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Two Trains Running Play Guide by Cameron Abaroa and Rachel Lindzon
For questions about the guide, please contact cabaroa@arizonatheatre.org

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Want to be a sponsor of ATC’s Learning & Education programming? Contact our Director of Philanthropy, Julia Waterfall-Kanter, at jwkanter@arizonatheatre.org
The mission of Arizona Theatre Company is to inspire, engage, and entertain – one moment, one production, and one audience at a time.

Under new leadership – and now celebrating its 52nd-season – Arizona Theatre Company is truly “The State Theatre.” Our company boasts the largest subscriber base of any performing arts organization in Arizona, with more than 130,000 people each year attending performances at the historic Temple of Music and Art in Tucson, and the elegant Herberger Theater Center in downtown Phoenix.

Each season of carefully selected productions reflects the rich variety of world drama – from classic to contemporary plays, from musicals to new works – as audiences enjoy a rich emotional experience that can only be captured through live theatre. ATC is the preeminent professional theatre in the state of Arizona. Under the direction of Artistic Director David Ivers in partnership with Managing Director Billy Russo, ATC operates in two cities – unlike any other League of Resident Theaters (LORT) company in the country.

ATC shares the passion of the theatre through a wide array of outreach programs, educational opportunities, access initiatives, and community events. Through the schools and summer programs, ATC focuses on teaching Arizona’s youth about literacy, cultural development, performing arts, specialty techniques used onstage, and opens their minds to the creative power of dramatic literature. With approximately 450 Learning & Education activities annually, ATC reaches far beyond the metropolitan areas of Tucson and Phoenix, enriching the theatre learning experience for current and future audiences.
INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

TWO TRAINS RUNNING

By AUGUST WILSON
Directed by LOU BELLAMY

The crossroads of a revolution. There’s a new president in the White House. Racial tensions are on the rise. But no, it’s not 2018. It’s 1969 – and the Civil Rights Movement is sending tremors through Pittsburgh’s Hill District. At the center of the community is Memphis Lee’s diner, slated to be demolished – a casualty of the city’s renovation project, where urban planning is rapidly eating away at Memphis’ beloved neighborhood. Now he must decide if he should allow the government to take over his building or sell the property to a ruthless businessman, while the diner regulars fight to hang on to their solidarity and sense of community. For it is this diner – which seems to always be out of what’s promised on the menu – where they gather daily to gossip about the neighborhood, dream about their futures, and confront the brutal realities of the present. The seventh in his decade-by-decade saga of ordinary African Americans in the turbulent twentieth century, Two Trains Running explores a time of extraordinary change and the ordinary people who get left behind.
CAST AND CREATIVE

CAST

James Craven*  Memphis
Alan Bomar Jones*  Holloway
Erika LaVonn*  Risa
Cedric Mays*  Sterling
Lester Purry*  Wolf
Dennis W. Spears*  West
Ahanti Young*  Hambone

CREATIVE

Lou Bellamy  Director
Vicki Smith  Scenic Designer
Matthew J. LeFebvre  Costume Designer
Don Darnutzer  Lighting Designer
Brian Jerome Peterson  Sound Designer
Glenn Bruner*  Production Stage Manager

*Denotes members of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Denotes artists included in the ATC’s Arizona Artists Initiative.

ARIZONA ARTISTS INITIATIVE is a new initiative that furthers ATC’s commitment to our community and the artists who live in Arizona, were born in Arizona, return or move to Arizona, or write about Arizona. As the Official State Theatre of Arizona, we celebrate the impact Arizona has on the arts.
Two Trains Running is the seventh in the ten play series “The Pittsburgh Cycle,” by August Wilson. The two-time Pulitzer Prize winning playwright was born Frederick August Kittel Jr. in 1945 and lived through and experienced the Civil Rights Movement first hand.

According to the August Wilson Theatre, the Broadway Theater that now bears his name, “After his father’s death in 1965, Frederick Kittel Jr became August Wilson, a decision made to honour his mother. The late sixties saw Wilson become heavily influenced by Malcolm X and the Blues and he converted to Islam to ensure the survival of his marriage to Brenda Burton (1969). A year earlier Wilson set up the Black Horizon Theater with Rob Penny where his first plays, Recycling and Jitney, were performed. (The August Wilson Theatre, n.d.).”

His play Jitney, as mentioned above, became the basis of Wilson’s magnum opus “The Pittsburgh Cycle.” Each of the ten plays portrays the African-American experience throughout the 20th Century.

As the New York Times wrote upon Wilson’s death in 2005, “In his work, Mr. Wilson depicted the struggles of black Americans with uncommon lyrical richness, theatrical density and emotional heft, in plays that gave vivid voices to people on the frayed margins of life: cabdrivers and maids, garbage men and side men and petty criminals. In bringing to the popular American stage the gritty specifics of the lives of his poor, trouble-plagued and sometimes powerfully embittered black characters, Mr. Wilson also described universal truths about the struggle for dignity, love, security and happiness in the face of often overwhelming obstacles (Isherwood, 2005).”

