

# LIBERATED ETHNIC STUDIES MODEL CURRICULUM



## JITNEY

Grade Level: 7th-12th

### [Link to the Slides for this lesson Plan](#)

**Purpose (What will students learn from this lesson?):** August Wilson's play, *Jitney*, set in the Hill District neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in a jitney cab station, is the first play written in the Century Cycle. Students will read and perform parts of the play, close read for themes and write a literary analysis.

### **Unit Enduring Understandings Alignment:**

- We understand and challenge all forms of oppression and their manifestations by conceptualizing and enacting transformative projects of agency and resistance.
- We understand that while studying forms of oppression, it is also critical to engage ourselves in developing critical consciousness, reclaiming hope and healing.

### **Essential Questions:**

- What qualities or accomplishments make a life to be proud of?
- How does gentrification impact a neighborhood and those who call it home?
- What does it mean to serve your community?

### **Essential Skills:**

- Speaking & Listening
- Making Inferences
- Persuasive Writing
- Research Skills

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- Social Emotional Health: Empathy and Understanding
- Collaboration/Group Work
- Critical Reading

### **Cultural Wealth (Yosso, p. 78):**

- **Navigational capital** refers to “skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this implies the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind. For example, strategies to navigate through racially-hostile university campuses draw on the concept of academic invulnerability, or students’ ability to ‘sustain high levels of achievement, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly at school and, ultimately, dropping out of school’ (Alva, 1991, p. 19)” (p. 80).
- **Social capital** can be understood as “networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions... Mutualistas or mutual aid societies are an example of how historically, immigrants to the US and indeed, African Americans even while enslaved, created and maintained social networks... This tradition of ‘lifting as we climb’ has remained the motto of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs since their organization in 1896” (p. 79-80). *Several characters of this play represent those who become resources for other members of the same immigrant community.*
- **Familial capital** refers to “those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition... This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a broader understanding of kinship. Acknowledging the racialized, classed and heterosexualized inferences that comprise traditional understandings of ‘family’, familial capital is nurtured by our ‘extended family’, which may include immediate family (living or long passed on) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends who we might consider part of our *familia*. From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources” (p. 79).

### **Ethnic Studies Principles Alignment:**

- 3. Center and place high value on pre-colonial, ancestral, indigenous, diasporic, familial, and marginalized knowledge;
- 5. Challenge imperialist/colonial hegemonic beliefs and practices on the ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels;

### **Standards Alignment:**

- English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7

- English Language Arts Standards » History/Social Studies  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
  
- CA ELD Standards  
A. Collaborative 1. Exchanging information and ideas with others through oral collaborative discussions on a range of social and academic topics.

### Modifications, Accommodations, Resources for Multilingual Students:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Close readings of pivotal scenes in the play, specifically those with critical vocabulary, concepts, symbolism, etc. required to understand the overarching themes and enduring understandings.</li> <li>● Translation into home language of some of the close readings of pivotal scenes in the play, specifically those with critical vocabulary, concepts, symbolism, etc. required to understand the overarching themes and enduring understandings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use of movement, music and props to express universal concepts and enduring understandings.</li> <li>● Note-catcher documents for close readings and translated texts.</li> </ul>
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### Critical Vocabulary (also found on Critical Concepts slides 17-23):

<b>CRITICAL VOCABULARY</b>	<b>Definition and Rationale for choosing this word, phrase, or concept</b>	<b>Idea for pre-teaching or front-loading the concept.</b>
<b>Jitney</b>	<p>Originally, the term “jitney” was slang for a nickel deriving from New Orleans through the use of the French word “jeton.” Jitney rides originally only cost a nickel.</p> <p>The first recorded jitney cab ride was in Los</p>	<p>Teach this using the slides before beginning the “Readers Theatre of the Play.”</p>

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	<p>Angeles in July 1914 but soon spread throughout the country as far as Maine, with an estimated 62,000 jitneys operating in 175 US cities.</p> <p>Jitneys were convenient, allowed for Black folx to become entrepreneurs who would give the Black community rides with dignity.</p> <p>Big business interests and cities responded with opposition in the form of crippling regulations. Jitneys soon became a service of the past.</p>	
<p><b>Demolition &amp; Gentrification</b></p>	<p>In 1955, the federal government approved a redevelopment plan which cleared 95 acres of homes and businesses on the Hill and displaced more than 8,000 residents. Meanwhile, the federal government built federally funded public housing. The Hill District had more public housing than any other neighborhood in Pittsburgh.</p> <p>In the 1960s and 1970s the Pittsburgh steel industry collapsed, causing rampant unemployment. This was bad news for the Hill District. The crime rates rose and buildings deteriorated from lack of upkeep. Random demolition of these buildings left vacant lots.</p> <p>In Jitney, Doub says, “They been planning to tear these shacks down before you was born.” He knows that the city will soon demolish Becker’s jitney station. In the play, the city envisions the transformation of the Hill District as an opportunity for revitalization and economic growth. However, the drivers know that a demolished city block rebuilt with luxury buildings will lead to businesses without buildings and people without homes.</p>	<p>Teach this using the slides before beginning the “Readers Theatre of the Play.”</p>
<p><b>The Hill District of</b></p>	<p>August Wilson grew up in the Hill District, the</p>	<p>Teach this using</p>

