

# A comparison between troy maxson and oedipus essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Aristotle believed that the greatest play to have been written before and during his time was one by Sophocles entitled Oedipus the King. For him, a great tragic play offered a reversal of fortune and recognition on the part of the tragic hero, which were exemplified by Sophocles. The story of Oedipus was, for centuries, considered to be the basis of a tragic hero and continues to influence literary writers for tragedy. One tragic play that is also influential in modern times is by August Wilson entitled Fences.

Set in the 1950s, the play explores the experience of an African American man and examines race relations during and prior to that time. The tragedy of the main character, Troy Maxson, however, does not compare to that which Oedipus was presented. While Fences is considered to be a good tragic play, Troy is not a representation of a modern version of the classical tragic hero. One cause of a tragic hero's demise is the presence of a tragic flaw called hamartia.

It is usually a type mental flaw, but could be a physical flaw as well, that greatly impacts the tragic character's decision which would ultimately lead to a conflict between characters but more commonly results in an internal conflict of the tragic character. Such is the impact of hamartia to the character that it is often the character's own thoughts and actions that leads to his or her own downfall. Oedipus' hamartia is said to be his arrogance in resolving a situation. As king, he firmly believed that he is responsible to finding a solution to the plague that infests their lands.

He sought the advise of a prophet called Teiresias but was refused at first to be given an advise due to the fact that the prophet was concerned about the

King and knows that the solution would lead to the King's downfall. Oedipus, however, insists that a solution be given to him and in the process called the prophet a fraud. Little did Oedipus know that the person he is seeking responsible for the death of the previous king was himself, and also learned the bitter truth that the former king, which he unwittingly killed was his own father, and that he unwittingly married his own mother and had children with her.

As a result of his own decision, he was ultimately banished from the land which he ruled. On the other hand, Troy's hamartia is his insensitivity to the needs of others, particularly of his wife and children. Because of his race, he and his ancestors had been victims of social injustices. Despite of his talent as a baseball player, he was not given a chance to play in the Major League because it prohibits as players "people of color" during his time. His son, Cory, apparently have inherited his father's talent.

Troy, however, prohibited his son to pursue the sport because of his belief that there is still social injustice against their race. He refuses to believe that times are changing and that the society is now learning to accept that black and white are the same human beings. These resulted in the conflict between father and son. Troy also admonished his other son's talent who has pursued a career in music. To pursue a career in music at that time was considered to be ridiculous and extremely unconventional.

Because of his incomprehension of the changing times, Troy referred to jazz music as "Chinese music" (Act I, scene 4), which proves his failure to appreciate the creation of his own race. Troy had also been insensitive to the

needs of his wife, who regarded him as selfish and of taking and not giving (Act II, scene 1). Despite of his friend, Bono, advising him to devote time for his family, Troy continued to have an affair with another woman, of which he at first denied the fact. He later claims that having an affair was just his course of an escape to his failures in life.

Troy, however, refused to accept that his wife and Lyon's interest in the game of numbers was also a means of escape, therefore further proving his selfishness. Troy's insensitivity to the need of others was also the cause of his failure to provide love and support that his loved ones need most out of him. While Troy has proven to be a responsible husband and father in terms of providing for his family, he has forgotten to provide care for his family. His pride of being the family's breadwinner failed him to realize the other needs of his wife and children which ultimately caused him to lose their trust and respect.

What differentiates Troy from Oedipus is their willingness to face and accept the outcome of their decisions. While Oedipus displayed great remorse to the outcome of his decisions and willingly accepted the consequences of his own actions, Troy failed to feel remorse because of his insensitivity and pride. Troy firmly and wrongfully believed that, as a father, his only responsibility was to provide shelter and food to his family and nothing more, and demands respect from his children and wife.

Thus, their concept of responsibility also differentiates Troy from Oedipus. As king, Oedipus sees his people as his sons and daughters who need protection. Oedipus has done everything in his capacity to provide for his

subject and was willing to take responsibility from his action for the good of his people, even if it meant his death or banishment. Troy, on the other hand, had a diminutive concept of responsibility. He, however, tried to make up for his mistakes through his daughter.

What is lacking on Troy that makes him different from the classical tragic hero is the reversal of fortune—that is, from a high ranking member of society to a lowly figure. Troy never has been a high ranking member of the society. His loss was limited to the loss of trust and respect of his loved ones, and his tragedy was a result of his failures and shortcomings. While his story is definitely sad, events in his life did not result in his loss of a social status—an element that exists on most effective classical tragedy such as Oedipus the King.