

Dear Fifth Formers,

This summer, you will read *Fences*, a Pulitzer-Prize winning play by August Wilson. In order to fully understand this text, your English teachers ask that you use the **following questions / annotation guides / resources** as tools for your summer reading. Please keep an eye out for specific passages in the play that speak to these themes.

*Please note that *Fences* contains some instances of explicit language. Specifically, the n-word appears in the text in ways that reflect the play's historical and cultural context. Though we don't condone the use of this word, we have determined that reading *Fences* will be an enriching experience and prepare you to discuss other texts in American Literature this year.

In the opening days of school, you should expect that your English III teacher will give an annotation check and some kind of written assessment on the play. You should come to class with passages marked in your text that speak to the themes below:

Generational Trauma — Whether individual people, historical events, or societal practices and conditions, what kinds of things cause trauma—lasting, physical, mental, or emotional pain—to the characters in this play? Where, how, and why do certain characters pass their trauma on to others? How do the characters' traumas affect their decisions and behaviors? Does *Fences* suggest any solutions to generational trauma, any ways to stop it or mitigate it?

Gender — What kinds of power dynamics exist between men and women in this play? How do the men think about their own masculinity, and how does this inform their choices and behaviors? How do the women think about their femininity, and how does that inform their choices and behaviors? Is there anything progressive—anything ahead of its time—about the way this play presents gender roles and gender norms? Or does the play present fairly traditional views of manhood, womanhood, and the roles of men and women in a family?

Fatherhood and Father-Son Relationships — According to *Fences*, what does it mean to be a "good father"? What can we reasonably expect a good father to say to his kids or do for them? Where is the line between the bare minimum and exceeding expectations? If a man has children, is it possible for him to be a "good father" but not a good husband (or vice-versa)? How do the norms and expectations of fatherhood change based on demographics: race, economic class, etc.?

Male Friendship and Brotherhood — According to *Fences*, what makes a strong dynamic of friendship between men? Are friendships between men different from friendships between women? Where and how does "brotherhood" exist beyond family ties? How do your friends' decisions impact your decisions and values? If friendship (especially between men) requires loyalty, can loyalty ever become harmful?

Race and Racial Inequality — In what ways are the characters in this play affected by racism in America? In what ways do the characters themselves agree or disagree about that question? Does *Fences* present racism as a more or less insurmountable barrier to black success and upward mobility? Or is it something that can be overcome, and if so, through what? Sheer individual effort? Luck? Patience?