

Course Proposal

August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle

Rachel M. E. Wolfe

Course level: undergraduate upper-division

Envisioned enrollment: 10-15 students

Catalogue description:

August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle, also called the Century Cycle, is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest achievements in American playwriting. Chronicling the black experience through the 20th century in the U.S., the Pittsburgh Cycle consists of ten plays: one for each decade 1900-2000. This course examines the whole of the Pittsburgh cycle, critical and literary reviews of the plays, film adaptations, and the place of August Wilson's momentous achievement in the history of American drama.

Course format:

Beyond the intensive look at August Wilson's Pittsburgh cycle described in the catalogue description, this course serves students as an intro to literary criticism, with its attendant analytical and critical thinking skills. Studying ten plays, their filmic adaptations, and the myriad writings about them both good and bad over the course of fifteen weeks, students will be encouraged to develop their own opinions about the significance of the plays through a combination of research and synthesis. Literary criticism about the plays will include such diverse writings as feminist critiques, historical narratives, adaptation analyses, and genre (de)constructions. Students' own opinions will be developed and refined through a combination of in-class round table discussions, informal writing assignments, and oral presentations (on one play of their choice at midterms and the whole cycle at finals). The class will culminate in a mini-conference, at which students will put forward their own analyses of the Pittsburgh Cycle as conference-style presentations, complete with Q&A sessions with the audience (their classmates and invited guests).

Selected reading sources:

August Wilson, *Century Cycle*

C. W. E. Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson*

Harold Bloom, *August Wilson*

Alan Nadel, *August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle*

Qlasope O. Oyelaran and Kwame Senu Neville Dawes, *Gem of the Ocean: Essays on August Wilson in the Black Diaspora*

Sandra Garrett Shannon, *August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle: Critical Perspectives on the Plays*

Riley Keene Temple, *Aunt Ester's Children Redeemed: Journeys to Freedom in August Wilson's Ten Plays of Twentieth-Century Black America*