

FENCES

Synopsis

Troy Maxson is a garbage collector who prides himself on his ability to provide for his family and keep it together. He is the patriarch and central character in *Fences*, (1950-1965), he continually places barriers between himself and the very people he loves the most. Troy's rebellion and frustration set the tone for this play as he struggles for a sense of fairness in a society that offers none. He and his son clash over their conflicting views of what it means to be a black man in mid-century America.

Characters

TROY MAXSON: The protagonist of *Fences*, Troy is a working class African-American man who lives with his wife Rose and their son Cory. He works for the Sanitation Department as a trash collector. He is devoted to providing for his family and guaranteeing that his sons have better lives than he did. Having been a great player baseball play in the Negro leagues, Troy was too old to join the Major leagues when they were finally integrated. It's this experience, and several others from his past that color his outlook on life and his relationship with his sons.

ROSE: Rose is Troy's second wife who he married upon his release from prison. She is the mother of his youngest son, Cory. She is a 43-year-old housewife who makes time for her Church regularly. The compassionate matriarch of the play, Rose is a fair judge of character who hopes for a better future for herself, her husband, and her son. She has high hopes for Cory, and keeps on looking forward instead of romantically clinging to the past like her husband. She personifies the qualities of love, patience, and forgiveness—and has plenty of opportunities to exhibit all three.

BONO: Having served time together in prison, Troy and Bono became very close and remain best friends well out of their time spent in jail. Having seen Troy through thick and thin, Bono often serves as the voice of reason and perspective for Troy—especially when it comes to Rose Maxson. Despite having been friends with him for over thirty years, Bono's concern for Troy's marriage trumps his loyalty to the friendship. Bono himself is a devoted husband to his wife Lucille.

GABRIEL: Gabriel is Troy's brother who suffered a head injury during World War II. Part of the effect is his nonsensical ramblings that actually touch on quite a bit of truth. He is sometimes convinced that he is the Angel Gabriel waiting for St. Peter to open the gates of Heaven. He is the wise fool, often knowing more about those people surrounding him than they know about themselves. Gabriel receives money from the government because of his injury, some of which Troy used to pay for the house where the Play takes place.

FENCES

Code: 50-01
Time: 2:40
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Death
Type 3: Sports

Act 1; Scene 1

TROY MAXSON

Death ain't nothing. I done seen him. Done wrassled with him. You can't tell me nothing about death. Death ain't nothing but a fastball on the outside corner. And you know what I'll do to that! Lookee here, Bono...Am I lying? You get one of them fastballs, about waist high, over the outside corner of the plate where you can get the meat of the ball on it . . . and good God! You can kiss it good-bye. Now, am I lying?

Look here, Bono... I looked up one day and Death was marching straight at me. Like Soldiers on Parade! The Army of Death was marching straight at me. The middle of July, 1941. It got real cold just like it be winter. It seem like Death himself reached out and touched me on the shoulder. He touch me just like I touch you. I got cold as ice and Death standing there grinning at me.

I say... what you want, Mr. Death? You be wanting me? You done brought your army to be getting me? I looked him dead in the eye. I wasn't fearing nothing. I was ready to tangle. Just like I'm ready to tangle now. The Bible say be ever vigilant. That's why I don't get but so drunk. I got to keep watch.

Death standing there staring at me... carrying that sickle in his hand. Finally he say, "You want bound over for another year?" See, just like that... "You want bound over for another year?" I told him, "Bound over hell! Let's settle this now!" It seem like he kinda fell back when I said that, and all the cold went out of me. I reached down and grabbed that sickle and threw it just as far as I could throw it...

and me and him commenced to wrestling. We wrestled for three days and three nights. I can't say where I found the strength from. Every time it seemed like he was gonna get the best of me, I'd reach way down deep inside myself and find the strength to do him one better.

All right. At the end of the third night we done weakened each other to where we can't hardly move. Death stood up, throwed on his robe . . . had him a white robe with a hood on it. He throwed on that robe and went off to look for his sickle. Say, "I'll be back." Just like that. "I'll be back." I told him, say, "Yeah, but . . . you gonna have to find me!" I wasn't no fool. I wasn't going looking for him. Death ain't nothing to play with. And I know he's gonna get me. I know I got to join his army . . . his camp followers. But as long as I keep my strength and see him coming . . . as long as I keep my vigilance . . . he's gonna have to fight to get me. I ain't going easy.

