

Letters to AugustWilson.net

Note: AugustWilson.net stopped publishing letters in January 2009 when the editor became overwhelmed with more pressing academic duties. Still, these letters document a historical time period relating to August Wilson from 2003-2009 and have value as such.

January 13, 2009

Greetings! My name is Randy Pitts. I was a friend of August when he attended the University of Pittsburgh, during the seventies.

I have a couple of old photos of August, and Rob Penny who serve at the Black Studies of Pitt, and myself. We had a writing group where we recited poetry and other creative writings. The photos were taken at a poetry event that was presented at the Homewood Library in Pittsburgh back in the late seventies.

I too am a playwright, poet, and recently finished a fictional novel about a Special Agent assigned to bring down an international terrorist. I have written teleplays and was selected as a finalist for the USA Hometown Festival.

I am aware of the new multicultural facility being constructed for August in downtown Pittsburgh. I'm not sure if they were interested in having copies of these photos as part of their exhibit. You would be more knowledgeable of that than I.

Anyway, if your schedule is accommodating I would like to here from you.

Thanks.

Randy Pitts

p.s. Thanks for recognizing the talents of a friend

October 18, 2008

Dr. Downing,

I am a senior at the University of Central Missouri. My husband and I plan to be inner-city Kansas City middle school educators and feel that a inter-disciplinary curriculum that addresses the issues in the plays would be invaluable in our chosen field. I am look at my honor's project and am wondering if I am trying to reinvent the wheel. I have seen your website and am writing to ask if you are aware of any lesson plans or Unit studies that have been written for Mr. Wilson's plays.

I have tickets to Radio Golf on Friday and hope that I am going to be as excited by this play as I was when when I was first introduced to August Wilson's plays. I saw Joe Turner's Come and Gone shortly before his death and had the honor of meeting Mr. Wilson. At that time I began to realize the wealth of educational opportunities for students.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to ramble.

Leslie Theurer

July 5, 2008

Thank you for time and energy in preserving/ documenting the story and life of August Wilson. My boyfriend and I are going to see Jitney tonight in Houston Texas.

ML Young

Thursday, September 4, 2008 10:08 am

My Pleasure, Dr. Mike Downing,

My name is Guilherme. I've found your website about August Wilson's works, and I really enjoy it.

I'm a student at the "Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei" (UFSJ) in Minas Gerais, Brazil. I want to ask you a question, if possible.

In this semester, I'm working with the Black theater and getting very interested in Ma Rainey's Black Bottom. I want to do a dissertation about the social aspects in the play, like racism, human exploration, and specially the relations of power.

Could you recommend any works? I would like you to help me in this.

Thanks.

Guilherme

[Guilherme,](#)

[Two articles to start with:](#)

["Speaking of Ma Rainey/Talking about the Blues" by Sandra Adell](#)

["The Blues on Broadway: Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" by Sandra Shannon](#)

Otherwise, check out books and journal articles at your local university library.

Thanks,

Dr. Downing

Thank you for help me, Dr. Michael Downing, I'll search the articles.

Guilherme

August 27, 2008

Dr. Downing:

I work for a small, independent educational publishing company called Knowledge Unlimited. We produce supplemental products and programs for the K-12 market.

We are working on a poster set tentatively entitled "Great African American Writers," and we would like to include August Wilson -- one of my personal literary heroes -- in the set. Do you know who I should contact (family, executor, etc.) for approval?

Thank you in advance for any information you are able to provide.

Sincerely,

Matt Cibula
Knowledge Unlimited
1-800-356-2303, ext. 3068

Matt,

After some digging, I discovered an answer to your question:

The Estate of August Wilson
4509 Interlake Avenue North
Box 103
Seattle, WA 98103
208-599-9197

Best,

Dr. Downing

November 8, 2007

Hi Dr. Downing,

We are an adult group with a couple of librarians, a writer, and a historian (I think), to name a few. We are meeting this evening, so I will talk to the group about your email, especially about reading the plays in chronological order. I will be in contact with you again soon. I think it would be wonderful if we were to have an ongoing discussion with you about Wilson and his plays!

Kindly,
Jennifer Lang

Jennifer,

You are asking a wonderful question.

I think it depends on two things 1) the goal of the group and 2) and reading level of the group.