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<p><b>Pittsburgh</b></p>	<p>setting for all but one of the 10 plays in his American Century Cycle. In the early 1800s, the Hill District was a hub for immigrant families who came to work in the steel mills during the Industrial Revolution. After slavery ended, many African Americans moved to the Hill District. By the early 1900s, the Hill had become a diverse and vibrant community, rich in culture. Then its infrastructure began to crumble. Many of the inhabitants of the Hill moved on to other parts of the city, leaving a significant African American majority. In the mid-1900s the Hill District became a lively network of African American-owned shops, restaurants, Lbarbershops and nightclubs.</p>	<p>the slides before beginning the “Readers Theatre of the Play.”</p>
<p><b>Stereotypes &amp; Appropriation of the Black Experience</b></p>	<p>In Hollywood, some of America’s most revered epic films depict the early stereotypes created in the theater and in the 1920s and 30s. Black artists, writers and musicians began responding to the racist depictions and creating their own artistic representations of black life and philosophy. This period of burgeoning talent and new work is known as The Harlem Renaissance. In 1923, the first serious play written by a black playwright produced on Broadway. It was called The Chip Woman’s Fortune by Willis Richardson. Still, the prevalent trend was for white artists and producers to pull from black narrative, song and dance and parody it for audiences. Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer were particularly concerned with white representations of blackness in the theater. Read Langston Hughes’ famous poem “Notes on Commercial Theater”:</p>	<p>Teach this using the slides before beginning the “Readers Theatre of the Play.”</p>

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### C1: Cultural Ritual and/or Energizer Slides 3-16

#### Description:

How will you engage the students? This energizer contributes to setting the “culture” of the classroom while also connecting the main concepts of lesson plan to the students prior experiences/knowledge/interests.

We encourage Ethnic Studies lessons starting off with land and ancestor acknowledgement. Example provided in the slides. *The slides are to be used before beginning the close read via “Readers Theatre” Once you’ve cast the characters, you can have the students who were not cast use the Worksheet for Guided Questions Throughout the Play linked above.*

	DESCRIPTION	TIME
Slide 1-2	<b>Introduction Slides</b>	<b>2 min</b>
Slide 3	<b>Land Acknowledgement / Los Angeles &amp; Pittsburgh</b>	<b>2 min</b>
Slide 4-8	<b>Ancestor Acknowledgement / August Wilson &amp; his plays</b>	<b>4 min</b>
Slides 9-16	<b>Cultural Energizer - The 4 B’s</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning about and discuss the 4 B’s of Wilson’s Inspiration:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Blues (listen to a Ma Rainey song and reflect)</li> <li>- Romare Bearden (research a painting by Bearden and reflect)</li> <li>- Amiri Baraka (watch him perform a poem and reflect)</li> <li>- Jorge Luis Borges (read a magical realism excerpt and reflect OR read whole short story and reflect)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>30-60 min</b>

### C2: Critical Concepts

	DESCRIPTION	TIME
Slide 17-24	<b>Critical Concepts -</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learn about the following critical concepts using the slides and the discussion questions:</li> </ul>	<b>15 min</b>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jitney</li> <li>- Demolition &amp; Gentrification</li> <li>- The Hill District of Pittsburgh</li> <li>- Stereotypes &amp; Appropriation of the Black American Experience</li> </ul>	
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### C3: Community Collaboration and/or Critical Cultural Production

STEP	DESCRIPTION	TIME
Slide 25-27	<p>Read some background about the play Jitney. Cast the play with students for each character. You can re-cast for each scene or after several scenes.</p> <p>Guided questions can be used to facilitate a close reading.</p>	2-3 class periods.

### C4: Conclusive Dialogue/Critical Circular Exchange

<p><b>Connection:</b> How is this relevant to students? How is it relevant to the unit? How do you bring back to the PURPOSE of the unit?</p>	<p>Use slide 28, a quote from August Wilson, to facilitate a dialogue about how Wilson learned to respect the Black voice and how it made his plays more authentic. This may be a place to talk about Ebonics, Spanglish and other cultural adaptations/dialects/styles of English.</p>
<p><b>Assessment:</b> How will the students be assessed?</p>	<p>Students will be assessed by their meaningful participation in the culminating community circles. A rubric is not provided but is suggested.</p>
<p><b>Evaluation:</b> How will the effectiveness of this lesson plan be evaluated?</p>	<p>You can use slide 29 to discuss big questions connected to the play.</p> <p><i>The students should write or record a culminating reflection based on their responses and the responses of their peers in the community circle.</i></p>

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## RESOURCES AND NOTES

### Materials:

#### THE PLAY:

[Jitney, by August Wilson](#)

This play cannot be used for a public performance/production without the permission of the playwright or the legal representative for the playwright.

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