FENCES

Code: 50-02
Time: 2:00
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Exploitation
Type 3: Commerce

Act 1; Scene 1

TROY MAXSON

Look here, Bono . . . I went down to see Hertzberger about some furniture. Got three rooms for two-ninety-eight. That what it say on the radio. “Three rooms . . . two-ninety-eight.” Even made up a little song about it. Go down there . . . man tell me I can’t get no credit. I’m working everyday and can’t get no credit. What to do? I got an empty house with some raggedy furniture in it. Cory ain’t got no bed. He’s sleeping on a pile of rags on the floor. Working every day and can’t get no credit. Come back here – Rose’ll tell you – madder than hell. Sit down . . . try to figure what I’m gonna do. Come a knock on the door. Ain’t been living here but three days. Who know I’m here? Open the door . . . devil standing there bigger than life. White fellow . . . got on good clothes and everything. Standing there with a clipboard in his hand. I ain’t had to say nothing. First words come out of his mouth was . . . “I understand you need some furniture and can’t get no credit.” I liked to fell over. He say, “I’ll give you all the credit you want, but you got to pay the interest on it.” I told him, “Give me three rooms’ worth and charge whatever you want.” Next day a truck pulled up here and two men unloaded them three rooms. Man what drove the truck give me a book. Say send ten dollars, first of every month to the address in the book and everything will be all right. Say if I miss a payment the devil was coming back and it’ll be hell to pay. That was fifteen years ago. To this day . . . the first of the month come and I send my ten dollars, Rose’ll tell you.

I ain’t never seen that man since. Now you tell me who else that could have been but the devil? I ain’t sold my soul or nothing like that, you understand. Naw, I wouldn’t have truck with the devil about nothing like that. I got my furniture and pays my ten dollars the first of the month just like clockwork.

FENCES

Code: 50-03
Time: 2:45
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 4

TROY MAXSON

My Daddy ain't had them walking blues! What you talking about? He stayed right there with his family. But he was just as evil as he could be. My mama couldn't stand him. Couldn't stand that evilness. She run off when I was about eight. She sneaked out one night after he had gone to sleep. Told me she was coming back for me. I ain't never seen her no more. All his women run off and left him. He wasn't good for nobody.

When my turn come to head out, I was fourteen and got to sniffing around Joe Canewell's daughter. Had us an old mule we called Greyboy. My daddy sent me out to do some plowing and I tied up old Greyboy and went to fooling around with Joe Canewell's daughter. We found us a nice spot, got real cozy with each other. She about thirteen and we done figured we was grown anyway . . . so we down there enjoying ourselves . . . ain't thinking about nothing. We didn't know Greyboy had got loose and wandered back to the house and my daddy was looking for me. We down there by the creek enjoying ourselves when my daddy come up on us. Surprised us. He had them leather straps off the mule and commenced to whipping me like there was no tomorrow. I jumped up, mad and embarrassed. I was scared of my daddy. When he commenced to whupping on me . . . quite naturally I run to get out of the way. *(Pause)* Now I thought he was mad 'cause I ain't done my work. But I see where he was chasing me off so he could have the gal for himself. When I seen what the matter of it was, I lost all fear of my daddy. Right there is where I become a man . . . at fourteen years of age. *(Pause)* Now it was my turn to run him off. I picked up the same reins that he has used on me. I picked up them reins and commenced to whupping on him. The gal jumped up and

run off . . . and when my daddy turned to face me, I could see why the devil had never come to get him . . . 'cause he was the devil himself. I don't know what happened. When I woke up, I was laying there by the creek, and Blue . . . this old dog we had . . . was licking my face. I thought I was blind. I couldn't see nothing. Both my eyes were swollen shut. I laid there and cried. I didn't know what I was gonna do. The only thing I knew was the time had come for me to leave my daddy's house. And right there the world suddenly got big. And it was a long time before I could cut it down to where I could handle it.

FENCES

Code: 50-04

Time: 2:20

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Men's Status/Identity

Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 4

TROY MAXSON

I walked on down to Mobile and hitched up with some of them fellows that was heading this way. Got up here and found out . . . not only couldn't you get a job . . . you couldn't find no place to live. I thought I was in freedom. Shhh. Colored folks living down there on the riverbanks in whatever kind of shelter they could find for themselves. Right down there under Brady Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tarpaper. Messed around there and went from bad to worse. Started stealing. First it was food. Then I figured, hell, if I steal money I can buy me some food. Buy me some shoes too! One thing led to another. Met your mama. I was young and anxious to be a man. Met your mama and had you. What I do that for? Now I got to worry about feeding you and her. Got to steal three times as much. Went out one day looking for somebody to rob... that's what I was, a robber. I'll tell you the truth. I'm ashamed of it today. But it's the truth. Went to rob this fellow... pulled out my knife... and he pulled out a gun. Shot me in the chest. It felt just like somebody had taken a hot branding iron and laid it on me. When he shot me I jumped at him with my knife. They told me I killed him and they put me in the penitentiary and locked me up for fifteen years. That's where I met Bono. That's where I learned how to play baseball. Got out that place and your mama had taken you and went on to make life without me. Fifteen years was a long time for her to wait. But that fifteen years cured me of that robbing stuff. Rose'll tell you. She asked me when I met her if I had gotten all that foolishness out of my system. And I told her, "Baby, it's you and baseball all what count with me." You here me, Bono? I meant it too. She say, "Which one comes first?" I told her, "Baby, ain't no doubt it's baseball . . . but you stick and get old with me and we'll both outlive this baseball." Am I right, Rose? And it's true.

