

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading Character List

Directions: Before you “meet” the compelling characters from August Wilson’s classic play, *Fences*, read the guiding questions on the attached page. You are reading interactively for answers to these questions.

Troy Maxson: The protagonist of the play, Troy, is an African-American man in his 50s who works as a garbageman. He is also a former baseball star from the Negro Leagues. Troy’s athletic abilities diminished before the Major Leagues accepted Blacks, and his resentment and anger frame much of his thinking about the world. Hard-working, strong, and prone to telling some tall tales (a nice way to say “lies”.) He is the family breadwinner and plays the dominant role in his thirty-year friendship with Jim Bono. Troy’s character is the centerpiece that all other relationships gather around. Troy is husband to Rose, father to Lyons, Cory, and Raynell, and brother to Gabriel. He is a tragic hero who has excessive pride and struggles to show love to those who love him.

Cory Maxson: The teenage son of Troy and Rose Maxson, Cory is a senior in high school who gets good grades and excels on the football team; in fact, college recruiters are coming to see him play football. Cory is a respectful son, a compassionate nephew to his uncle Gabriel, and generally a giving and enthusiastic person. An ambitious young man who has the talent and determination to realize his dreams, Cory’s opportunities are very different from those of his father. Cory years for acceptance from his father while still wanting to be his own man.

Rose Maxson: Troy’s wife and mother of his second child, Cory, Rose is a 43 year-old African-American housewife who volunteers at her church regularly and loves her family deeply. Rose’s request that Troy and Cory build a fence in their small, dirt backyard comes to represent her desire to keep her loved one together and close. Unlike Troy, Rose is a realist, not a romantic yearning for the days past. She has high hopes for Cory and supports his dreams and aspirations. Later in the play, Rose’s acceptance of Troy’s daughter (from another woman), as her own child, exemplifies her compassion.

Gabriel Maxson: Troy’s younger brother, Gabriel was a soldier in World War II, during which time he received a head injury that required a metal plate to be surgically implanted in his head. Because of his brain damage and service to his country, Gabriel receives checks from the government that Troy used to help pay for the Maxson home, where the play is set. He spends his days wondering about the neighborhood, thinking that he is the angel Gabriel whose job it is to open the gates to heaven. Gabriel thinks like a young child and is motivated by a desire to please people, especially his brother, Troy.

Jim Bono: Troy's best friend of over thirty years, he is usually called "Bono" or "Mr. Bono." Bono and Troy met in jail, where Troy learned to play baseball. Troy is a role model to Bono, as Bono is the only character in the play who remembers, first-hand, Troy's glory days of hitting home runs in the Negro Leagues. Bono spends every Friday night over at Troy's house drinking beers and telling stories. Less controversial than Troy, Bono is a devoted husband to his wife Lucille. He is equally loyal to Troy, but his concern over Troy's treatment of Rose ends up taking precedent over their friendship.

Lyons Maxson: Troy's older son, fathered before Troy's time in jail with a woman Troy met before he became a baseball player and before he met Rose. Lyons is an ambitious and talented jazz musician. He grew up without Troy for most of his childhood because Troy was in prison. Lyons, like most musicians, has a hard time making money; he depends on his girlfriend for financial support. Lyons does not live in the Maxson home, but comes around most often on Troy's payday. Troy believes Lyons' jazz music, which Troy calls "Chinese music", is foolish. Lyons is well-liked by everyone, but often argues with his father.

Raynell Maxson: Troy's illegitimate daughter, mothered by Alberta, Troy's lover. Wilson introduces her to the audience as an infant; her innocence and vulnerability convince Rose to take Troy back. Later, as a little girl, Raynell plants seeds in the once barren dirty yard. (Holy symbolism – we'll talk more about it at the end of the play!) Raynell is the only Maxson child that will live with few emotional scars from Troy and is emblematic (symbolic) of new hope for the future and the positive values parents and older generations pass on to their children.

Alberta: Troy's lover, Raynell's mother, Alberta dies while giving birth to Alberta.

Bonnie: Lyons' girlfriend.

Mr. Stawicki: Cory's boss at the A&P grocery store.

Coach Zellman: Cory's high school football coach.

Mr. Rand: Bono and Troy's boss at the Sanitation Department who doubted that Troy would win his discrimination case.

Miss Pearl: Gabe's landlady at his new apartment.

Character Questions

1. Define a three-dimensional shape from math class:

2. Characters also are **three-dimensional** or one-dimensional. Using your math definition from above, what do you think that means? Which characters interest us more?

3. Connected to #2, simply by skimming the character descriptions, who are the three-dimensional characters?

4. Predict two of the major conflicts in this play – whom do they involve? Describe the conflicts.

5. Identify all the familial (family) relationships. For example, near Cory, write "son of Rose and Troy, nephew to Gabriel."

6. Based on the character descriptions, identify three likely thematic topics in *Fences*:
