the church. Berniece doesn't want to revive spirits from the past by playing the piano. He promises to return the next day to exorcise the ghost.

Act Two, Scene 3: Several hours later, Boy Willie brings Grace into the darkened house. She refuses to sleep on the couch and invites him to her house, but warns that Leroy may return. As he tussles with her, they knock over a lamp. Berniece orders him to take Grace somewhere else.

Berniece is heating the teakettle when Lymon arrives after abandoning Dolly, his date. He plans to take a job unloading boxcars. Berniece thinks her brother is too stubborn to work for somebody else. Lymon gives her perfume and puts some behind her ear and kisses her.

Act Two, Scene 4: Late the next morning (Friday), Boy Willie dislodges Lymon from the sofa in anticipation of the buyer who is coming for the piano. Boy Willie anticipates getting half the \$1,150 price. When the two men try to move the piano, the ghost sounds and the piano will not budge. Doaker objects to Boy Willie's moving the piano from Doaker's house. Boy Willie leaves to find a plank, wheels, and rope.

Act Two, Scene 5: Boy Willie screws casters on the plank and tells Maretha about the yellow cars on the Yazoo Delta railroad. Berniece arrives to arrange Maretha's hair and orders her brother out. Berniece sends Maretha across the street to buy more hair grease. Doaker refuses to eject Boy Willie from the house. Berniece threatens to get Crawley's gun.

Berniece wishes that Maretha were a boy. Boy Willie thinks the girl should know about the piano and celebrate Boy Charles's audacity. Boy Willie regrets that his father felt hopeless. Berniece accuses her brother of wasting his life on talk. When Avery arrives, Boy Willie offers him a hundred dollars if he sees the ghost. Lymon returns late after meeting Grace and making a date for a movie.

While Doaker tries to dissuade Boy Willie, Berniece comes downstairs with a gun. Maretha withdraws to Doaker's room. Wining Boy enters and demands a drink. He plays a song he wrote to honor Cleotha and refuses to relinquish the piano. Grace comes in to complain about Lymon's keeping

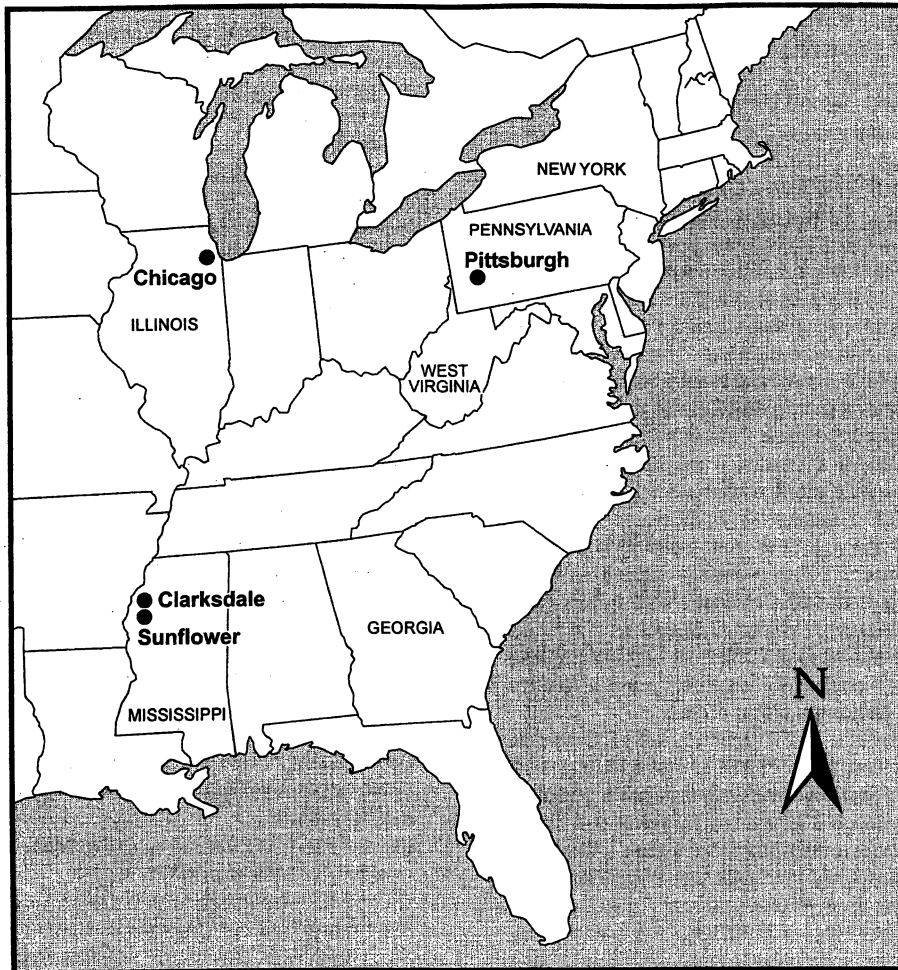
her waiting in the truck and senses something in the house. As Lymon leaves with Grace, Wining Boy feels the ghost's presence.

Avery begins the exorcism; Boy Willie mocks him with a pot of water from the stove. An unseen force twice tosses Boy Willie from the steps. Berniece plays the piano and calls on her grandparents and parents—Berniece, Esther, Boy Charles, and Ola. Boy Willie prepares to take the train back down South.

