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relationship with the  
piano in the piano  
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**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

"The Piano Lesson", written by August Wilson, utilizes the relationship between past, present and future to convey a deeper message of power through ancestry. The key symbol in this story is an old classical piano engraved with carvings of the Charles family. Boy Willie a current day member of the family wants to sell the piano in order to purchase Sutter's land. The slave master who had owned their family and has passed away. Boy Willie's relationship with the piano demonstrates the past, using the piano as a method of rebellion and strength. The present, remembering who you are, where you came from, and the idea of self-worth. And the future, with hopes of building off of what his ancestors left him.

The two most prominent opposing characters in the play are Boy Willie and Berniece. This is because they have two very different ideas of the past and what it represents. Berniece looks backwards and sees the struggles her mother went through when their father was not providing for them.

Contradictory, Boy Willie sees rebellion and strength in the African carvings crafted on to this European instrument. Music has always been used as a form of rebellion especially in the African-American community, so the idea of carving into a European instrument sends a strong message to him. Boy Willie definitely identifies with the dream of freedom and power, while Berniece is looking more toward blending into White culture as a way of gaining status and power. Berniece is teaching Maretha how to play piano in a more classically European manner, while Boy Willie wants her to break from the conformity. "Boy Willie sits and plays a simple boogie-woogie." (pg. 21) The boogie-woogie is an African-American style of music that broke from the conformity of standard European classical music. Boy Willie tries to teach

Maretha how to play by example and she asks for sheet music. This demonstrates again Boy Willie's dream of freedom and rebellion, as the music he is playing is without boundaries or limitations.

A scene from the screen adapted version of *The Piano Lesson* shows Boy Willie and Lyman paying the preacher Avery a visit at his job in the bank. Boy Willie takes the elevator up to the second floor along with the obviously confused and uncomfortable White people. This sends a very strong message of where he stands presently on his personal ideas of self-worth and pride. "They treat you like you let them treat you. They mistreat me I mistreat them right back. Ain't no difference in me and the white man." (38) He is unfazed by the mean glances that he receives having stepped out of his "assigned" status position in society. He will stand just as tall and proud as any White man. This idea of gaining pride from the past and remembering who you are is demonstrated through the piano as well. Boy Willie tries to explain the past to Maretha and again directly opposes Bernice who does not want Maretha to know about the past for fear that it will bring her, in the White people's eyes, to the level of other African American people. Of course this is ridiculous as Maretha is Black and cannot hide from the consequences that came with it during this time. This is why Boy Willie wants to install in her some sense of self-worth without compromising who she truly is and where she came from. "You ought to mark down on the calendar the day that Papa Boy Charles brought that piano into the house...Have a celebration! If you did that she would have no problem in life. She would walk around here with her head held high... That way she know where she at in the world." (pg. 91) Boy Willie wants Maretha to know about the past and

the struggles her ancestors overcame so she knows that where she comes from is strong and has power. That she has that very same strength and power within her. Like the African slaves that were brought to the America's and stripped of their culture and sense of empowerment, without a sense of self you are lost. Boy Willie feels that teaching Maretha about the past will make her a stronger person presently and help her in the future.

The reason Boy Willie explains that he want to sell the piano is so he can use that money to buy Sutter's land. He believes that the piano was giving to them so they could make something out of it. To build on what their family left them, otherwise what's the use of it? Berniece wants to hold onto the piano because to her it represents the struggles that her mother went through and selling it would be a dishonor to the years Mama Ola spent toiling over it and begging Bernice to play something for her. Because the past is gone and the present is happening, the only thing he can look forward to is the future. " The only thing that make that piano worth something is he carvings Papa Boy Charles put on there. That's what make it worth something. That was my great-grandaddy. Papa Boy Charles brought that piano into the house. Now I'm supposed to build on what they left me."(pg. 51) Boy Willie plans to make sure that he has something to give and contribute to his parents legacy. To him the piano is more of a metaphorical depiction of the past. But to Bernice it's much more physical. " You ain't taking that piano out of my house. Look at this piano. Mama ola polished this piano with her tears for seventeen years. For seventeen years she rubbed on it until her hands bled. Then she rubbed the blood in mixing it with the rest on the blood on it."(pg. 52) The two dreams oppose each other

in meaning but are both very powerful in their own ways. Boy Willie tells Bernice that if she were making money off the piano then he would think differently about it because he wants to see the future being made out of it. A future that can help new generations find some worth in themselves and what their parents left for them.

Boy Willie's relationship with the piano is about finding power and success for the future. He sees his ancestors' struggle as a source of freedom and strength and wants Maretha to feel that way too because she represents the future. His need for freedom shows in the way that he rebels through song and music. And his hopes for reclaiming his slave owners' land is symbolic of reclaiming his past. Boy Willie's ideas of self-worth and pride come from his ancestors which are displayed on the piano and through his characters' interactions with it during the play.