**Essay Topics for Fences**

1. Evaluate the American Dream and what role it plays Fences.
2. Analyze Troy’s downfall.
3. Explain how Rose is the backbone of the family

**Themes to Consider**

1. Separation – Fences are dividers used to separate or make a border, to keep people in or out. What are the fences that you can identify in the play? Are they for protection? How does racism work like a fence? Can fences ever be positive? How do our characters experience fences? What is the result?

2. Inherited History – How does the past affect the future? Should the sins of the father be passed onto his children? What is the history that our characters are dealt? How do they reckon with this history? Can they escape it? Can history ever be used productively?

3. Damaged Fathers/Damaged Sons – Many of our characters were reared by flawed fathers. What does it mean to be a poor role model? How does poor parenting affect one’s own parenting skills and, subsequently, one’s children? How do fathers teach their sons about being men?

1. Survival Mechanisms – Life can be hard. What do our characters do to survive the lives they’ve been leading? What makes their lives difficult? What modes of escape make it easier? Is it truly easier or just temporary relief? How is the “right to dream” a survival mechanism? Why is dreaming so important?

**Fences**

**“A Dream Deferred”**

Read Langston Hughes’ “A Dream Deferred” and consider the following questions.

**“”A Dream Deferrd”**

*by Langston Hughes*

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Which of Hughes’ metaphors best describe Rose’s deferred dreams? Explain. Troy’s dreams? Explain. Cory’s dreams. Explain. Be sure to use quotes from the play!

Write a eulogy to be read at Troy Maxon’s funeral. Include details from his life that would help mourners see that “he meant to do more good than harm.” Consider carefully who the speaker of your eulogy is and include a brief character description of him or her prior to the eulogy. It could be one of the characters in the play or someone else entirely. Be sure to include quotes from the play!

* Choose two characters with an internal or external conflict. Identify and explain the conflict. Finally explain how the conflict – internal or external – changed the characters for better or worse. In your essay, be sure to evaluate how the character’s conflict contributes to the overall meaning of the play.
* Discuss the theme of the play. Also discuss the significance of the title as it relates to main theme and the character of the play. Explain how August Wilson achieves his purpose in the play through the title.
* Analyze the historical events of the period in which the play was written which may have had an influence on the characters, setting, and theme. Through your explanations, show how the events influence the actions and events in the play.
* An effective literary work does not merely stop or cease; it concludes. In the view of some critics, a work that does not provide the pleasure of significant closure has terminated with an artistic fault. A satisfactory ending is not, however, always conclusive in every sense; significant closure may require the reader to abide with or adjust to ambiguity and uncertainty. Discuss the ending of *Fences*. Explain precisely how and why the ending appropriately or inappropriately concludes the play.
* Morally ambiguous characters – a character whose behavior discourages readers from identifying them as purely evil or purely good – are at the heart of many works of literature. Choose a character from Fences and explain how that character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the play as a whole.
* What is the play’s attitude towards women? How might a female playwright tell the story of Fences differently than August Wilson? What themes or issues might be raised in a play about black women in the 1950’s? Do Rose and the women mentioned in the play typify roles of the 1950’s or defy them? What attributes or actions of the female characters support your interpretation?
* Music features largely in the play. Lyons is a musician, Gabriel blows his horn, and several of the characters sing old songs. What does music mean to Lyons? To Gabriel? How does each song comment on the play’s actions and relationships?
* A fence is one of the major symbols, both figuratively and literally, within the play. Describe and analyze two examples of fences that exist within the play discussing who builds each fence, how each fence is built, and what effect each fence has on the characters in the play
* By the end of Fences, every character except Raynell is institutionalized – Rose in the church, Lyons in the penitentiary, Gabriel in the mental hospital, and Cory in the U.S. Marines. The only free person is Raynell, Troy’s daughter. What might the institutionalization of Troy’s family members represent? What might be represented by the fact that Raynell is the sole remaining Maxson to exist outside of an institution?