TIME LINE

before 1865	Robert Sutter buys a piano for his wife Ophelia. He pays for it by selling Doaker's grandmother Berniece and her son.
later	Sutter has Berniece's husband Boy Willie carve portraits of his wife and son on the piano. He also carves his parents, Mama Esther and Boy Charles.
1905	Wining Boy marries Cleotha Holman.
July 4	After Doaker and Wining Boy steal the piano, someone burns Boy Charles's house.
later	Whites burn the boxcar carrying Boy Charles and four hobos.
1928	Mama Ola dies; Berniece stops playing the piano.
1932	Berniece parts from Boy Willie after Crawley is killed. Lymon and Boy Willie get out of jail on Stovall's money and pay him back by working at the Parchman farm.
1933	Wining Boy visits Mississippi while Boy Willie and Lymon are serving three-year sentences.
1934	Avery becomes a preacher and begins asking Berniece to marry him.
8 months earlier	On a visit to Pittsburgh, Wining Boy tells Doaker that Cleotha is dead.
3 weeks earlier	Wining Boy visits Doaker's house. Sutter falls down the well and dies. His brother arrives from Chicago to sell his land.
2 weeks earlier	Doaker sees the ghost at the piano. The surviving Sutter gives Boy Willie two weeks to find \$2,000 to buy the family's land.
Monday	Boy Willie arrives in Pittsburgh; Berniece sees Sutter's ghost.
Thursday	Wining Boy arrives from Kansas City. Boy Willie and Lymon experience another breakdown and must sleep in the truck to protect the watermelons. Maretha sees the ghost.
late that evening	Berniece asks Avery to bless the house to remove the ghost.
several hours later	Berniece orders Boy Willie to take Grace somewhere else.
Friday morning	Boy Willie and Lymon move the piano, causing the ghost to sound. The piano will not budge. Grace senses something in the house; Wining Boy feels the ghost's presence.
	Avery begins the exorcism; Berniece

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plays the piano and calls on family patriarchs. Boy Willie subdues the ghost and prepares to take the train back down South.

AUTHOR SKETCH

A native and resident of St. Paul, Minnesota, August Wilson is a self-described "race man." A champion of black American theater, he has created a major drama cycle on the black American experience. In an interview with National Forum, he declared: "I don't write for black people or white people; I write about the black experience in America. And contained within that experience, because it is a human experience, are all the universalities. I am surprised when people come up to me and say, well, *Fences* is universal. Of course it is! They say that as though universals existed outside black life."

Born Frederick August Kittel on April 27, 1945, to a white German baker, Frederick August Kittel, and Daisy Wilson, a black janitor, he and five siblings grew up in a ghetto, the Hill section of Pittsburgh. His parents tried to conceal their privations. Wilson augmented the family income with a paper route, which paid for milk and bread. In 1958, the family moved to a predominantly white part of the city, where residents taunted and victimized them. After the father abandoned them, Daisy married David Bedford. Wilson attended a

Catholic academy and a public high school, but quit at age 16 after a teacher accused him of plagiarizing a 20-page report on Napoleon that his sister typed for him. While hiding his dropout status from his mother, he began reading on his own and discovered the poems of John Berryman and Dylan Thomas and the works of Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and Ralph Ellison.

After a series of deadend jobs as elevator operator, cook, and lawn man and a stint in the army, Wilson began producing poetry and short fiction for black journals at the University of Pittsburgh. He was inspired by a stack of 78 records, particularly Bessie Smith's "Nobody in Town Can Make This Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine," which introduced him to everyday poetry. At age 23, as a component of the Black Power movement, he pursued consciousness raising by founding and directing the Black Horizons Theater Company. The company produced the work of LeRoi Jones and Wilson's first play. Late in the 1970s, he developed scripts for the anthropology division of the Science Museum of Minnesota. He was invited to write for a St. Paul theater founded by Claude Purdy and published *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills* (1981) and *Jitney* (1982), a dialect drama set at a taxi stand. Acceptance by the O'Neill Theatre Center's National Playwrights Conference introduced him to professional writing. His next play, *Fullerton Street*, was a failure.

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Wilson's cycle of black drama, a chronicle of African-Americana, began with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, a play about a hot-tempered blues singer. For this and later works, Wilson sought the assistance of Lloyd Richards, dean of the Yale drama school, who helped clarify themes and pace the action for a work he described as "spiritual allegory." After its debut at the Yale Repertory Theater, the play opened in 1985 in New York and won the Drama Critics Circle award. Its sequel, *Fences* (1985), winner of a Tony and the Pulitzer Prize for drama, received strong reviews for its examination of bigotry and failed fatherhood. The stage version earned praise for the character acting of star James Earl Jones, who plays Troy Maxson. It earned Wilson a second Drama Critics award and widespread name recognition. His success netted the \$250,000 Whiting Writer's award for emerging talent. He followed with *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, a saga of black migration from the agricultural South presented at the historic Barrymore Theatre, where Lorraine Hansberry debuted *Raisin in the Sun*. The play continued the string of awards in 1988, when Wilson also accepted an honorary doctorate from Yale. With *The Piano Lesson*, the story of a family's clash over a prized heirloom, Wilson won comparison to Tennessee Williams and a second Pulitzer Prize before the work's debut on Broadway. When it opened at the Yale Repertory Theatre on November 26, 1987, it starred Samuel Jackson. The play was adapted for production on Hallmark Hall of Fame and a subsequent video series.

Wilson settled in Seattle in 1990 with his wife Constanza Romero, a costume designer. In 1991, he published *Two Trains Running*, a naturalistic drama that returns to the Hill for a story about the sale of a diner. Additions to his list of published works include contributions to *Black Lines* and *Connection* and to *The Poetry of Black America*. His latest publications are a rich, many-voiced biography play, *Seven Guitars* (1995), and *King Hedley II* (1999), which was in contention for a Pulitzer Prize. His professional goal is to study the breakdown of the black American family and to fathom the random violence that destroys lives.

CRITICS CORNER

A consummate storyteller of the American theater, August Wilson has developed into a homegrown delicacy. His work, influenced by the blues and the art of Romare Bearden, is a microcosm of black ferment of the 1950s and 1960s. The support of the John Gassner Award, Chicago Tribune's Artist of the Year, Drama Desk award, New York *Public Library's* literary lion, Clarence Muse award, Bush and Guggenheim fellowships, and Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame award assures readers that Wilson's writings are no chance fluke but the outgrowth of substance, control, and artistry. Most recently, he has earned a 1999 National Humanities Medal, honorary degrees, and the only high school diploma ever issued by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

Wilson's arrival among the theater's elite and his stand on black drama and colorblind casting have placed him at the core of artistic contention. Beyond this show of militance, he has spoken through nuanced dialect, voicing underclass hardships to acknowledge and nourish dreams and ambitions. In his words, "For me, the primary focus should be the celebration and illumination of the culture. . . . The culture has not always been valued; it certainly has not been valued by white America. In terms of the value and worth of the humanity of black folks, it has been sometimes very urgently

and profoundly denied."

