**August Wilson Essay Contest**

**Sponsored by the Southern Methodist University**

**Division of Theatre**

**(In conjunction with the Dallas Region August Wilson Monologue Competition)**

**PRIZE:** Three top essays will be chosen, and the authors of each essay will receive a prize award of **$125.00 each.**

Presentation of the awards will be during the finals of the monologue competition at Southern Methodist University on February 16, 2019. The top three recipients are encouraged to attend for recognition and awarding of the prize. If for some reason a recipient is unable to attend, the award will be mailed.

**RULES:**

1. The essay must be written in English
2. Essays must be 800-1000 words, minimum and maximum.
3. Only one submission per writer. Essays must be unpublished.
4. Judges decisions are final.

**SUBMISSIONS:**

1. Send a copy of the essay via email. Please send as a .pdf file. We can then print a copy for the judging committee.
2. Send your essay to: [**abcummings@smu.edu**](mailto:abcummings@smu.edu)

**NOTE: In the SUBJECT line of email put: August Wilson Essay Contest Entry. This phrase in the subject line will ensure that I identify the essay entry correctly for submission. I will respond ASAP to each entry with: Essay Received.** Therefore, the candidate will be duly notified that the essay has been received.

1. Entries will not be returned. All entries must include a cover page with the title of the essay, the author’s name, address, phone number, email address, and the participating school the student attends.
2. Top three award recipients will be announced no later than February 11, 2019.
3. All qualified applicants will receive consideration without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation and/or political belief.
4. Applicants must be a high school student and from one of the participating schools entered in the August Wilson Monologue Competition. The competition is open to *any* student at the participating schools---not just the actors.

**DEADLINE for SUBMISSION:**

February 4, 2019. No email submission of essays will be accepted after NOON on that date.

**August Wilson Essay Contest 2019**

**Prompts / Topics**

***Choose one of the following:***

1. The Religious/Spiritual/Supernatural motifs in August Wilson’s Plays: Mr. Wilson often employs religious, spiritual and/or supernatural themes in his plays. Choose a play and character that employs these subjects and discuss its relevance in the African-American community. For example, there is the ghost of a White Man in “The Piano Lesson.” What is the symbolic nature of this ghost in the play, and how does it relate overall to African-American culture?
2. The Blues and the Evolution of African-American music: Blues music was always a muse for Mr. Wilson. I have often found there to be a deep Gospel thread running through the plays, as well. For example, Rose in *Fences* is a devout church-going woman. She even sings a hymn in the play as she hangs the wash. Discuss how Mr. Wilson uses words/text to create an almost musical soundscape to the characters and the plays. You may also choose a play and discuss how the rhythms of your chosen play relate to today’s musical genre of “hip hop.” The African-American musical contribution to our culture is an evolution of slave field work-song, to gospel/hymnal, to ragtime, to blues, to jazz, to soul, to R&B, and to hip hop, in a nutshell. (Keep in mind, R&B of the 70s was very socio-politically conscious. Consider the works of the O’Jays, Stevie Wonder, and Marvin Gay as a few examples). Therefore, apply this critical analysis to one of Mr. Wilson’s plays.

1. Mr. Wilson’s century-cycle focuses on America’s Black working class and the struggles to achieve “*the American Dream.”*  Select a character from one of the plays and compare-and-contrast that character with a modern-day public figure. For example, compare and contrast the ambitions of Boy Willie in *“The Piano Lesson”* with a public-figure who embodies some of the same attributes in their desire to grab their *piece of the American pie,* as it were.
2. Choose a female character from one of the plays and discuss how her role is a very singular and significant voice in the world of that play, and in the era (decade) in which she lives in the play.

**NOTE: Punctuation and grammar will be *highly* considered in submitted essays. Please have a teacher, advisor, etc. proofread your essays before submission. For the past two years, the top three recipients received the honor of having their essays published in Samuel French’s national Breaking Character Magazine. Therefore, grammar, syntax, critical analysis, etc. will be highly considered.**

**Due to the submission to Breaking Character Magazine, the top three recipients will need to submit a headshot and short bio for publication with the essay.**