So, what is the goal of the group? If you want to experience the plays on a decade-by-decade basis, then read them that way. If you want to see how Wilson developed as a writer, then read them in order as written.

Now, as far as the reading level of the group, if the skill level of the readers is basic (high school), then I would suggest *Fences* first, because it can most easily be related to *Death of a Salesman* and standard Greek tragedy. Then I'd move on to *The Piano Lesson*.

However, if the skill level is greater (and a reading discussion group sounds like a high-level group), then I would suggest tackling one of the other options.

Personally, I think it would be fascinating to read the plays in chronological order by decade. I don't know of anyone who has done this to date. If you do this, I would love to add some of the group's perspective to my AW website and possibly add some information to one of the two books I'm working on relating to Mr. Wilson. It would be a productive and enlightening study.

In my scholarly past, I have encountered his plays haphazardly, originally watching *Ma Rainey* and *Two Trains Running* at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre. From there, I went on to read, watch, and re-read all the other plays in no particular order.

Please stay in touch. I would love to stay in contact with your group as you move into this

project.

Best,

~Mike Downing

Dr. Michael Downing
Assistant Professor of English
Professional Writing Program
Kutztown University of PA

October 4, 2007

Hi, Dr. Mike,

I emailed you last fall asking you if August Wilson's complete works had been published.

At that time they were not so I'm wondering has that happened yet?

I'd take separate scripts as well. Can you help?

Suzy McKeaney

Suzy,

Yes, they've all been published.

You can purchase them on Amazon individually in paperback form or you can buy August Wilson's Century Cycle in hardback for \$200.

Go to Amazon for details.

Have fun!

DrD

June 19, 2007

Hello Dr. Downing,

I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Wilson's play King Hedley II in Cleveland, Ohio this past Saturday. It was performed at a community theater called Karamu which has produced several

plays by black playwrights for years. In fact Fences has been performed there several times over the years. I just wanted to let you know I loved King Hedley II and I hope you complete your book on this great talent.

Keith

April 24, 2007

Hi Dr. Downing,

My name is Katie Boggs and I thoroughly enjoy your site. I am trying to draft a paper right now on Wilson's Joe Turners Come and Gone and was wondering if I could get a few pointers from you.

My assignment is to write on how two literary devices (characters, irony, symbolism, subplot, metaphor, etc.) demonstrate or create a theme. I know identity is really apparent in this play, but I was digging for something deeper. Could you help me? Thanks so much,

Katie

Katie,

Well, the characters represent mythic aspects. You can pursue that angle. And along with mythic aspects, you have symbolism and metaphor.

Bynum = bind them. He is the conjurer. The witch doctor. The one who understands the spiritual world.

Herald = an angel's name; one who announces...Loomis = one who is weaving together his life, particularly his past ("loom")

Herald, as his name might imply, is on a spiritual mission to locate his wife.

Seth Holly always reminded me of Faulkner's Joe Christmas. ("Holly")....also Faulkner's novel is Light in August, so that has an echo for me, too.

From *Wikipedia* (underlining belongs to me):

"Joe Christmas is a fictional character, one of the central characters in the 1932 novel *Light in August* by William Faulkner. Raised in an orphanage, Joe Christmas knows little about his own identity. While he is presumably both black and white, Joe Christmas appears to be mostly white; in fact, there is no certainty that he is black at all, though he identifies himself as such. His search for racial identity is central to the work."

Once upon a time, I had a realization that Zonia was somehow named after Wilson's mother, Daisy Wilson, but I've never verified the connection.

That should keep you busy. If you have questions, please let me know.

DrD

April 12, 2007

Greetings, Dr. Downing:

My name is Jibril Abdul-Hafeez and I teach Qur'anic Linguistics with a Humanities minor leaning at An-Nur Islamic Center, a small Islamic gathering place for mainly an African American Muslim congregation in the Eastern area of Greater Pittsburgh.

The Mr. August Wilson that I can talk about that I knew came out of my connection to him as we both were Nation of Islam members where I met his first wife Brenda Burton in the 70's. She was a major influence on his life as it relates to "Black" consciousness. He joined her in marriage and enlisted in the Nation of Islam during the early 70's. He wrote poetry at that time influenced by the Nation of Islam's leadership that was featured in a book about Pittsburgh's African Americans sit-in and takeover of a room demanding a department for African American enrichment at the University of Pittsburgh.