OTHER WORKS BY AUGUST WILSON

Black Bart and the Sacred Hills (1981)
The Coldest Day of the Year (1979)
Cultivating the Ground on Which We Stand (2001)
Fences (1985)
Fullerton Street (1980)
Jitney (1982)
Joe Turner's Come and Gone (1988)
King Hedley II (1999)
Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (1985)
The Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket (1983)
Seven Guitars (1995)
Two Trains Running (1991)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the impact of racism and slavery on subsequent generations
2. To account for a cycle of murder and vengeance
3. To interpret urban social customs
4. To contrast religious points of view
5. To discuss the themes of longing and ambition
6. To explain the main events in terms of ownership
7. To analyze causes of regret
8. To describe attitudes based on selfishness
9. To describe elements of atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze the loss of enslaved family members

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain why an unnamed evil looms in every scene
2. To analyze the symbolism of the character names Boy Willie/Willie Boy
3. To account for Berniece's withdrawal into overprotective motherhood
4. To contrast Lymon, Avery, and Boy Willie as suitors
5. To justify Wining Boy's returns to Pittsburgh
6. To predict how Berniece will alter her attitude toward piano music
7. To summarize events that launch the ghost story
8. To discuss the implications of exorcism
9. To summarize the roles of Grace, Dolly, Leroy, the pawnbroker, and Mama Ola
10. To list examples of suspicion, hard-heartedness, and callousness
11. To characterize the fight with the ghost
12. To analyze details, particularly songs and Avery's exorcism ritual

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of August Wilson's narrative style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

dialect language peculiar to a limited population in a small geographical area. Often the language of the streets or the patois of a poorly educated segment of the population, dialect increases the authenticity of the characters' speech, particularly Boy Willie's sly way of negating Berniece's argu-

ments and accusations with his own view of family history and meaning.

first-person narrative a story or series of actions told from the vantage point of a single observer. Doaker is the speaker of the family's past. From his memory comes the story of great-grandmother Berniece and Doaker's grandfather, whom Sutter sold to pay for the piano. Doaker corroborates his telling with his older brother, Wining Boy. Both men would have a clearer understanding of the family's history than Berniece and Boy Willie, who are one more generation removed from the hardships of slavery. The purpose of Doaker's telling is to reaffirm the past and pass on to Maretha the importance of their family's defiance of Sutter.

sermon a speech, harangue, or moral lecture intended to educate, uplift, or advise hearers on ethical behavior or religious orthodoxy. Avery imposes on James Sutter's ghost the power of God the Father, but Avery's mishmash of scripture allies elements from unlikely parts of the Bible, particularly citing the 23rd Psalm as "Our Father taught us how to pray." In citing from Jesus's confrontation with Satan in the wilderness, Avery muddles through "Get thee behind the face of Righteousness as we Glorify His Holy Name!"

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is typical of the playwright's social crucibles—a tightly resonant family arrangement in a single household. Central to the story is the piano itself, the carved totem that dominates part of Doaker's living room. The comings and goings of family force them to confront each other early and late as they leave for work or return from an evening out. Their comments on the piano and on the presence of Sutter's ghost resurge frequently because the piano is too ornate, too psychologically charged with meaning to be ignored.

Boy Willie violates the peace of Doaker's house by his impromptu arrival and childish demands. In frequent arrivals and departures to sell watermelons or get Lymon's truck fixed, Boy Willie keeps the house in an uproar. In the dark after the movie, Grace violates the peace of family sleep by tussling with Boy Willie and upsetting a lamp. Berniece's ousting of Grace takes on symbolic meaning in light of the Christian interpretation of grace, the goodness that God bestows on people regardless of their deserving.

Uncle Doaker's kitchen, with its domestic significance, is less volatile. He can share grilled bread with Boy Willie and pour drinks for Wining Boy and the others and also iron a uniform to wear to work without engaging other characters in more discussion of the piano. In her appearances alone in the kitchen, Berniece receives some moments of peace at the stove heating water in the teakettle and at her kitchen bath. Alone with Avery, she shares a moderately sensible exchange about her concerns for matrimony, the future of their church, and the need for a spiritual force to remove the ghost.

The use of unseen rooms allows the playwright some leverage in group conversation. When the situation reaches an emotional climax with Berniece threatening to get Crawley's gun to drive Boy Willie away from the piano, Maretha withdraws to Doaker's room, a safe zone out of range of the gun and the intrusive ghost of James Sutter. The final face-off between the ghost and pious exorcistic teamwork of Avery and Berniece traps Boy Willie in the middle, where he must deal physically with the spiritual presence that haunts the

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family and twice buffets him down the stairs. Grace, an outsider, comes to the room for a short while, but immediately recognizes something wrong in the family's home environment. The thumping piano music that dispels the ghost also sends Boy Willie on his jovial way by train to Mississippi.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

Novels

William Armstrong, *Sounder*

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Ernest Gaines, *A Gathering of Old Men* and *A Lesson Before Dying*

Alex Haley, *Queen*

Terry McMillan, *Mama*

James Michener, *Hawaii*

Charles Portis, *True Grit*

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Richard Wright, *Native Son*

Plays

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Lillian Hellman, *The Little Foxes*

Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*

Poetry

Richard Wright, "Between the World and Me"

Short Stories

Toni Cade Bambara, "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird"

Richard Wright, "Almos' a Man"

Nonfiction

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*

Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*

Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

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<www.gactr.uga.edu/GCQ/gcqw95/blackwhite.html>

"Counseling Services for Families," <www.nire.org/famcou63.htm>

"Crisis, Grief, and Healing," <www.webhealing.com>

"Sunflower County, Mississippi,"

<www.rootsweb.com/~mssunflo/county.htm>

Videos/DVDs

The Apostle

Beloved

Native Son

Ragtime

Sounder

Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Piano Lesson* should include these aspects:

Themes

- slavery
- murder
- injustice
- revenge
- poverty
- ambition
- family

- ownership
- racism
- self-actualization

Motifs

- coping with a ghost
- seeking escape from poverty
- comprehending the needs of an ambitious man
- confronting evil
- removing a family curse

