

Sample Seminar Questions for *The Piano Lesson*

Question Type	Description	Examples
Opening Questions	These are questions anyone can answer; knowing the text allows you to ask the question, but you don't to have read to answer.	<p>What would it take for you to consider selling a valuable family heirloom?</p> <p>How do families with conflicting values settle their differences?</p>
Closed-ended Questions	The purpose of these questions is to find out what the text says; there is really only one answer to them.	<p>Why does Boy Willie feel he needs to sell the piano?</p> <p>Who else has tried to get Berniece to sell the piano?</p>
Open-ended Questions	There are many possible responses to these questions; there is no "right" answer. You need evidence (probably from the text) to help answer these questions.	<p>Will Berniece sell the piano?</p> <p>Does Boy Willie have the right to claim part of the piano?</p> <p>Why does August Wilson bring Sutter's ghost into the story?</p>
Core Questions	These questions help you explore the "big ideas"—themes, main ideas, and essential issues—of the work.	<p>How does the piano serve as a bridge and a divide between Boy Willie and Berniece, their past and their future?</p> <p>What is the significance of Maretha taking piano lessons?</p>

Question types and descriptions adapted from Ensrud, Mark. "Getting at What They Want to Know: Using Students' Questions to Direct Class Discussion." From *Inquiry and the Literary Text: Constructing Discussions in the English Classroom*. James Holden and John S. Schmit, eds. NCTE, 2002: 79-86.