Walter White as a Tragic Hero

**After viewing the *YouTube* clip on the evolution of Walter White in *Breaking Bad*, complete the table below to determine whether or not he fits the definition of Aristotle’s tragic hero.**

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| Characteristics | Yes or No | Explanation |
| Hero must suffer more than he deserves. | Yes and No | Yes, he was a normal person living an ordinary life. He followed the rules before being diagnosed with cancer.  No, he made choice (i.e., becoming a drug distributor) that led to his downfall. He alienated his family and put them in jeopardy. He is responsible for the death of Hank, his brother-in-law. |
| Hero must doomed from the start, but bears no responsibility for possessing his flaw. | Yes and No | Yes, he is diagnosed with terminal cancer. He will die.  His fatal flaw is hubris (pride). It’s part of his personality, but it leads him to his own downfall. |
| Hero must be noble in nature, but imperfect so that the audience can see themselves in him. | Yes | He is noble because he wants to give his earnings to his family. He’s a loving father and husband early in the show. He’s a high school teacher who helps others.  He is imperfect because he is overly greedy and ambitious. He is proud and jealous at times. |
| Hero must have discovered his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him. | Yes | He dies as a result of the choices he made as he became a meth producer. He was going to die regardless (i.e., cancer), yet his choices lead to his death. |
| Hero must understand his doom, as well as the fact that his fate was discovered by his own actions. | Yes | He knows that the cancer is terminal, so he takes fate into his own hands. The control he takes over his life empowers but also endangers his life and the lives of the others. He acknowledges to his wife that he “did it for himself.” He takes pride in the fact that he was good at being a meth producer. |
| Hero’s story should arouse fear and empathy. | Yes | At first, we empathize with him because having cancer is putting him in a difficult situation. He’s trying his best to keep control over his life and to provide for those he loves.  Later on, we fear for him because he finds himself in dangerous situations, and his family is also affected and put in danger.  Towards the end of the show, we come to fear him because he has been completely transformed. Walter says, “I’m the one who knocks.” In other words, he inspires fear in others, including the audience. |
| Hero must be physically or spiritually wounded by his experiences, often resulting in his death. | Yes | His death is a direct result from his own actions. He is spiritually wounded because he transforms himself from a loving father/husband to a cruel, unemotional meth producer. As a result, his family abandons him. |
| The hero must be intelligent so he may learn from his mistakes. | Yes | Walter is a very intelligent man. He doesn’t learn from his mistakes in the sense that he keeps making the same ones as he expands drug production. In the end, however, he does try to redeem himself by giving money to his family, by killing Hank’s killers, and by freeing Jesse. |
| The hero must have a weakness (usually, it is pride). | Yes | Hubris is Walter’s hamartia (tragic flaw). Mike tells Walter, “You just had to be the man.” |
| He has to be faced with a very serious decision that he has to make. | Yes | He decides how he will provide for his family.  He decides to come out of hiding to seek revenge and to restore his fortune and give it to his family. |