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the play. Explain each in context. Act, scene, and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Got her in an extra school down at the Irene Kaufman Settlement House. (Act One, Scene 1, p. 10)
(Berniece takes advantage of the free socialization programs of neighborhood improvement centers. Initiated by altruistic white volunteers, these instructional centers improved diet, health care, and education for slum dwellers and for immigrants speaking little English.)
2. You think this the land of milk and honey. (Act One, Scene 1, p. 17)
(The description of an earthly paradise comes from three places in the book of Exodus, the story of the Israelites' flight from Egypt. In Chapter 3, verses 8 and 17, God speaks to Moses from the burning bush and promises deliverance and the reward of a worthy land for his people to occupy. In Chapter 13, verse 5, Moses repeats God's promise, emphasizing a peaceful, prosperous land where beekeeping and herding enrich the residents' lives.)
3. Boy Willie sits and plays a simple boogie-woogie. (Act One, Scene 1, p. 21)
(The percussive, repetitive style of Boy Willie's piano blues replicates a popular dance rhythm dating to unknown origin around 1928. It gained popularity from performances by Count Basie and Lionel Hampton, among others.)
4. The Good Shepherd Church of God in Christ. (Act One, Scene 1, p. 24)
(In a heavily symbolic sermon in John 10, Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd, which he repeats in verses 11 and 14. In Chapter 13 of Paul's letter to the Hebrews, verse 20 shapes a benediction around "Our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep.")
5. Rented him a mule on Palm Sunday and rode through the town. (Act One, Scene 2, p. 30)
(Wining Boy speaks of an unscrupulous preacher in Spear who followed Christ's last earthly activities, including the triumphal procession into Jerusalem on a mule. Because followers spread palm fronds along the way, the commemoration of Palm Sunday includes wearing bits of palm in the lapel.)
6. I believe it was that yellow jaundice. (Act One, Scene 2, p. 31)
(In reminiscing over the death of Cleotha Holman, Wining Boy suspects that she died of the same disease that killed her mother. Jaundice, a liver disease involving a severe bilious condition, spreads a greenish-yellow color over the skin.)

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7. I done been to where the Southern cross the Yellow Dog and called out their names. (Act One, Scene 2, p. 34)
(The mystic spot in northwestern Mississippi where the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog appear is at Sunflower, west of the Sunflower River in Sunflower County. The lumber-rich area, part of the Yazoo Delta, is prone to flooding and fever.)
8. They called it jumping the broom. (Act One, Scene 2, p. 44)
(Doaker states as part of the family history the slave marriage of Boy Charles to Mama Berniece, the patriarchs of his lineage. In lieu of legal matrimony, slaves had no choice but to make up their own rituals to sanctify and legalize a relationship. The homely broom, symbol of domesticity and daily work, served slaves as a substitute for a sanctified altar.)
9. Gonna leave Jackson Mississippi and go to Memphis and double back to Jackson (Act Two, Scene 1, p. 54)
(Doaker's geographic jingle describes the train's schedule on the Jackson to Memphis route. The towns are not in a straight line, as the song implies. The trip leaves Jackson, in southwestern Mississippi, travels northeast to Winona, passing through Courtland, Batesville, Como, Senitobia, and Lewisberg on the way north across the Tennessee line to Memphis. To the west, the cities of Clarksdale, Glendora, and Sunflower lie along the delta west of Greenwood. Indianola and Moorhead are southwest of Greenwood.)
10. Two strokes back and I would have been his daddy! (Act Two, Scene 1, p. 63)
(Wining Boy's sexual innuendo refers to Lymon Jackson's mother's sacrifice of sex for the money to get L. D. Jackson out of the clutches of the sheriff, who was going to rent him out as prison labor at the Parchman farm.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

Motivation

1. What causes Willie Boy to carve the piano?
*(After Sutter sells two slaves, Mama Berniece and her son, to Nolander in payment for the piano, Ophelia falls ill from grief. She misses Berniece as cook, maid, and companion. To appease his wife, Sutter orders his enslaved woodcarver, Willie Boy (the original Boy Willie), to carve portraits of the two slaves on the piano.
In the dark wood, Willie Boy shapes the two from memory. To record the family's history during enslavement, he adds pictures of Mama Esther and Boy Charles, Willie Boy's parents. He carves the slave marriage of his parents as they jump the broom, the birth of Wining Boy and Doaker's father, Mama Esther's funeral, and Nolander leading the two slaves back to Georgia.)*

Setting

2. Describe Pittsburgh from the point of view of Lymon and Boy Willie.
(Far from Sutter's lush delta land in Mississippi, Lymon and Boy Willie force the truckload of watermelons to Pittsburgh. Lymon sees the big city as a land of opportunity, where he can get a job unloading trucks and flee

the oppression of the South. Displacement to an urban area will free him of stalking in Mississippi, where he is wanted by the sheriff.

To Boy Willie, the city is a source of quick money, where he can sell watermelons and the piano and acquire the remaining two-thirds of the \$2000 he needs to buy Sutter's land. Lymon and Boy Willie enjoy city entertainments while they are selling their produce. They dress up to go to a bar, find willing dates, and plan to take them to a movie. Boy Willie considers the journey north only one stage in his rise from landless black to owner of the land on which his family was enslaved. He has no intention of getting a job in Pittsburgh or of working for a white man, even if positions are plentiful in the city. To him, Pittsburgh offers no satisfaction like farming in the Mississippi delta.)