Sonia Sanchez, Dr. Curtiss Porter, the late Bob Johnson, Sala Udin, and the late Rob Penny just to name a few were important factors that were contributing to the blackpride demands that had been ignited by The Honorable Elijah Muhammed's Nation of Islam and his spokesman "Malcomb X".

The late Mr. August Wilson picked up "Muhammed Speaks" weekly newspaper publications and took to the streets just like I and many thousand others who were fed up with being victims of cultural engineering for the benefit of the diabolical ruling class capitalists. Recently, the wife of the late Rob Penny and I shared a tongue in cheek chuckle about the time when she and her late husband came across "August" on the University of Pittsburgh's campus armed with Muhammad Speaks newspaper intended to enlighten African Americans about the abuses of White Supremacy.

I recall with pride witnessing Sakina Ansari Wilson, the beautiful first daughter of Mr. & Mrs. August Wilson adorned in her custom designed uniforms for students attending private schooling at Muhammad's Mosque #22 here in Pittsburgh.

I attended Mr. Wilson's services here in Pittisburgh that brought together many to commemorate the passing of Mr. August Wilson. Although many can choose to overlook Mr. August Wilson's life and experiences as a Nation of Islam member, it is impossible to erase the impact that those years played on the works and thinking of August's creative

artistry. To do so would be cheating the truth about the real August Wilson's education, life and legacy. Need i say more...

Best regards,
Jibril Abdul-Hafeez
Director-HBCCO Arts & Culture Working Group,
Vice President-Islamic Council of Greater Pittsburgh

Jibril,

Thanks for writing.

I've known for some time that the influences of Black Nationalism and Islam would come to the surface as they relate to Mr. Wilson. To date, I have not known how to pursue this angle. Now, you've opened the door. Thank you.

With your permission, I would like to publish your letter. I would also like to invite you to continue to write about your knowledge of the influences upon Mr. Wilson. I invite your friends to do the same. That's what the site is all about.

In conjunction with your argument, I am wondering whether you can point to any instance where Mr. Wilson himself points to such influences. I know he has pointed to Amiri Baraka, Blues music, Romare Bearden, and Jorge Luis Borges, and I know that he has said that he was "fired in the kiln of black nationalism," but I would like to learn more about this aspect of Mr. Wilson's influences, particularly as they relate to Islam.

Best,

DrD

Thursday, April 12, 2007 2:39 PM

Dr. Downing,

I found your site on August Wilson and was interested in additional information. I have been looking for a copy of Fences but can honestly say not been able to find one. I have found many good reference articles on August Wilson life and small guides to Fences, but nothing to assist me in writing a paper about his works. I have small excerpts from the fences but no complete work. The database at my community college is rather small when it comes to quiet a bit of the material I have been in need of. Any help would be appreciated. I was happy to find your page so thank you for your detailed accounts of his life and works. If you are able to email me a copy of Fences

I would be very thankful.

Adam Waldron

Adam,

I cannot email you a copy of *Fences*; however, it is available in paperback on Amazon.

Thanks for writing.

DrD

March 26, 2007

Dr. Downing:

I am using one of your letters in my lecture, "Is August Wilson Racist?" I think it is a solid piece that addresses a lot of issues about Wilson's legacy. I also call your attention to an article Henry Louis Gates wrote, "The Chitlin Circuit," written for the *New Yorker*, I think (I found it in a book, "African-American Performance and Theater History").

It chronicles his famous (or, if you're Robert Brustein, infamous) speech to the Theater Communication Group meeting at McCarter Theater, Princeton, NJ. (I worked there in the late 70's and actually remember a TCG meeting there where I was run ragged by theater folk - my coincidence cup runneth over. I'll stop.)

What a treat to hear from you! Thanks again for the website - it is a fantastic resource.

Phil

Thanks, Phil.

Thanks for the "Chitlin Circuit" tip. I'll follow up.

I'm glad that you found the site useful. I'm surprised at how many hits it's gotten in past three years...

