

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Fences

by August Wilson

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Item No. 201711

Fences

Act One, Scene One

1. Wilson writes that together “with his blackness, [Troy’s] largeness informs his sensibilities and the choices he has made in his life.” What aspects of your identity most inform your “sensibilities” and your choices—your age, your race, your beliefs, your financial background, something else? Explain your answer in a paragraph.
2. Troy and Bono’s friendship is founded on Bono’s admiration of “Troy’s honesty, capacity for hard work, and his strength.” What three characteristics do you most admire and seek in a friend? List the qualities, and then write a brief explanation for each as to why it is so important to you.
3. Troy’s first line includes the controversial word “nigger.” Write a one or two-paragraph letter to August Wilson about how you feel when you see this word and why you think he decided to include it in Troy’s first speaking line.
4. Troy has just filed a complaint with his employer concerning the unequal way whites and “coloreds” are treated in his company, and some of the other black workers fear that Troy’s boldness will get all of the blacks fired. Wilson doesn’t include the dialogue Troy has with Mr. Rand in the play. In a page or so, write the scene between Troy and Mr. Rand as you think it would have taken place. Before starting the dialogue, imagine and describe the setting in a sentence or two.

Response Journal

5. Wilson writes that Rose’s devotion to Troy “stems from her recognition of the possibilities of her life without him: a succession of abusive men and their babies, a life of partying and running the streets, the Church, or aloneness with its attendant pain and frustration.”

In a paragraph, write about what you think your life will be like if you decide never to get married. Do all of the other options seem negative like Rose’s?

6. Rose and Troy disagree about what sort of grocery store to patronize. Troy would rather go to a store where he and his community are respected and treated well, even if it means having to pay more. Rose thinks it makes no sense to pay more regardless of how one is treated. Pretend you are with them and they ask for a third opinion to settle the matter. In a paragraph, write what you would say, making sure to include which side (if any) you would take.
7. It is 1957, and Troy is skeptical about how far the “white man” is going to let Cory go with football. Imagine that *Fences* is set in our time. Do you think Troy’s response to Rose’s news would be any different? In a paragraph, write out what you think Troy’s response might be.
8. Troy holds little respect for highly acclaimed professional baseball players like Jackie Robinson. He feels that he was a better player, but was never allowed the chance to prove himself. Write about a situation or time when you didn’t get the recognition you felt you deserved—and it seemed as though someone less talented than you did. Do you still feel resentful about it?

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9. Troy says “Death ain’t nothing but a fastball on the outside corner”. The story he tells about his struggle with death further illustrates Troy’s sense of self-confidence—not only could he beat Jackie Robinson, he could beat Death, too! In contrast, Rose gets upset even talking about death. Write a short poem about how you feel when you think of “Death” approaching you. You might start it “Death ain’t” (or isn’t) or “Death is...”

10. Lyons says, “I don’t wanna be carrying nobody’s rubbish.” Do you think most people end up with jobs they like? Do you think that you will end up with a job you like? Explain your answer.

11. Lyons defends himself against his father’s accusations that he is lazy by stating, “I know I got to eat. But I got to live too. I need something that gonna help me get out of the bed in the morning. Make me feel like I belong in the world.”

Lyons’s statement reflects a basic moral dilemma: the importance of financial security versus the importance of happiness. Assume that you are faced with two career choices. Career “A” features a steady, secure income but involves doing work that does not interest you. Career “B” interests you, but doesn’t offer a steady, secure income. Make a pro/con list for both career options and decide which you would choose. Does your choice reflect the work ethic of Troy or of Lyons?

Act One, Scene Two

12. Do you agree with Troy that lotteries take advantage of the poor? Pretend that your state is in the middle of a heated debate on whether to have or dispense with a lottery. A local newspaper has invited people to send in letters expressing their opinions on the subject. Write such a letter, making sure to include both your opinion and the reasoning behind it.

13. Although he doesn't mention it, Rose intuitively senses that Troy is worried about what happened at work yesterday. In a paragraph or two, describe a time when you were able to sense what someone was thinking even though he or she didn't speak of it directly. How could you tell what was really on that person's mind?

14. If it weren't for the money Gabe got from the government for his war wound, Troy would not have been able to buy a house. It upsets Troy to realize that he is fifty-three and wouldn't have a home if not for that money. Imagine that, instead of going to a listen to a ball game, Troy decides to write a journal entry addressing these circumstances at this end of this scene. As Troy, write the entry.

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Act One, Scene Three

15. Troy is angry with Cory for having gone to football practice before doing his chores, yet Troy himself has avoided working on the fence for weeks. Does this seem unfair to you, or perfectly in keeping with a parent's rights? Explain your answer.

16. As Troy and Cory work on fencing the yard, they argue over the sensibility of buying a television. Fast-forward this scene to today. What luxury item do you think Cory would be asking for now? As Cory, write your father a letter convincing him to buy this item for the family. Consider what you know of Troy and use arguments that you think would appeal to him in particular.

17. Troy is reluctant to buy things on credit. How do you feel about buying things you don't yet have the money for? Are credit cards liberating in that they don't limit us to what we can afford at a given moment—or are they a trap? Explain your answer.

18. Cory recognizes that his father's bitterness may be responsible for Troy's unreasonable assessments of major league players' talents. Think of the time when you first realized that an adult in your life was capable of mistakes and faulty reasoning just like children are. Did the realization bring you closer together or build a fence between you? Write a paragraph describing the incident and your feelings about it both then and now.