OLENTANGY SCHOOLS LITERATURE SELECTION REVIEW FORM

LOCATION

Building(s): Olentangy High School
Classes/Grade Level(s): CP English 12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Selection Title/Author: *Fences* by August Wilson
Genre: Drama
Lexile Reading Level: **870L**

Book Summary (abbreviated, bulleted list or link to a book summary)	**Potentially Objectionable Content** (list all categories and at least one example, referenced with a page or chapter number)
https://www.litcharts.com/lit/fences/summary	Racial slurs reflective of 1950s language, adult themes (infidelity, death, grief), mild profanity
Book Reviews (1-2 link(s)) *Note: teacher is not responsible for broken links* https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1987/04/06/mr-wilson-and-mr-jones https://www.aaihs.org/capturing-the-spirit-of-black-pittsburgh-a-review-of-fences/	

ABOUT THE CLASS

Rationale for the Literature Selection (in addition to standards): (To be completed by the teacher or team)

Fences by August Wilson is a cornerstone of my English 12 curriculum because it speaks directly to the central aims of the course: helping students understand themselves, tell their own stories, and critically examine how individual lives are shaped by broader historical and cultural forces. Wilson's play provides a rich, accessible, and emotionally resonant entry point for students to explore the intersections of family, identity, race, gender, legacy, and personal agency.

Set in 1950s Pittsburgh and rooted in the Black experience in America, *Fences* invites seniors—many of whom are preparing to cross their own thresholds into adulthood—to wrestle with questions of inheritance, trauma, dreams deferred, and the burdens passed between



generations. The character of Troy Maxson, with all his contradictions, becomes a powerful figure for students to analyze as they consider how systems (racism, poverty, patriarchy) influence individual choices and family dynamics.

To deepen this work, students actively annotate the play using a guided process in which they infer what characters are feeling when they speak, identify what needs are being met or unmet that might be driving those emotions, and track the patterns of themes that emerge. This process is designed not only to develop close reading and analytical skills, but also to cultivate **empathy and emotional literacy**—students are asked to step into the emotional world of each character and consider the humanity behind every line of dialogue. In doing so, they also practice naming and understanding their own feelings and needs.

The play also provides opportunities to:

- Practice close reading of complex characters and layered dialogue
- Engage with a canonical African American playwright in the American literary tradition
- Reflect on the ways masculinity, fatherhood, and generational trauma shape identity
- Connect literature to students' own experiences of family, dreams, resentment, and reconciliation
- Analyze how memory, storytelling, and silence operate in both the structure of the play and in their own lives
- Build the emotional and interpersonal tools needed for self-awareness, compassion, and community care

In a course that emphasizes personal writing, critical engagement with media, and self-discovery, *Fences* functions not only as a literary text but as a cultural and emotional mirror. Students are asked not just what the characters do, but why—and what that reveals about the world they live in. As seniors, they are especially equipped to consider what we owe to the past and what we choose to carry into the future.

Teaching *Fences* honors both literary excellence and lived experience. It allows students to grapple with big questions while anchoring their analysis in the intimate terrain of family, love, and disappointment—realities they often know too well but may not have had space to name or

examine: The play supports my larger goal of helping students leave high school with stronger voices, deeper empathy, and a clearer understanding of the systems that shape them.

The Ohio Department of Education ELA Standards (list priority standards *only and* abbreviations of the main ideas of the priority standards) Link to Ohio's ELA Standards

In alignment with **Ohio's 11–12 Reading Literature Standards**, *Fences* helps students:

- **Cite strong and thorough textual evidence** to support analysis and explore ambiguity (RL.11-12.1)
- **Determine and analyze multiple interacting themes** across the play and explain how they develop over time (RL.11-12.2)
- **Analyze the impact of the author's structural and stylistic choices**, such as Wilson's use of silence, monologue, and metaphor (RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.5)
- **Interpret figurative, connotative, and denotative meanings** of language and evaluate how Wilson's diction contributes to tone and mood (RL.11-12.4)
- **Examine the cultural perspective and point of view** embedded in Wilson's portrayal of Black life in mid-century America (RL.11-12.6)
- **Analyze multiple interpretations** of the play (e.g., stage vs. film adaptation) to evaluate how production choices shape meaning (RL.11-12.7)
- **Read and comprehend complex drama independently and proficiently**, while making personal, societal, and ethical connections (RL.11-12.10)

ALTERNATIVE TEXTS

What alternative texts would allow students to meet the same objectives? (1-2 texts, title/author; Note: these texts must also have lit. reviews forms associated with their selection)

1. *Death of a Salesman* — Arthur Miller
2. *A Raisin in the Sun* — Lorraine Hansberry

SIGNATURES (embedded jpegs of authentic signatures are fine OR download/print form and obtain traditional signatures)

Teacher: _____ Date: 10/21/25

ELA Department Chair: _____ Date: 10/21/25

Building Principal: _____ Date: 11/4/25

District Curriculum Administrator: Elaine N Fried Date: 11/10/25