Character Development

3. How does Berniece display an arid personality?
*(Like an undernourished plant, Berniece departs Mississippi in widowhood three years before the play opens. She lives with her Uncle Doaker, who moved them north with the family piano. At the play's beginning, he travels with the railroad as a cook. Meanwhile, Berniece rules his household like the female head of the family. Her uncle Wining Boy dislikes her bossy behavior enough to avoid Pittsburgh during his rambles. In the family's opinion, she stopped living after Crawley was shot during the theft of firewood and after she gave up playing the family's heirloom piano.
After settling in Pittsburgh to raise Maretha, Berniece smothers the girl with rules and forces her to conceal her blackness while attending the program at Irene Kaufman's Settlement House. The devotion of Avery Brown and repeated offers of marriage repulse Berniece, who intends to make no change in her living arrangements. A shared kiss with Lymon and the gift of perfume make no significant impression on her. Although the kiss catches her off guard, she makes no effort to accept his offer of affection.)*

Historical Milieu

4. How did the family suffer in slave times?
(The family belonged to Sutter, who owned a plantation. To suit the wishes of Miss Ophelia by buying her a piano, Sutter agreed to sell Mama Berniece and her son, thus splitting the family as easily as trading livestock. Sutter's half-hearted attempt to avoid destroying the slave family's harmony engenders a creative hatred in Boy Charles. When Miss Ophelia takes to her bed in grief for her favorite cook and companion, the creative woodcarver shapes their portraits in the dark-hued piano case. The carving takes on the trappings of an album in bas relief incised in wood as dark in hue as the skin of Sutter's slaves.

The upshot of the carved piano was the anger of Sutter, who was powerless to restore the case to its original state. The smoldering hatred of enslavement infected Boy Charles, the oldest of the first Boy Charles and Mama Bernice's three sons. Some 48 years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves, Doaker and Wining Boy gave up negotiating for the piano and stole it from Sutter's house. Ironically, the raid takes place on the Fourth of July, the date of the county picnic.

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The anger of racist whites led to the anonymous burning of Boy Charles's house and of the boxcar in which he and four hobos died.)

Theme

5. What does the author reveal about self-esteem?
(Esteem is important to Boy Willie. He longs for validation in Mississippi, his homeland, where the racist Jim Crow laws extend elements of slavery into the 1930s. He has no intention of resettling in the urban atmosphere of Pittsburgh, which is foreign territory to him. His feelings of self-worth lie in reclaiming the former plantation and raising tobacco, cotton, and oats for his own enrichment rather than for a heartless slave master like Sutter.)

To a fault, Boy Willie is immature and headstrong. Unable to take direction from an employer, he impresses his sister as doomed to failure. Rather than accept her shaded judgment of his character, he insists on raising the \$2000 he needs to buy Sutter's land. Physical contact with the piano changes his mind. After grappling with Sutter's ghost, Boy Willie feels satisfied that he has done what was necessary to avenge his family's slave-time sufferings. Content with the cooperation of his sister, he is ready to take the next train South.)

Interpretation

6. What does the play illustrate about heirlooms?
(The piano, which is worth \$1,150 on the market, carries a mixed value to the family. To Wining Boy, it offers him a release from sorrow over Cleotha's death and a chance to perform the skill he knows best. For Doaker, the piano was worth stealing from Sutter's house and transporting to Pittsburgh, but not worth the dissolution of family through squabbles and threats of ejecting Boy Willie from the house at gunpoint. Berniece sees her mother's grief in the dark polished wood. Berniece's only hope for the heirloom is to provide Maretha with the refinement and education necessary to groom her for the teaching profession.)

In Act II, the piano takes on a vital role in realigning family members. The pivotal scene is Boy Willie's confrontation with the ghost in person and the battle up and down the stairs of Doaker's house. Berniece, who has given up playing the piano, sits down to improvise a prayer and plea to the spirits of past generations. From her change of heart and contribution come an end to the haunting and a renewal of Boy Willie's enthusiasm for home. No longer intent on selling the piano, he asks when the next train leaves for the South.)

Conflict

7. Why does the piano disorient the family?
(The family is at loose ends when members emigrate from the South. To Wining Boy, departure from the homeland is a start on a career that keeps him on the move, playing at different locales. His rootlessness ends a marriage to Cleotha, a beloved woman whom he annoys with his inability to settle in one place. To Doaker, who also travels constantly and ruins his marriage to Coreen, the piano is a merely a contested piece of furniture that sits in his parlor. Because his niece refuses to play it after Mama Ola dies, Doaker uses the instrument as evidence that Berniece has rejected creativity and giving in favor of over-mothering her daughter Maretha.)

The loud, bumptious arrival of Boy Willie from Missis-

issippi with plans for the piano forces the other family members to re-examine their acceptance of family history. To Boy Willie, the best way to thwart the racist South is to live on the site of his family's degradation and to profit as the land's new owner. Boy Willie's inept and crude behaviors unsettle Doaker's household and force a new intra-familial relationship on the remaining members. By the play's conclusion, Boy Willie and Berniece, with Avery's help, have triumphed together over the ghost and Boy Willie has given over his selfish demands for a sale in favor of returning to Mississippi by train with Wining Boy.)

Author Purpose

8. How does Wilson illustrate the importance of marriage?
(The numerous failed relationships in the play suggest that the family still struggles with settled relationships just as their great grandfather Boy Charles attempted to compensate for loss of Mama Berniece and their son. To Doaker and Wining Boy, jobs that require constant moves destroy marriages to Coreen and Cleotha, two women who deserved better than they got. Berniece, still laden with a widow's grief, rejects Avery, a stable, ambitious black man intent on a righteous life and on marrying Berniece, his deaconess.)

Both brother and sister seem incapable of sustained relationships. The main character, Boy Willie, is a play-boy and good-timer who is capable of admiring Maretha as the offspring of a normal marriage. He lies to Grace to get her onto the couch for the night. Wilson contrasts Boy Willie's immaturity with the settled attitude of Lymon, who wants to find a woman to woo for a long-term relationship rather than an evening of drinks at the bar followed by casual sex. Because Berniece blames Boy Willie for the death of Crawley, the siblings scrap and fight, coming to threats of a gun and banishment from the house, the only normal residence that the family can still return to for comfort and assistance.)

Style

9. Why does Wilson rely totally on dialect?
(To express the hardships and longings of the fractured family, Wilson re-creates a patois that developed during the antebellum South and that expanded with the elements of city life among blacks fleeing north to a more promising setting. The pulsing, demanding speech patterns of Boy Willie express a dissatisfaction with self and place that requires action. Ironically, he summarizes his uncle, his mirror image, in terms of faults, "If he had a whole sack of money you liable never to see him. You ain't gonna see him until he get broke. Just as soon as that sack of money is gone you look up and he be on your doorstep.")