Take care,

DrD

March 28, 2007

Mike,

I have heard many references to early plays that Wilson wrote around the same time as Jitney, such as "Recycling." Is it possible to procure copies of these early scripts? Or, have they been lost or otherwise unattainable by the common August Wilson addict?

Thanks,
Dan

Dear Dan,

I have not seen the early plays in print. Jitney, of course, is in print, but such plays as:

Black Bart and the Sacred Hills, The Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket, Recycling, How I Learned What I Learned, and

Homecoming are not generally available.

I am waiting for some announcement from Mr. Wilson's Estate on how his works will be handled/published, but I've heard nothing yet.

Thanks for writing.

DrD

February 25, 2007

Dr. Downing:

Being one who also grew up in the Hill District, I have obvious pride and respect for the work of Mr. Wilson.

I would like to know if you are aware of his work available on DVD?

Sincere thanks,

George R. Wilmer

Dear George:

So far, only The Piano Lesson has been produced as a Hallmark Hall of Fame production.

Fences was in production (starring James Early Jones), but that fell through.

I'm sure, in time, the plays will find their way to DVD.

Thanks,

DrD

Dear Dr.D.

Just saw Radio Golf last night at the Huntington Theater in Boston. I've seen all of Wilson's plays except Ma Rainey and Fences, all in the same theater (in the same seats!) Now, at the end of the cycle, and knowing that Wilson's "come and gone," I'm even more blown away than usual, and went to the internet to confirm the intersections of characters and themes that Radio Golf brought to mind.

Do you know if anyone has done a Wilson "family tree?" That is, some way of showing all the interconnections of his characters over the century he writes about?

Thanks,

Lisa

Lisa,

This has been a hot topic lately. Somebody said that a family tree existed on the Web, but I've been unable to find it. I think it's ripe for someone to tackle as a research project.

If you find it, please send it along and I'll post it.

Thanks,

Mike

Dear Dr.Mike

I am Dr. Sayed Abdel Hay Abdel kader- assistant professor of English literature at the

department of English, Faculty of Arts, Assiut University in Egypt and I am working now as an assistant professor at Al-Baha Teachers' College in Saudi Arabia. I have been working on Afro-American Literature. My M.A. was on Amiri Baraka's treatment of racism as depicted in his two plays 'Dutchman' and 'The Slave'. My Ph.D. was on the Social and political themes that are tackled by Langston Hughes in his drama. I want to pursue my studies within the same field.

I admire your dedication to and interest in August Wilson. But this is what Mr. Wilson deserves. I myself am fascinated by the writings of Mr. Wilson and have begun reading about him. What troubles me now is that I do Not have any of his texts. I'll be grateful if you can help me in this. If you are willing to help, I need some of his texts especially 'Ma Rainey Black Bottom', 'Fences', and 'Joe Turner's Come and Gone' and some critical appreciation revolving around his drama. By the way, I am willing to pay for any photocopying or shipment costs. I wish we could work in collaboration and I'll be grateful if you give me the chance to read some of your work.

Waiting for your reply
Dr. Sayed Abdel Hay Abdel kader
Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia

Dr. Sayed,

Thanks very much for your kind words.

Most of Mr. Wilson's works are available on <http://www.amazon.com/>. They are available in paperback, so it would be cheaper for you to simply order the books through that site.

Best,

Dr. Mike

Dr. D.:

Your website is a wonderful idea! Saw Gem of the Ocean in San Francisco recently. My sister and I are also planning to see all of his plays. My family is going to see Seven Guitars in NY on 09/18.

I agree with your "modern Shakespeare" comment wholeheartedly. We hope that one day someone will publish a book with all the plays in one volume.

Best of luck.

Regards,

Arlene Wilcox

Hi. Dr. Downing,

A note about poor Mr. Wilson,

i write him twice a year just to send him a st paul article, i've never heard back from him but on the other hand the envelopes have not been returned. when he comes to st paul's penumbra theater i always go down and get a few autographs and ask him to say hi to "the girls", who have not made it to town his last two trips.

you may know this already, in the indicia for the hardcover Jitney it listed his office addr. in Seattle, it's Suite 301, 600 First Ave., Seattle WA 98104. since it was in the book i assume he wanted it "known",

last week i sent him two letters saying that i was saddened by the news and that i was praying up a storm for him.

thank you for your massive web site and for maintaining it,

-30-

S. from Minnesota

8/28/2005

Mr. Downing,

I just received the sad news of August Wilson's illness. I would like to send him a letter to let him know the impact he has made on my life as an actor and a Black woman. I would appreciate any help you can give me. Thank you.

