

**Choose a work of literature in which a character goes through a spiritual journey. In a well-developed OPEN RESPONSE, describe this character's journey.**

Playwright August Wilson is concerned with the spiritual redemption of African Americans.(1) Over the course of his play, *Gem of the Ocean*, the protagonist Citizen Barlow undergoes a spiritual journey in which he finds his true identity.(2) The story of *Gem* tracks Citizen Barlow as he undergoes a spiritual journey. After killing a man, Citizen Barlow comes to see Aunt Ester to get his soul washed. Aunt Ester takes Citizen in and ultimately leads him to a mythical place called The City of Bones. Aunt Ester herself says to Citizen, "You on an adventure, Mr. Citizen. I bet you didn't know that. It's all adventure. You signed up for it and didn't even know it" (*Gem of the Ocean* Iii, p. 23). This adventure is Citizen's spiritual journey.(3) In the City of Bones, Citizen Barlow encounters the man he killed, confesses his act, and finds freedom from his past sins.(4) Indeed, by the end of this spiritual journey, Citizen Barlow finds his true identity. At the end of the play, Citizen puts on the clothes of Solly Two Kings and walks out of the house carrying a can of kerosene. The final stage directions to the play read, "ELI drinks. The sound of FIRE BELLS are heard. The lights go down on the scene" (*Gem of the Ocean* IIiv, p. 100). This implies that Citizen has used the kerosene to burn down the police station in order to free those who are in bondage there. In putting on Solly's clothes and completing the task Solly had died fighting to accomplish, it is as though Citizen is taking on a new identity, the identity of a freedom fighter.(5) In conclusion, Wilson's play walks the audience through the spiritual journey and transformation of Citizen Barlow as he comes to find his true identity as a freedom fighter. Citizen's character serves as a beacon of light for all people struggling to find themselves.(6)

*As you read the Composition below, pay very close attention to how the Open Response has changed to become a Composition.*

*Every time a part of the Open Response shows up in the Composition, even if the words have been changed somewhat, write the number of that part (from the Open Response) in the margin (of the Composition).*

**Choose a work of literature in which a character goes through a spiritual journey. In a well-developed COMPOSITION, describe this character's journey.**

In all of his plays, playwright August Wilson is concerned with the spiritual redemption of African Americans. In particular, Wilson emphasizes the importance of spiritual journeys for young black men who feel lost in the world of post-slavery racism and economic struggle. One such character is Citizen Barlow, the protagonist in Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. Over the course of this play, Citizen Barlow undergoes a spiritual journey in which he finds his true identity. The story of *Gem of the Ocean* tracks Citizen as he undergoes a spiritual journey through the guidance of a spiritual healer named Aunt Ester who brings Citizen to a mythical place called The City of Bones. Citizen's passage into the City of Bones and along his spiritual quest requires that he confess his past sins. This allows him to find his true identity

as a freedom fighter. Ultimately, Citizen should be seen as a beacon of light for all people struggling to find themselves and escape the burdens of the past.

The story of *Gem of the Ocean* tracks Citizen Barlow as he undergoes a spiritual journey. After killing a man, Citizen Barlow comes to see Aunt Ester to get his soul washed. After forcing himself into Aunt Ester's house against the will of Eli, the keeper of Aunt Ester's house, Citizen says with urgency, "The people say go see Aunt Ester" (*Gem of the Ocean* Prologue, p. 2). Citizen has clearly asked people in the community who he should see in order to solve his inner problems. Aunt Ester takes Citizen in and ultimately leads him to a mythical place called The City of Bones. Aunt Ester herself says to Citizen, "You on an adventure, Mr. Citizen. I bet you didn't know that. It's all adventure. You signed up for it and didn't even know it" (*Gem of the Ocean* Iii, p. 23). This adventure, lead by the wise Aunt Ester and involving a trip to the City of Bones, is Citizen's spiritual journey.

The key that allow Citizen's to pass through his spiritual journey is his confession of past sins. Citizen feels a great moral burden because he stole a bucket of nails and then watched a different man get accused of the crime. This other man, Garret Brown, committed suicide by jumping into the river so as to avoid being wrongfully punished for a crime he didn't commit. When Citizen arrives at the mythical City of Bones, he sees Garret Brown himself guarding the City's entrance. Citizen says, "It was me...my name is Citizen Barlow, and I stole the bucket of nails" (*Gem of the Ocean* Iiii, p. 78). It's only once he admits his crime to Garret Brown that the City doors open. It is crucial that Citizen, in admitting his sins, also tells Garret Brown his name. By doing this, it is as though Citizen is finally coming into himself. Indeed, Citizen's journey towards his own true self, requires that he confess his sins and let go of the burden of this past.

