Assignment: Based on your annotations and ideas formed during class discussion, select a topic of interest in *Fences* about which you can offer an argument or interpretation.

Follow the stages of the writing process, with an extensive focus on prewriting, evidence gathering, and drafting, to develop a 5-6 page paper (MLA 8 format) that supports an argument about your topic.

Your paper will have a substantial introduction that begins with an epigraph or illustrative example, establishes context for your argument, and ends with a clear thesis. The body will consist of several well-developed paragraphs that clearly develop your thesis and avoid summary. In your conclusion you will offer some commentary on the significance of your topic—the “So What?” factor.

Regardless of the topic of your thesis, start with your evidence! Let your interpretation of the evidence form the argument you make in the thesis!

**Secondary Sources:**
For this assignment you may, and in some cases will need to do, some research. For example, if you choose a topic that requires you to talk a little bit about the time period before or during the action of the play, about racism during that time period, about an allusion to something in the Bible, etc. you can’t rely on generalizations or what you THINK is true; you must substantiate your claims with research from a reputable source and you must cite your information parenthetically and on a works cited page.

- **Historical and social context**—racism in the northeast in the 1950s, racism and the Jim Crow South circa 1918, the Great Migration, the history of the Hill District in Pittsburgh, blues music, the Negro leagues and the integration of major league baseball
- **Allusions**—biblical references in Troy’s stories, the angels Gabriel and St. Peter, Uncle Remus, the American folk song “Old Blue,” baseball plays mentioned in the play
- **Meaning of symbols** such as fences, gardens, trumpets, names
- Interviews with August Wilson about the play

For this assignment, you should NOT use critical sources to support or extend your own analysis of the play; the analysis should be solely yours. However, if you choose to consult a secondary source, you must cite it, so keep a careful record of sources you visit, even if you just give them a cursory read through.
Possible Topics:

- Allan Wallach, reviewing *Fences* in *Newsweek*, described Troy as “a man who scaled down his dreams to fit inside his rundown yard.” Write a paper in which you identify the efforts Troy makes to “scale down his dreams to fit inside his rundown yard” and analyze the effects of these efforts on Troy and his family. What argument can you make about the effects of unfulfilled potential and opportunity?

- Troy’s behavior towards his friends and family can make him a difficult man to like or understand, but Rose recognizes that he has a “fine and illuminating” spirit, and the adversity he causes can be an impetus for growth. Write a paper in which you identify how Troy illuminates or prompts growth in two characters from the play. Your challenge is to analyze how Troy’s character or actions prompt a character to grow and change in response to his presence in their lives. What argument can you make about the way in which Troy illuminates the strengths in others?

- In addition to Rose, several women who never or rarely appear onstage nevertheless exert considerable influence: Lucille, Bonnie, Alberta, Raynell. Choose 2-3 of these women and write a paper in which you analyze how each of these women affect the men in their lives? What argument can you make about the role of women in this play? Or, what argument can you make about why Wilson chose to keep most of the female characters offstage?

- Troy isn’t a man who shows his feelings openly or easily, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t trying to communicate his feelings through other avenues. Troy’s stories about Death and the devil—both those he shares with others and those he keeps to himself—provide a great deal of insight into his character and his fears, as do his metaphors about baseball and the song “Old Blue”. Focusing on 2-3 examples, write a paper in which you analyze how Troy uses song, metaphor and storytelling as a means of self-production and/or communication. What argument can you make about the way in which these devices help him cope or hinder him?

- This play is somewhat unusual in that the setting is sparse and changes very little over the course of the play, but it would be wrong to say that the setting is therefore unimportant. Write a paper in which you analyze how aspects of the physical setting of the play act as symbols of the conflicts with which the Maxson family struggles? How do the elements of the setting—the fence, the porch, and the yard—change over the course of the play, particularly with the addition of Raynell’s garden at the end? What argument can you make about the significance of these changes and what they say about the characters?

- Troy Maxson is a complicated man whose life and attitudes are informed by his experiences with abuse, racism, poverty, crime, ambition, talent, love, responsibility, and pride—to name a few. Using both the stage notes at the beginning of the scenes and details from the action of the play, identify one of Troy’s dominant personality traits, either positive or negative, or a conflict he struggles with. Write a paper in which you analyze how events in his life have given rise to this trait/conflict in Troy’s character. What argument can you make about how this trait shapes his behavior and attitudes in the present?

- In Act 1, scene 4 Troy tells Bono and Lyons about the hardships his family faced as Southern sharecroppers and implies a connection between those hardships and his father’s oppressive, abusive behavior towards his children. With the introduction of
Troy’s father into the story, we begin to see evidence of a cycle of behavior in the play. Write a paper in which you identify the causes of oppression and abusive relationships in this play. What argument can you make about whether or not the characters in this play perpetuate or break the cycle of oppression, betrayal, and violence that began with Troy Maxson’s father or, more broadly, that began with slavery itself?

- Throughout the play, Gabriel reminds his family of his job to blow his horn on the Judgment Day so that St. Peter will know to open the gates of heaven. Gabriel’s actions at the end of the play suggest that, for all Troy’s faults, there is some chance that he will be redeemed in the end. Write a paper in which you analyze how the outcomes of this play suggest that Troy is or is not redeemed in the end. What argument can you make about the significance of Troy’s redemption or lack of redemption?

Timeline:
You may conference with me at any point during your writing process, and you may conference with me more than once! This timeline gives you a rough, flexible plan to follow for writing your essay; you can and should start drafting as soon as you feel you have enough material for a good body paragraph!

While I do not expect you to work on the paper every day, I do expect that you will work on it consistently and often. A poor performance on this essay will jeopardize your chances of taking AP English next year.

- FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 3: Decide on a topic, break your topic into strategy and content terms, and engage in two different pre-writing strategies to develop your initial ideas about the topic.
- MARCH 4-10: Review the play, gathering evidence related to your topic with a strong preference for evidence that gives you something to analyze and interpret. Develop your interpretation of the evidence using a connotation journal. **Develop a working thesis, and start drafting the body paragraphs.**
- MARCH 11-14: Draft the body of your essay, peer review, conferencing
- MARCH 14-19: Revising the body of your essay; finding and incorporating secondary sources, drafting the introduction, peer review, conferencing
- MARCH 19-22: Revising the introduction, drafting the conclusion, peer review, conferencing
- MARCH 22-24: Revising the conclusion, editing and formatting