FENCES

Code: 50-05
Time: 1:45
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Relationships
Type 3: Sports

ACT 2; SCENE 1

TROY MAXSON

Rose, I done tried all my life to live decent . . . to live a clean . . . hard . . . useful life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know. But . . . you born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely . . . always looking for the curve-ball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike. If you going down . . . you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you. What you gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job... I was safe. Couldn't nothing touch me, I wasn't gonna strike out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I wasn't gonna lay in the streets with a bottle of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job. I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on first looking for one of them boys to knock me in. To get me home.

Then I saw that girl . . . she firmed up my backbone. And I got to thinking that if I tried . . . I just might be able to steal second. Do you understand, after eighteen years I wanted to steal second.

FENCES

Code: 50-06
Time: 1:40
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Family
Type 3: Progeny

Act 2; Scene 3

TROY MAXSON

Well... I guess we'll just sit out here on the porch.

(He sits on the porch. There is an awkward indelicateness about the way he handles the baby. His largeness engulfs and seems to swallow it. He speaks loud enough for ROSE to hear.)

A man's got to do what's right for him. I ain't sorry for nothing I done. It felt right in my heart.

(to the baby)

What you smiling at? Your daddy's a big man. Got these great big old hands. But sometimes he's scared. And right now your daddy's scared 'cause we sitting out here and ain't got not home. Oh, I been homeless before. I ain't had no little baby with me. But I been homeless. You just be out on the road by your lonesome and you see one of them trains coming and you just kinda go like this....

(He sings a lullaby:)

Please, Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line
Please, Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line
I ain't got no ticket please let me ride the blinds.

(ROSE enters from the house. Troy hearing her steps behind him, stands and faces her)

She's my daughter, Rose. My own flesh and blood. I can't deny her no more than I can deny them boys. (*Pause.*) You and them boys is my family. You and them and this child is all I got in the world. So I guess what I'm saying is . . . I'd appreciate it if you'd help me take care of her.

FENCES

Code: 50-07
Time: 2:20
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Relationships
Type 3: Love

ACT 2; SCENE 1

ROSE

I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too. I gave eighteen years of my life to stand in the same spot with you. Don't you think I ever wanted other things? Don't you think I had dreams and hopes? What about my life? What about me. Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? That I wanted to lay up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities? That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good? You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams . . . and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom.

But I held on to you, Troy. I held you tighter. You was my husband. I owed you everything I had. Every part of me I could find to give you. And upstairs in that room . . . with the darkness falling in on me . . . I gave everything I had to try and erase the doubt that you wasn't the finest man in the world. And wherever you was going . . . I wanted to be there with you. 'Cause you was my husband. 'Cause that's the only way I was gonna survive as your wife. You always talking about what you give . . . and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take . . . and don't even know nobody's giving!

FENCES

Code: 50-08
Time: 2:45
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Women's Status/Identity
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 5

ROSE

You can't be nobody but who you are, Cory. That shadow wasn't nothing but you growing into yourself. You either got to grow into it or cut it down to fit you. But that's all you got to make life with. That's all you got to measure yourself against that world out there. Your daddy wanted you to be everything he wasn't . . . and at the same time he tried to make you into everything he was. I don't know if he was right or wrong . . . but I do know he meant to do more good than he meant to do harm. He wasn't always right. Sometimes when he touched he bruised. And sometimes when he took me in his arms he cut.

When I first met your daddy I thought . . . Here is a man I can lay down with and make a baby. That's the first thing I thought when I seen him. I was thirty years old and had done seen my share of men. But when he walked up to me and said, "I can dance a waltz that'll make you dizzy," I thought, Rose Lee, here is a man that you can open yourself up to and be filled to bursting. Here is a man that can fill all them empty spaces you been tipping around the edges of. One of them empty spaces was being somebody's mother.