Berniece and Maretha, who have distanced themselves from the rural South, avoid the strong, impulsive slang expressions that permeate Boy Willie's comments and isolate him from normal conversation. Berniece's use of slang usually erupts with her temper, when she has tolerated all of Boy Willie's nonsense she can take. For balance, Wilson counters Boy Willie's black dialect with the biblical phraseology of Avery Brown, a semi-literate scripture reader whose language demonstrates a replacement of street lingo with pulpit idiom.)

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Structure

10. How does this play satisfy an audience?

(The energy of Wilson's gathering of characters demonstrates early on that clashes and misunderstandings have the potential to generate a positive change in a family still carrying the scars of slavery. The possibility of extensive damage to Doaker's relationship with Berniece or of harm to Maretha, who seems innocent of domestic violence, causes sympathies to work against Boy Willie, who genuinely loves his family, especially his niece. In addition to bad manners and improper demands on his sister, he appears as capable of stealing the piano as Doaker and Wining Boy, who once raided Sutter's house and hauled the piano away on a wagon. Although Boy Willie does not interpret his intent as theft or anticipate the type of upheaval the original raid caused, his behavior reflects home wrecking and violation of trust on a grand scale.

To achieve satisfaction in the playgoer, Wilson gentles the fractious and misaligned character relations with less violent passions. Avery's ambition to launch a church and Lymon's wish for a normal male-female relationship couple with Wining Boy's need of sympathy at Cleotha's passing to restore order and hope for the family's future. Doaker, the bland stabilizing influence, is ironically a traveling man whose steady income and ability to own and tend a home provides the setting in which the other characters can act out personal gripes and express their needs. By the play's end, the characters have not achieved their individual aims, but have settled a destructive element from the past that threatened their working alliance.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Wilson's ear for street slang and black dialect energizes the exchanges of characters scrambling to achieve:

1. Boy Willie states his purpose in raw, forceful Southern dialect when he declares, "You can't do nothing with that piano sitting up here in the house. That's just like if I let them watermelons sit out there and rot. I'd be a fool."
2. With more civility and grace, Berniece feminizes her view of the heirloom by recalling her mother: "Look at it. Mama Ola polished this piano with her tears for seventeen years. For seventeen years she rubbed on it till her hands bled. Then she rubbed the blood in . . . mixed it up with the rest of the blood on it."
3. Berniece allows her grammar to degenerate near the end of her argument: "I ain't never seen it come to nothing. People getting burned up. People getting shot. People falling down their wells. It don't never stop."
4. Doaker, the sensible connection between warring siblings, murmurs without elaboration, "Come on, Berniece . . . let it go, it ain't his fault."
5. When the tense face-off between Berniece and Boy Willie halts for the entrance of Wining Boy, he sputters in self-defense, "I don't need your whiskey. I can buy my own. I wanted your company, not your whiskey."
6. As Berniece's anger spills over, she commands, "Take Grace or whoever with you. Just go on get out my house."
7. To Avery's sincere recitation of Psalm 51:10, Boy Willie, the crude country bumpkin snorts, "Hey Sutter! Sutter!

Get your ass out this house!"

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Business and Economics

1. Describe the job opportunities that appeal to Willie Boy, Mama Berniece, Lymon, Boy Willie, Doaker, Wining Boy, and Berniece. Explain why Squirrel Hill is important to Berniece and Boy Willie's prosperity.
2. Explain why Stovall would pay the fines of two timber thieves and have them work on the Parchman farm. Why does the prison farm system invite exploitation?

Cinema

View films about clashes between family members, such as *Ordinary People*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *The Piano Lesson*. Comment on the interplay of people of different geographic, social, and religious backgrounds.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of various incidents. Supply sketches of costumes and props.
2. Create a storyboard account of the piano's history. Indicate at what point the piano became a symbol of family history, accomplishment, and defiance of slavery. Show where Berniece, Wining Boy, Doaker, and Boy Willie deviated in their respect for the piano.

Education

Suggest courses of study and outside experiences to prepare Maretha for a career in teaching.

Geography

1. Use topographical maps to describe the terrain the story covers. Why does Mama Berniece's journey with her son to Nolander's home in Georgia form a setback in family history?
2. Draw a map of the neighborhood. Include Cohen's building, Benny Diamond's store, bars, pawnshops, movie theater, Squirrel Hill, Grace's house, Seefus, and Doaker's house.
3. Based on your understanding of the play, lead a panel discussion of the effects of Doaker's hypnotic sing-song geography covered by the train he serves as cook. Support your opinions with a chart surveying the number of miles covered along the route and the long and short stretches he travels on each sojourn.

History and Social Studies

1. Compose an extended definition of social isolation. Explain why the term describes wanderers like Wining Boy. Comment on his rootlessness since Cleotha's death. Contrast his constant movements to Doaker's regular railroad cycle and Berniece's work at a white family's home in Squirrel Hill.
2. Contrast female characters and their attitudes toward family and responsibility. Consider Mama Ola, Grace, Dolly, Berniece, Mama Berniece, Cleotha, Coreen, Ophelia Sutter, and Maretha.
3. Summarize the contribution of northern settlement houses to assisting newcomers in finding jobs, protecting themselves from disease, educating their children, securing medical care and birth control, and retrieving themselves from poverty. Add details of the work of Juliette Lowe, Lillian Wald, Margaret Sanger, and Dorothy Day.

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Language Arts

1. List locutions that characterize black dialect, for example, go on and . . . , not studying no, carrying on, walk on out, don't do nothing but, go ahead and, fixing to, and what I'm talking about.
2. Compose extended definitions of street slang and dialect. Analyze the content of songs in the play. Determine what aspects of standard grammar and punctuation are missing or ignored.
3. Pantomime symbolic or significant episodes.
4. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, poems, songs, and stories that describe racism, violence, family contention, and poverty.
5. Analyze each line of the 101st Psalm. Determine which images apply to the situation at Doaker's house. Explain how the poem suits a situation calling for ethics and wise decisions.
6. Read aloud I Kings 3:16-28. Compare the judgment of the contested infant with Boy Willie's demand for his share of the family piano. Why can Berniece not agree to a compromise?
7. Make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: portent, Staggerlee, Sunflower, Yazoo Delta [Y. D.], settlement house, exorcism, line track, hot comb, boogie-woogie, Rockefeller, Good Shepherd, Nazareth, Jerusalem, ham hocks, Last Supper, Palm Sunday, resurrection, jaundice, jumping the broom, sentimental value, keep the wolf from the door, thirty-eight, highball, Florsheim, homeboy, Zion, Queen of Sheba, tit for tat, and statues.

