

Dear Mr. August Wilson,

I am writing to offer my views on your play, Fences. As with most of the literature I have read concerning the Black struggle, I find Fences to be a humble, prudent example of how discord in Black families is generated. Not only is Troy Maxson's family torn apart by society; his family later becomes separated because of his traditional beliefs. However, the characters of Fences do not accept Troy's views readily. His sons Cory and Lyons question his actions but never stoop down to their father's despondent level; instead, they search for something greater than Troy's views. This is a quality I admire in Fences, and one of the play's themes--the search for a life better than one's own--makes the play truly representative of the Black struggle toward improvement.

To be loyal to one's parents is certainly important, but if Troy's children forsook their aspirations and followed their father's wishes, that action would have represented a moral failure. Not only would Cory and Lyons have to lose something they had worked hard for; they would be pleasing their father, whose views about success were misguided due to his misfortune in professional baseball. However, because Cory later became successful as a Marine, he overstepped his father's misguided views and proved him wrong. More importantly than proving his father wrong, Cory defines the true spirit of success and becomes something his father could never be.

Each of the characters in Fences seems to represent a different type of success. Troy dreams of being successful, but then becomes bitter because he was denied the opportunity to succeed at baseball. While Cory is the most successful character, defying his father's views and becoming a corporal in the Marines, Lyons is similar to his father. He had always dreamed of forming a band, but it was not his primary goal; instead, he ends up going to jail. Rose is a successful wife, but the destruction of her marital success was not her fault. Gabriel does not have many chances to speak in the play, but as far as the acceptance of failure matters, Gabriel symbolizes well the resiliency of the Black spirit. Though he later realizes he is not an archangel, he quickly accepts his failure. All these different portrayals of success give Fences a different view of the Black struggle toward improvement.

Mr. Wilson, I feel obligated to see myself in your work as a person who, also, is struggling for the improvement of Black livelihood. I see myself as a person surrounded by social, economic, and personal "fences" that must be overcome before I can be successful. Fences contributes greatly to the understanding of achieving success; one person's success may not be the same as another's, but all people must strive for the same degree of self-improvement.

Sincerely,

W.E.B. Du Bois

Dear Mr. August Wilson,

I could not help but marvel at your passionate commitment to a great subject, the triumph of African-Americans over social oppression. The first thing that stood out in my mind as I read your play was the title Fences; I knew that Troy was building a real fence around his home, but the title implied to me that there were other "fences" in the play even more real. The simple definition given in the play for a fence, a structure built to keep people out or in, told me everything I needed to know about the subject that was to be implicitly discussed in the play.

By each character's eventual leap over these "fences," the symbolism of the fences represent triumph over social or familial problems. At first, I noticed that the main character, Troy, was a talkative and outgoing character. However, as the world around him begins to change and his children begin to grow up, Troy seems to understand his wife and sons less, becoming angrier and afraid. It was difficult to experience the gradual breakdown of Troy and his family, but the reader is rewarded at the end with the triumph of Troy's wife and sons over his estranged and angry behavior.

The most prominent fence is the divide between the races during the 1950s. Although he wanted to be a professional baseball player, he could not because he was African-American. I believe that this event was the start of his dejected attitude toward life. Troy had learned a common lesson for men of his race at that time; to be proud and African-American meant he had to face pressures that could crush his outlook on his family and life. Suddenly, his family had to be guarded from making the same mistakes he had made; he did not want his son Cory to play football or for Lyons to pursue music. Because of this, he builds an imaginary protective fence between his family and the world. Later, Troy's family begins to pull apart from him as he constructs another fence between himself and his family. Interestingly, when Troy passes away, almost no one mentions him. It was his family that had become successful, surpassing the anger and oppression Troy created for them through his "fences."

There could be no title more appropriate for this play than Fences; I have discovered that most of the fences were made to keep people out, rather than in. For what other purpose did Troy Maxson build a fence around his home? Mr. Wilson, your play is truly committed to defining the African-American strive to overcome any form of oppression, whether it is created by society or by a close family member. That message is what I hold as the ideal theme for all my literary works. I am much grateful to have had a chance to experience Fences.

Sincerely,

Maya Angelou