

1. Considering what is happening nationally, discuss: Martin Luther King, Jr, “And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.” He was also murdered because of the deeply rooted racism in our country.
2. Troy Maxon’s last name makes subtle reference to the Mason-Dixon Line--the imaginary line that in the 1820s divided slave states from free states. How does this allusion to history help prepare you for the play’s themes? What are the connotations of other characters’ names--for example, Rose and Gabriel?
3. What is the significance of the biblical and supernatural allusions that appear throughout the play? Consider the story of Troy getting furniture from the devil, and the behavior and history of Gabriel.
4. In the stage directions for act I, scene 1, Wilson describes Troy as “a large man with thick, heavy hands; it is this largeness that he strives to fill out and make an accommodation with.” How does this description establish the character of Troy? Consider also Troy’s encounters with Death--the way he taunts Death to come and get him, asserting that he will go down swinging. What might Wilson be saying about Troy’s character with these descriptions?
5. How does Rose’s assertion in act I, scene 1, that “Times have changed” (I.153) set the mood for the action that follows? How does it anticipate the themes Wilson will explore more specifically through his characters and the action of the play?
6. How do you interpret Lyon’s response to his father’s criticism of his lifestyle: “I know I got to eat. But I got to live too. I need something that gonna help me to get out of the bed in the morning. Make me feel like I belong in the world” (I.1.340-341)? Discuss what it is that makes each of the central characters feel some sense of belonging in the world: Troy, Rose, Lyons, and Cory.
7. What role does Bono play in the development of Troy’s character? Pick a scene that you think shows Bono’s role most clearly, and then explain.
8. At the opening of act I, scene 2, Rose is hanging up clothes in the early morning, humming and singing to herself. Her song imploring Jesus to “be a fence all around me everyday” reflects one of the play’s important themes.
 - a. How do different characters relate to and define fences?
 - b. Whom do fences keep out, and whom do they enclose?
 - c. Consider also how fences relate to baseball.
 - d. Explain why this is an appropriate title for the play.
9. Why do you think Wilson chose not to have Alberta make an appearance on stage? How does she appear in your imagination? How would you describe her?
10. Is Troy a hypocrite? Do his relationships with Alberta and Cory make his assertions regarding family responsibilities and duty ring false?
11. When Cory returns after Troy’s death, he tells Rose, “I can’t drag Papa with me everywhere I go. I’ve got to say no to him” (II.5.110).
 - a. What finally convinces Cory to attend Troy’s funeral?
 - b. What does his attending the funeral suggest about what Cory’s future might hold and what kind of home and family he will have? Has he said “no” to his father?