Tonnie Walker

8/27/2005

Dear Mike,

I read about August Wilson's liver cancer in today's newspaper, and realized that a health product that I use could be of great help to him. I lost my father to cancer several years ago, and was helpless to do anything for him. Since then, I have been on a mission to discover any and all possibilities for improved health. As a result of this, I stepped "out of the box" to overcome my own health issues.

Many people with terminal cancers have used this product, and some have had miraculous results! The Mangosteen fruit, that is prevalent in Southeast Asia, has been used for centuries in traditional medicine. Its super anti-oxidant xanthones produce incredible results for a multitude of health issues, including cancer!

I tried to locate an email address for August, but was unable to find one. I would like to suggest that you forward this onto August. He should go to the website <http://www.researchmangosteen.com/> and take a serious look at this information. A 21-Day Cancer Challenge protocol can be seen at <http://www.mangosteenexperiences.com/> by clicking on the link titled "21-Day Cancer Challenge". If interested, please visit my website at <http://www.gotyourmangosteen.com/> and call or email me if any questions arise.

I only wish to give August another chance at a cure,

Carolyn Cozzette

8/24/05

Dr. Downing,

Would you happen to know how to contact August Wilson or his agent?
We are interested in having him visit the university as a guest
artist. Any information you might be able to pass along would be appreciated.

Many Thanks,
Naomi Baker
Assistant Professor
UAB Theatre

5/29/2005

I am writing a argument paper defending August Wilson from the remarks that he has made and remarks from Robert Brustein. If you think you could help me understand each of their arguments that would be great. I am trying to defend him from being known as a racist or segregationist.

Best Regards,

Awais Ahmed

[To see a reply to this letter, [click here.](#)]

4/18/2005

We are currently reviewing August Wilson's play called Fences. By chance, has this play be put into a video or DVD even a book on tape? Any information would be helpful.

Thank you
Paula

2/25/2005

Dr. Downing,

My name is Will Bethel. I am a sophomore at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, NC. In our Honors curriculum, we are currently doing a study of August Wilson and his plays. I am trying to find out information on "Radio Golf", his last play in the Pittsburgh Cycle. Is there any way to get in contact with Mr. Wilson himself? Of course, I understand he is very hard to track down these days, but I was just wondering...or perhaps since you are very well-versed in his plays you could share with me(and all of us by extension) what tidbits you may have gleaned about the play. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Be Blessed!

Sincerely,

Wilton R. Bethel

Peer Mentor

Freshman to Senior Year Experience

Director, Prayer Ministry

Religious Life Program

Johnson C. Smith University

wbethel@jcsu.edu

2/22/2005

Dear Dr. Downing,

My name is Chimere Pelzer and I am a senior English major at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. I recently chose to do my first research paper, on someone who you have an extensive knowledge about, and that is Mr. August Wilson. The topic of my paper involves "The Piano Lesson" as his main work. I was wondering could you please assist me by telling me where to begin writing and what information should I include. I know you are wondering why I chose to email you. Well, I came across your website by searching for August Wilson in MSN. And when reading browsing your website

I look forward to hearing from you and hopefully some of your August Wilson insight will rub off on me!!

Sincerely,
Chimere Pelzer

2/12/2005

Dr. Downing,

Ten years ago I was the reading specialist at St. Luke's in Erie; now I am assistant professor of English at New Mexico Military Institute, Roswell, NM.

My college students and drama students enjoy working through *Fences* every time I offer it. Your August Wilson site is excellent!

Thank you.

Natalie J. Stewart-Smith
MAJ, NMMI
Assistant Professor of English

10/3/2005

Hello,

I'm trying to find August Wilson's contact info (email or street) to invite him to a b'day party for Amiri Baraka. Might you be able to help?

Thanks...

Pamela Morgan

9/24/2004

I hope you didn't mind. I wanted to let you know I used information from your website to do my drama analysis on the play The Piano Lesson. I think your website is really great, with lots of excellent information. I made sure I listed your website in my works cited information. Thanks for creating such a great website!