By the end of this spiritual journey, Citizen Barlow finds his true identity. At the end of the play, Citizen puts on the cloak of the recently deceased Solly Two Kings, a former Underground Railroad conductor and mentor to Citizen. It is as though Citizen becomes Solly, becomes a new man, taking Solly's place in the African American community. In order to demonstrate this, Citizen walks out of the house carrying a can of kerosene. Moments later, the final stage directions to the play read, "ELI drinks. The sound of FIRE BELLS are heard. The lights go down on the scene" (*Gem of the Ocean* IIiv, p. 100). This implies that Citizen has used the kerosene to burn down the police station in order to free those who are in bondage there. In putting on Solly's cloak and completing the task Solly had died fighting to accomplish, Citizen comes fully into his true identity; he has become a freedom fighter.

In conclusion, August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* walks its audience through the spiritual journey and transformation of Citizen Barlow as he comes to find his true identity. Guided by Aunt Ester to the City of Bones, Citizen confesses his sins and thus finds relief from the burden of his past. In turn, symbolically putting on the coat of his deceased mentor, Citizen steps into his true identity as a freedom fighter. Wilson's play, although it is set in 1904, is still deeply relevant for people today who are seeking to find themselves and escape the burdens of the past. Citizen teaches us that we must go on journeys of confession in order to find redemption and freedom.

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## **PARAGRAPH 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **LEAD**

- Begins Powerfully
- Key Background Information (play, author, character)
- Clearly Connected to thesis

### **THESIS**

- One sentence
- Clearly and insightfully answers the question.

### **PREVIEW OF SUPPORTING IDEAS**

- Three supporting ideas, directly and explicitly relate to the thesis.

### **PREVIEW OF CONCLUSION**

## **PARAGRAPH 2: SUPPORTING IDEA 1**

### **SUPPORTING IDEA STATEMENT 1**

- One sentence, directly and explicitly supports thesis.

### **SUPPORTING DETAILS/ EVIDENCE**

- Develop/Demonstrate the Supporting Idea for this paragraph.
- All Evidence is Introduced and Explained
- At least one appropriate quotation.

### **CLINCHER**

- Restates Supporting Idea 1 and other major points from this paragraph.

## **PARAGRAPH 3: SUPPORTING IDEA 2**

### **SUPPORTING IDEA STATEMENT 2**

- One sentence, directly and explicitly supports thesis.

### **SUPPORTING DETAILS/ EVIDENCE**

- Develop/Demonstrate the Supporting Idea for this paragraph.
- All Evidence is Introduced and Explained
- At least one appropriate quotation.

### **CLINCHER**

- Restates Supporting Idea 2 and other major points from this paragraph.

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The story of *Gem of the Ocean* tracks Citizen Barlow as he undergoes a spiritual journey. After killing a man, Citizen Barlow comes to see

**PARAGRAPH 4: SUPPORTING  
IDEA 3**

**SUPPORTING IDEA  
STATEMENT 3**

-One sentence, directly and explicitly supports thesis.

**SUPPORTING DETAILS/  
EVIDENCE**

- Develop/Demonstrate the Supporting Idea for this paragraph.
- All Evidence is Introduced and Explained
- At least one appropriate quotation.

**CLINCHER**

-Restates Supporting Idea 13 and other major points from this paragraph.

**PARAGRAPH 5:  
CONCLUSION**

**RESTATEMENT OF THE  
THESIS**

**BRING TOGETHER 3  
SUPPORTING IDEAS**

**FINAL INSIGHTS AND  
REFLECTIONS**

- Connected to Thesis
- Ends Powerfully

Aunt Ester to get his soul washed. After forcing himself into Aunt Ester's house against the will of Eli, the keeper of Aunt Ester's house, Citizen says with urgency, "The people say go see Aunt Ester" (*Gem of the Ocean* Prologue, p. 2). Citizen has clearly asked people in the community who he should see in order to solve his inner problems. Aunt Ester takes Citizen in and ultimately leads him to a mythical place called The City of Bones. Aunt Ester herself says to Citizen, "You on an adventure, Mr. Citizen. I bet you didn't know that. It's all adventure. You signed up for it and didn't even know it" (*Gem of the Ocean* Iii, p. 23). This adventure, lead by the wise Aunt Ester and involving a trip to the City of Bones, is Citizen's spiritual journey.

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