Law

1. Read aloud state laws governing crimes committed in the play, especially theft, shooting, arson, prostitution, adultery, gambling, assault, and murder. Determine whether Berniece is correct in predicting that Boy Willie could not hold a job and thrive in Pittsburgh's citified atmosphere.
2. Make a chart of advice to Doaker concerning his rights as property owner to evict Boy Willie for attempting to steal the piano.

Music

Contrast blues, boogie-woogie, and "Staggerlee," a honky-tonk tune that characterizes a violent black man. Determine how these rhythms and lyrics characterize the lives of the original Boy Charles, Willie Boy, Wining Boy, Doaker, and Boy Willie.

Psychology and Health

1. Explain with diagrams the pressures that impinge on a young widow like Berniece. Justify her ejecting Grace from the house, threatening to get Crawley's gun to drive Boy Willie away, refusing to marry Avery, reminding Maretha not to "show her color" at the settlement house, receiving a kiss and perfume from Lymon, and demanding that Wining Boy not drink in front of Maretha.
2. Lead a debate concerning the best methods of halting a family squabble short of threats with guns. Consider the use of religious strictures against violence, counseling, mediation, music, shared activities, ritual, and food.
3. Compose a lecture on emotional trauma as found in Berniece, Wining Boy, Doaker, and Boy Willie. List causes,

symptoms, and treatment for rootlessness and the inability to let go of past hurts and failures.

Religion

1. Compose program notes for a playbill explaining religious phrases and references.
2. Describe the role of "jumping the broom" in the family life of slaves. How did the sale of Berniece and her son violate the family's unity?
3. Outline the parallels between Southern slaves and the Israelites, who fled slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt. Explain why Pittsburgh is alien territory to Boy Willie.

Science

1. Outline a web site explaining the cause and symptoms of jaundice.
2. Perform a class skit on the life of Madame C. J. Walker, the first black female millionaire. Demonstrate the product that brought her fame and wealth.

Speech

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people exploit identifiable groups, especially slaves of a minority race? How does past suffering cause a folk story like the "Ghosts of the Yellow Dog"? How do speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, ritual, and other forms of creativity help quell regret, hatred, and revenge?
2. Compose a presentation to a historical society on the uniqueness of Sutter's piano. Explain how the piano is both a token of family courage and a tie with the degradation of slavery.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of immoral or illegal acts by various characters.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate family spirit.
3. Compose a scene in which Boy Willie and Berniece settle their mutual antipathies and determine how the piano can benefit the whole family in the future.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each.
5. Account for Boy Willie's intrusion on Doaker's house and his insistence that he have his share of the piano.

THE PIANO LESSON

VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each of the following with appropriate words from the list below.

akin	disarming	glorify	portent	sparsely
brash	dressing	jaundice	rendered	straightforwardness
commandment	exorcism	manner	resurrection	totems
craftsmanship	faultless	mixture	righteousness	vigor
delta	fraught	plea	smite	zest

1. The house is _____ furnished, and although there is evidence of a woman's touch, there is a lack of warmth and _____.
2. On the legs of the piano, carved in the _____ of African sculpture, are mask-like figures resembling _____.
3. The carvings are _____ with a grace and power of invention that lifts them out of the realm of _____ and into the realm of art.
4. A stillness that is a _____, a gathering, a coming together of something _____ to a storm.
5. Boy Willie's partner, he talks little, and then with a _____ that is often _____.
6. He is a man who looking back over his life continues to live it with an odd _____ of _____ and sorrow.
7. It is a life-and-death struggle _____ with perils and _____ terror.
8. It is an old urge to song that is both a _____ and a _____.
9. It is intended as an _____ and a _____ for battle.
10. "Get thee behind the face of Righteousness _____ as we _____ His Holy Name!"

THE PIANO LESSON

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions from the novel with the name of one or more characters listed below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. If no character fits the description, write "none."

- | | | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|------------|
| A. L. D. Jackson | D. Lymon | G. Mama Berniece | J. Ophelia | M. Doaker |
| B. Berniece | E. Robert Sutter | H. Maretha | K. Mama Ola | N. Stovall |
| C. Willie Boy | F. Wining Boy | I. Grace | L. Boy Willie | O. Avery |

- _____ 1. commits adultery
- _____ 2. displays ambition
- _____ 3. plays the piano
- _____ 4. commits acts of violence
- _____ 5. is separated from a loved one
- _____ 6. dies from the actions of the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog
- _____ 7. is a slave
- _____ 8. victimizes blacks
- _____ 9. attends a settlement house program
- _____ 10. offers \$1,150 for the piano

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Maretha, Doaker, Boy Willie, and Berniece all encounter the ghost.
- _____ 2. Robert Sutter regretted selling one and a half slaves to pay a woodcarver.
- _____ 3. Berniece declares that Crawley wouldn't have died if Boy Willie had not given him a thirty-eight.
- _____ 4. Lymon makes a movie date with Grace.
- _____ 5. Willie Boy stands at the crossing of the Yellow Dog and Southern to confront the ghost.
- _____ 6. To Boy Willie's consternation, Berniece wishes aloud that Maretha had been a boy.
- _____ 7. Boy Willie and Lymon hope to drive to Squirrel Hill to sell watermelons.
- _____ 8. Berniece calls on only the strong women of her family lineage to defeat the ghost.
- _____ 9. Wining Boy offers to return south by train with Boy Willie.
- _____ 10. Lymon considers his Florsheim shoes magic.

THE PIANO LESSON

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase which completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided.