I married your daddy and settle down to cooking his supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed. When your Daddy walked through the house he was so big he filled it up. That was my first mistake. Not to make him leave some room for me. For my part in the matter. But at that time I wanted that. I wanted a house that I could sing in. And that's what your daddy gave me. I didn't know to keep up his strength I had to give up little pieces of mine. I did that. I took on his life as mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. It was my life and I didn't have to live it like that. But that's

what life offered me in the way of being a woman and I took it. I grabbed hold of it with both hands.

By the time Raynell came into the house, me and your daddy had done lost touch with one another. I didn't want to make my blessing off of nobody's misfortune... but I took on to Raynell like she was all them babies I had wanted and never had. *(The phone rings)* Like I'd been blessed to relive a part of my life. And if the Lord see fit to keep up my strength . . . I'm gonna do her just like your daddy did you... I'm gonna give her the best of what's in me.

FENCES

Code: 50-09
Time: 2:00
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Family

Act 2; Scene 3

CORY

I got to get by. You in my way. I got to get by. Come on, Pop . . . I got to get by. I live here too! I ain't scared of you. I was walking by you to go into the house cause you sitting on the steps drunk, singing to yourself. You can put it like that. I ain't got to say excuse me to you. You don't count around here no more. That's right. You always talking this dumb stuff. Now, why don't you just get out my way.

You don't know what I got. You ain't got to worry about what I got. You talking about what you did for me . . . what'd you ever give me? You ain't never gave me nothing! You ain't never done nothing but hold me back. Afraid I was gonna be better than you. All you ever did was try and make me scared of you. I used to tremble every time you called my name. Every time I heard your footsteps in the house. Wondering all the time . . . what's Papa gonna say if I do this? . . . What's he gonna say if I do that? . . . What's Papa gonna say if I turn on the radio? And Mama, too . . . she tries ... but she's scared of you. I don't know how she stand you . . . after what you did to her.

(TROY advances on CORY.)

What you gonna do . . . give me a whupping? You can't whup me no more. You're too old. You just an old man. You crazy! You know that? You just a crazy old man . . . talking about I got the devil in me. It ain't your yard. You took Uncle Gabe's money he got from the army to buy this house and then you put him out.

(TROY advances on CORY.)

(TROY's advance backs CORY up against the tree. CORY grabs up the bat.)

I ain't going nowhere! Come on . . . put me out! I ain't scared of you. Come on! Come on, put me out. What's the matter? You so bad . . . put me out! (TROY advances toward CORY.) Come on! Come on!

FENCES

Code: 50-10
Time: 1:15
Type 1: Dramatic
Type 2: Friendship
Type 3:

Act 2, Scene 1

BONO

Troy . . . I done known you seem like damn near my whole life. You and Rose both. I done know both of you all for a long time. I remember when you met Rose. When you was hitting them baseball out the park. A lot of them old gals was after you then. You had the pick of the litter. When you picked Rose, I was happy for you. That was the first time I knew you had any sense. I said . . . My man Troy knows what he's doing . . . I'm gonna follow this nigger . . . he might take me somewhere. I been following you too. I done learned a whole heap of things about life watching you. I done learned how to tell where the shit lies. How to tell it from the alfalfa. You done learned me a lot of things. You showed me how to not make the same mistakes . . . to take life as it comes along and keep putting one foot in front of the other. (Pause) Rose a good woman.

She loves you, Troy. Rose loves you.... I know what Rose means to you, Troy. I'm just trying to say I don't want to see you mess that up.

Well, that's all I got to say. I just say that because I love you both.

FENCES

Code: 50-11
Time: 1:40
Type 1: Serio-Comedic
Type 2: Metaphorical
Type 3: Inspirational

Act 1; Scene 2

GABRIEL

Did you know when I was in Heaven . . . every morning me and Saint Peter would sit down by the Gate and eat some big fat biscuits? Oh, yeah! We had us a good time. We'd sit there and eat us them biscuits and then Saint Peter would go off to sleep and tell me to wake him up when it's time to open the Gates for the Judgment.

Troy . . . Saint Peter got your name in the book. I seen it. It say Troy Maxson. I say . . . I know him! He got the same name like what I got. That's my brother!

Ain't got my name in the book. Don't have to have my name. I done died and went to heaven. He got your name though. One morning Saint Peter was looking at his book . . . marking it up for the Judgment . . . and he let me see your name . . . got it in there under M. Got Rose's name . . . I ain't seen it like I seen yours . . . but I know it's in there. He got a great big book. Got everybody's name what was ever born. That's what he told me. But I seen your name. Seen it with my own eyes.

Better get ready for the Judgment
Better get ready for the Judgment
My Lord is coming down.

Better get ready for the Judgment
Better get ready for the Judgment morning
Better get ready for the Judgment
My God is coming down.