August Wilson put a voice to a minority group struggling to gain civil rights and equality. When asked why, he stated that “Before I am anything, a man or a playwright, I am an African American. The tributary streams of culture, history and experience have provided me with the materials out of which I make my art (Marin Theatre Company, n.d.).”

The Pittsburgh Cycle

From the August Wilson Theatre (The August Wilson Theatre, n.d.)

Gem of the Ocean (2003) – 1900s
Citizen Barlow enters the home of the 285-year-old Aunt Ester who guides him on a spiritual journey to the City of Bones.

Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (1988) – 1910s
The themes of racism and discrimination come to the fore in this play about a few freed African American slaves.
**Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (1984) – 1920s**  
Ma Rainey’s ambitions of recording an album of songs are jeopardized by the ambitions and decisions of her band.

**The Piano Lesson (1990) – 1930s**  
Brother and sister Boy Willie and Berniece clash over whether or not they should sell an ancient piano that was exchanged for their great grandfather’s wife and son in the days of slavery.

**Seven Guitars (1995) – 1940s**  
Starting with the funeral of one of the seven characters, the play tracks the events that lead to the death.

**Fences (1987) – 1950s**  
Race relations are explored again in this tale which starts with a couple of garbage men who wonder why they can’t become garbage truck drivers.

**Two Trains Running (1991) – 1960s**  
Looking at the Civil Rights movement of the sixties, this play details the uncertain future promised to African Americans at the time.

Jitneys are unlicensed cab drivers operating in Pittsburgh’s Hill District when legal cabs won’t cover that area. The play follows the hustle and bustle of their lives.

**King Hedley II (1999) – 1980s**  
One of Wilson’s darkest plays, an ex-con tries to start afresh by selling refrigerators with the intent of buying a video store. Characters from *Seven Guitars* reappear throughout.

**Radio Golf (2005) – 1990s**  
Aunt Ester returns in this modern story of city politics and the quest from two monied Pittsburgh men to try and redevelop an area of Pittsburgh.

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**Sources**


TIMELINE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE 20TH CENTURY

1948-- President Harry Truman ends segregation in the Armed Forces (Executive Order 9981).

1954-- The Supreme Court consolidates five cases into Brown vs. Board of Education and ruled that public schools should become desegregated. Many schools continued to stay segregated, ignoring this decision.

1955-- Rosa Parks is unwilling to give up her seat on an Alabama bus prompting a year long Montgomery Bus Boycott.

January 10-11, 1957-- Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK Jr.) and about sixty black pastors and activists meet in Atlanta, Georgia to coordinate nonviolent protests about racial discrimination and segregation.

September 4, 1957-- Nine black students, known as “Little Rock Nine” are blocked from entering a high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. The president at the time, Dwight D. Eisenhower, sent federal troops to escort them to class.

September 9, 1957-- Dwight D. Eisenhower enacts a new law, the Civil Rights Act of 1957. This law protects voters’ rights and allows federal prosecution if someone tries to suppress others’ rights to vote.

1960-- Four black college students in North Carolina refuse to leave a “whites-only” counter. This nonviolent protest prompts others to happen in the same city (Greensboro) and other states.

June 11, 1963-- Two black students are unable to register at the University of Alabama because the governor of the state, George C. Wallace, is blocking the entrance. The standoff ends when the president of the time, John F. Kennedy, sends the National Guard to the school.

August 28, 1963-- About 250,000 people take part in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. MLK Jr. gives his infamous “I have a dream” speech.

September 15, 1963-- A bomb goes off at a church in Birmingham, Alabama before Sunday services killing four young black girls and injuring several others.

1964-- Lyndon B. Johnson, the president at the time, signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prevents employment discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.
**Secondary Classroom Guide**

**Discussion Questions**
1. What does each character want? How do they get what they want?
2. What is the overall theme of the play?
3. What does this play teach us about the Civil Rights movement?
4. Why does Sterling steal a ham for Hambone?
5. Why do you think Risa takes so long to serve the customers at the diner?

**Classroom Activities**

**Compare and Contrast**
Using the play and the information presented in *Historical Context*, have students compare their own experiences with those of Memphis and the others at the diner. What has changed? What has stayed the same?

**Civil Rights Today**
Have students discuss or write about their own experiences with Civil Rights. Has there been a time in their life where they faced discrimination? How did they react? If a student cannot answer these questions, have them answer instead “How can I make sure everyone around me is treated with respect and equity under the law?”

**Additional Teaching Resources**
https://www.wqed.org/augustwilson/toolkit