1. Doaker relates that _____, the preacher, has been petitioning _____ to marry him for two years.
2. _____ visits Mississippi once a month when the train passes through, but avoids women since _____ left for New York.
3. Avery, the _____ operator at the _____ Building, needs a bank loan to rent Cohen's building.
4. The three _____ with _____ heads need someone to lead them past the wolves in the valley.
5. _____ dislikes Doaker's house because _____ is too bossy.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe how the ghosts avenge the dead.
2. Give Berniece's reasons for remaining single.
3. Discuss Lymon's influence on Boy Willie.
4. Account for Doaker's withdrawal from ambition and family pride.
5. Summarize events that occur after Boy Willie brings Grace to Doaker's house.

THE PIANO LESSON

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Berniece calls on her ancestors while
 - A. praying with Avery.
 - B. scolding Maretha.
 - C. combing Maretha's hair.
 - D. playing the piano.
- _____ 2. One third of the money for the land comes from
 - A. sale of watermelons.
 - B. sale of Lymon's truck.
 - C. a loan from Doaker.
 - D. the pawnshop.
- _____ 3. Wining Boy receives a disturbing letter from
 - A. Willa Bryant.
 - B. Cleotha Holman.
 - C. Alberta Samuels.
 - D. Patchneck Red.
- _____ 4. Wining Boy urges Avery to
 - A. marry Berniece.
 - B. bless the whole house.
 - C. ask the bank for a loan to start the Good Shepherd Church.
 - D. make Berniece a deaconess.
- _____ 5. To protect Maretha, Berniece
 - A. prays to her ancestors.
 - B. refuses to allow alcohol in the house.
 - C. orders Grace to leave.
 - D. asks the help of Irene Kaufman.
- _____ 6. Wining Boy declares that
 - A. Boy Willie will fail at growing cotton and tobacco in Mississippi.
 - B. Lymon has picked the best of the two women.
 - C. Coreen had good reason for leaving Doaker.
 - D. Doaker correctly relates the facts of family history.
- _____ 7. The ghost story begins after
 - A. Boy Charles's house burns.
 - B. the four hobos die.
 - C. the Yellow Dog crosses the Southern.
 - D. Stovall shoots Lymon in the stomach.
- _____ 8. Lymon sleeps in the truck because
 - A. Doaker's neighbors steal watermelons.
 - B. he is wanted by the sheriff.
 - C. he won't sleep on the couch.
 - D. Leroy is looking for him.
- _____ 9. Avery believes he can succeed if he
 - A. has God's blessing.
 - B. exorcises the ghost.
 - C. marries Berniece.
 - D. carries a bottle of water.
- _____ 10. Berniece believes that
 - A. Maretha shows her color in public.
 - B. she could give piano lessons.
 - C. Boy Willie can't hold a job in Pittsburgh.
 - D. Wining Boy will borrow money from Doaker and gamble it away.

THE PIANO LESSON

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Match the following actions with places from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| _____ 1. Lymon's truck breaks down. | A. railway crossing |
| _____ 2. Four hobos burn to death. | B. pawnshop |
| _____ 3. Berniece works for a white woman. | C. Kansas City |
| _____ 4. Boy Willie fights Sutter's ghost. | D. Parchman farm |
| _____ 5. Wining Boy lowers the price on his shoes. | E. stairs |
| _____ 6. Grace and Boy Willie upset a lamp. | F. living room |
| _____ 7. The ghosts speak. | G. boxcar |
| _____ 8. Coreen lives apart from Doaker. | H. New York |
| _____ 9. Prisoners work off their time after Stovall makes a deal for their labor. | I. Cohen's building |
| _____ 10. Boy Willie has been cutting wood. | J. Lymon's cousin's land |
| _____ 11. Sutter dies suddenly. | K. kitchen |
| _____ 12. Avery interrupts Berniece's bath. | L. well |
| _____ 13. Lymon kisses Berniece. | M. Sutter's land |
| _____ 14. Berniece blames Boy Willie for Crawley's death. | N. Squirrel Hill |
| _____ 15. Doaker sees the ghost holding his head. | O. Sunflower |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. Who grieved for Mama Berniece and the boy?
- _____ 2. Whom does Berniece suspect of murder?
- _____ 3. Who made a recording?
- _____ 4. Whom does Lymon abandon at the bar?
- _____ 5. How much does Boy Willie anticipate getting for the piano?
- _____ 6. When did Sutter and his family leave the house?
- _____ 7. Who offered Sutter's land for sale?
- _____ 8. Where did Doaker and Wining Boy take the piano?
- _____ 9. Who carved the piano?
- _____ 10. Who bought Mama Berniece?

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Ed Saunders died.
2. Contrast the ambitions of Avery, Boy Willie, Doaker, and Berniece.
3. Account for Berniece's change of attitude toward the piano.
4. Summarize events surrounding Boy Charles's death.
5. Describe the exorcism.

THE PIANO LESSON

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

1. sparsely, vigor
2. manner, totems
3. rendered, craftsmanship
4. portent, akin
5. straightforwardness, disarming
6. mixture, zest
7. faultless, fraught
8. commandment, plea
9. exorcism, dressing
10. righteousness, glorify

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

1. F, G, L
2. D, L, M, O
3. B, C, F, H
4. A, B, C, E, F
5. B, C, F, G, H, J, M, O
6. E
7. C, G
8. E, N
9. H
10. none

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. F |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. Avery, Berniece
2. Doaker, Coreen
3. elevator, Gulf
4. hobos, sheep
5. Wining Boy, Berniece

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. D |
| 2. A | 7. B |
| 3. A | 8. B |
| 4. B | 9. C |
| 5. C | 10. C |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. F | 11. M |
| 2. G | 7. A | 12. K |
| 3. N | 8. H | 13. K |
| 4. E | 9. D | 14. F |
| 5. F | 10. J | 15. F |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 1. Ophelia | 6. July 4, 1911 |
| 2. Boy Willie | 7. his brother |
| 3. Wining Boy | 8. Mama Ola's people in the next county |
| 4. Dolly | 9. Willie Boy |
| 5. \$1150 | 10. Nolander |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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