Karla

9/12/2004

Dear Dr Mike Downing,

I was very interested to find this morning your web page dedicated to the works of playwright August Wilson.

I am an independent theatrical producer based in London, UK, and I am currently developing a new play. I am wanting to contact Mr Wilson, but cannot find out who his agent is and who represents him, and I was just wondering if you knew this information? If so, I would be very grateful if you could pass this information onto me.

Many thanks, and I hope to hear from you soon,

Best wishes
Richard Matthews

6/25/2004

Hi Mike,

I'm a 52 yr. old senior at Metro State College in Denver taking my last English major elective - African American Literature. I've chosen to write my term paper on Fences. The criteria is that I analyze it through the African American experience based on what we read in class and research that I've been conducting.

Would you be willing to help me by answering the following questions for me? I would appreciate it so very much.

Nancy Bassett

1. August Wilson speaks of writing from the "blood's memory." In light of that comment, in Fences, how does the history of the African American inform the characters of
 - b) Rose, (what archetype of African American woman does she represent?)
 - c) Troy, (is his character influenced by the diaspora and Booker T. Washington?)
 - d) Lyons (is his character influenced by the Harlem Renaissance, the Blues?)
 - e) Gabriel (what does his character represent?)
2. How does the blues enter into Fences – by language, character development, and/or situation?
3. At the end of the play, Rose and Gabriel end up connected to institutions – Rose – the church and Gabriel a mental institution. What is the significance of this?

Dear Mr. Downing:

I heard August Wilson speak this weekend at the University Of Washington Commencement ceremony, where he was the keynote speaker. Frankly, I had never heard of him before. He spoke to my heart. My 20 year old son was also impressed, but commented that the ideas of Mr. Wilson were so compelling, he found himself thinking about the words so hard he was taken from the next comments, and had to keep bringing himself back to listen, missing much of the content.

I went online trying to find a way to contact him, or to get a copy of his speech, so that I could read it over carefully for possible future attribution in some public speaking I am planning to do. The U.W. website about the commencement said it was not transcribed.

Do you know how I might contact Mr. Wilson, or his staff, to get a copy of his remarks? Any help you could give me will be greatly appreciated.

Anthony Otto

Mr. Downing,

I came across your website on August Wilson while surfing the net for information on "The August Wilson Project", August Wilson's autobiographic one-man play about his life. I was intrigued about your dissertation and was wondering if you hane found a publisher. I would be interested in purchasing your dissertation for my own edification depending on the asking price.

Also, I want to get my hands on a copy of "The August Wilson Project". Would you know how?

Please respond.

Thanks,

Stephen Findley

5/10/2005

I am an American Literature and Advanced Placement English teacher. I teach Fences, Joe Turner's Done Come and Gone, and I show The Piano Lesson. I am constantly looking for additional information about August Wilson. On the military base where I teach, the base library has NONE of Wilson's plays. I order materials online. Yes, we need you to publish.

Ms. LaMarr D. Brack

Document! Document! Document!

Zama High School DSN 263-5307

3/8/2004

Dear Dr. Downing,

I just returned from a staging of *The Piano Lesson* here in Madison, WI. I was delighted to find your material on the web to enrich my understanding of the play, and the work of August Wilson. Thank you for taking the time and trouble to make this information available. And, when your book is published, I'll buy a copy.

Best regards,
Carol Wish

12/20/2003

....hello, i'm contacting you from the us coast guard, i was wondering if you were able to route a request thru to invite mr. wilson to be a guest speaker for a function that we will be having in feb.,.....please reply if you have contact info.,.....thanks for your help,....(even if you can't contact him, i still found some good info on your website,)..

thnx,

fs3 falicia demello

7/15/2003

Mike,

The website is coming along impressively. I had some Wilson miscellaneous stuff I was afraid I might lose before seeing you again so I snailed it. You should get it soon.

When *Jitney* was performed at Pittsburgh Public Theater I remember it was in a revised form. There may well be two texts of that floating around. *King Hedley* was in the process of revision when it got to the PPT, but I'm not sure whether it was previously published. There might be some interesting analysis to be done if there are multiple texts.

Later,

Dave Anderson

"For there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." Will Shakespeare