**The Tragic Hero Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Mr. Brennan, English II**

**Carl Jung** first applied the term archetype to literature. He recognized that there were **universal patterns** in all stories and mythologies regardless of culture or historical period and hypothesized that part of the human mind contained a **collective unconscious shared by all members of the human species**, a sort of universal, primal memory.

The term **archetype** can be applied to:

* An image
* A symbol
* A theme
* An idea
* A character type
* A plot pattern

**Archetypes** can be expressed in

* Myths
* Dreams
* Literature
* Religions
* Fantasies
* Folklore

**Aristotle and the Elements of Tragedy**

**I. Definition of Tragedy**

(From the Poetics of Aristotle [384-322 BC])

"Tragedy, then, is a process of imitating an action which has serious implications, is complete, and possesses magnitude; by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, with each of its varieties found separately in the parts; enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification (catharsis[\*], sometimes translated "purgation") of such emotions."

a) **"imitation"** (*mimesis* – “mime”):  Aristotle asserts that the artist does not just copy the appearances of the world, but rather imitates or represents Reality itself, and gives form and meaning to that Reality. In so doing, the artist gives shape to the universal, not the accidental.

**Critical Thinking:** Why is it important that a work of tragedy be realistic?

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b) **"an action with serious implications"**: serious in a moral, psychological, and social sense; significant

c) **"complete and possesses magnitude"**: not just a series of episodes, but a whole with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The idea of imitation is important here; the artist does not just slavishly copy everything related to an action, but selects only those aspects which give form to universal truths.

**Critical Thinking:** What’s the difference between “real” and “realistic”?

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d) **"language sensuously attractive...in the parts"**: language must be appropriate for each part of the play: choruses are in a different meter and rhythm and more melodious than spoken parts.

**Critical Thinking:** Why would a writer want to use different language for different scenes? What could this communicate to the audience?

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e) **tragedy** (as opposed to epic) relies on an enactment (dramatic performance), not on "narrative" (the author telling a story).

f) **"purification"** (*catharsis*): tragedy first raises the emotions of pity and fear, then purges them. Whether Aristotle means to say that this takes place only within the action of the play, or whether he thinks that the audience also undergoes a cathartic experience, is still hotly debated.

**II. The Tragic Hero**

According to Aristotle, The tragic hero is "a [great] man who is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but because of some mistake."

a) **a great man**: "one of those who stand in great repute and prosperity, like Oedipus and Thyestes: conspicuous men from families of that kind." The hero is neither a villain nor a model of perfection but is basically good and decent.

b) **"mistake" (*hamartia*)**: This Greek word, which Aristotle uses only once in the Poetics, has also been translated as "flaw" or as "error." The great man falls through--though not entirely because of--some weakness of character, some moral blindness, or error.

**III. Plot**

Aristotle distinguished six elements of tragedy: "plot, characters, verbal expression, thought, visual adornment, and song-composition." Of these, PLOT is the most important. All plots have some *pathos* (suffering), but a complex plot includes reversal and recognition.

a) **"reversal"** (*peripeteia*): occurs when a situation seems to developing in one direction, then suddenly "reverses" to another. For example, when Oedipus first hears of the death of Polybus (his supposed father), the news at first seems good, but then is revealed to be disastrous.

b) **"recognition"**(*anagnorisis* or "knowing again" or "knowing back" or "knowing throughout" ): a change from ignorance to awareness of a bond of love or hate. For example, Oedipus kills his father in ignorance and then learns of his true relationship to the King of Thebes.

c) **"suffering"** (*pathos*): Also translated as "a calamity," the third element of plot is "a destructive or painful act." The English words "sympathy," "empathy," and "apathy" (literally, absence of suffering) all stem from this Greek word.

**Making Connections:** Can you think of any stories (books, movies, TV shows, etc.) that feature these elements of tragedy?

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**Source**: Hartley, George. "ARISTOTLE & THE ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY: English 250." *Aristotle's Tragic Terms*. Ohio University, n.d. Web. 22 Aug. 2014.

**The Characteristics of an "Archetypal" Tragic Hero**

**Noble Stature**: since tragedy involves the "fall" of a tragic hero, one theory is that one must have a lofty position to fall from, or else there is no tragedy (just *pathos*). Another explanation of this characteristic is that tragedies involving people of stature affect the lives of others. In the case of a king, the tragedy would not only involve the individual and his family, it would also involve the whole society.

**Tragic Flaw** (Hamartia): the tragic hero must "fall" due to some flaw in his own personality. The most common tragic flaw is hubris (excessive pride). One who tries to attain too much possesses hubris.

**Free Choice**: while there is often a discussion of the role of fate in the downfall of a tragic hero, there must be an element of choice in order for there to be a true tragedy. The tragic hero falls because he chooses one course of action over another.

**The Punishment Exceeds the Crime**: the audience must not be left feeling that the tragic hero got what he deserved. Part of what makes the action "tragic" is to witness the injustice of what has occurred to the tragic hero.

**Hero has Increased Awareness**: it is crucial that the tragic hero come to some sort of an understanding of what went wrong or of what was really going on before he comes to his end.

**Produces Catharsis in Audience**: catharsis is a feeling of "emotional purgation" that an audience feels after witnessing the plight of a tragic hero: we feel emotionally drained, but exultant.

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| **Archetypal Tragic Hero Characteristic** | **Quote showing that Oedipus has fulfilled this characteristic** | **Explain how Oedipus met this characteristic** |
| **Noble Stature** |  |  |
| **Tragic Flaw** |  |  |
| **Free Choice** |  |  |
| **Punishment Exceeds the Crime** |  |  |
| **Hero Has Increased Awareness** |  |  |
| **Produces Catharsis in the Audience** |  |  |