A Raisin in the Sun Study Guide

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

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Introduction

A Raisin in the Sun was first produced in 1959 and anticipates many of the issues which were to divide American culture during the decade of the 1960s. Lorraine Hansberry, the playwright, was an unknown dramatist who achieved unprecedented success when her play became a Broadway sensation. Not only were successful women playwrights rare at the time, but successful young black women playwrights were virtually unheard of. Within its context, the success of *A Raisin in the Sun* is particularly stunning.

In part because there were few black playwrights as well as few black men'and women who could attend Broadway productions the play was hindered by a lack of financial support during its initial production. Producers hesitated to risk financial involvement in such an unprecedented event, for had the play been less well-written or well-acted, it could have suffered an incredible failure. Eventually, however, the play did find financial backing, and after staging initial performances in New Haven, Connecticut, it reached Broadway.

Compounding the racial challenges the play posed was its length of nearly three hours as it was originally written. Because audiences are not accustomed to plays of such length, especially by a newcomer, a couple of significant scenes were cut from the original production. (These scenes are sometimes included in later renditions.) These scenes include Walter's bedtime conversation with Travis and the family's interaction with Mrs. Johnson. In addition, the scene in which Beneatha appears with a "natural" haircut was eliminated in the original version primarily because Diana Sands, the actress, was not attractive enough with this haircut to reinforce the point of the scene. This scene would become more crucial as cultural ideas shifted.

Author Biography

Born in Chicago in 1930, Lorraine Hansberry was the youngest of four children. Her father, Carl Hansberry, was a successful real estate agent and his family hence middle-class who bought a house in a previously all-white neighborhood when Lorraine was eight years old. His attempt to move his family into this home created much tension, since Chicago was then legally segregated. Subsequently, however, as a result of Carl Hansberry's lawsuit, the Illinois Supreme Court declared these housing segregation laws unconstitutional.

After high school Hansberry attended the University of Wisconsin, where she studied drama, and the Art Institute of Chicago, where she studied painting. She moved to New York in 1950, supporting herself through a variety of jobs including work as a reporter and editor, while she continued to write short stories and plays. Before completing *A Raisin in the Sun*, she attempted three plays and a novel. During this period, she also met and married her husband, Robert Nerniroff, a white man who shared Hansberry's political perspective. They were divorced in 1964.

When Hansberry began *A Raisin in the Sun*, she titled it *The Crystal Stair*, which is also a line in a poem by Langston Hughes. The eventual title under which the play was and is performed is taken from Hughes's famous "A Dream Deferred." The play achieved its Broadway debut in 1959 it was the first play by a black woman to be produced in a Broadway theater. Several other "firsts" occurred because of this production; for example, Hansberry was the youngest play wnght and first black playwright to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. This was a particularly rewarding honor, since Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, two of America's most prominent playwrights, also had plays on Broadway at this time. This version of *Raisin in the Sun* ran for 530 performances. A film version for which Hansberry had written the screen play was also released in 1961. She was nominated for the Screen Writers Guild award for her work.

Hansberry began another play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window,* Although it was less successful, it ran on Broadway for 101 performances. It closed on the day of Hansberry's death, January 12, 1965. At the age of 35, after a remarkably brief illness, Hansberry died of cancer.

Plot Summary

Act I, Scene One

The opening scene of *A Raisin in the Sun* occurs on a Friday morning when the members of the Younger family are preparing to go to school or work. During this scene, as in the opening scene of most plays, several key pieces of information are revealed. The family's inadequate living situation is conveyed through the fact that they share a bathroom with other tenants in their apartment house and through the fact that Travis must sleep on the sofa in the living room As crucial, Walter's conversation elicits the fact that Mama is expecting a significant check in the mail the following day life insurance paid to them because Mama's husband and Walter and Beneatha's father has died. The tension over money is also evident when Ruth refuses to give Travis fifty cents he needs for school. Walter gives him the money, along with an additional fifty cents to demonstrate that the family is not as poor as Ruth claims. Ironically, however, when Walter leaves for work, he will have to ask Ruth for carfare since he has given all his money to Travis.

During breakfast, Walter discusses the liquor store he wants to buy with the money Mama will receive. The other family members are hesitant to invest money with Walter's friends. Walter becomes increasingly frustrated, but when he expresses his longing for a more independent life and a career beyond that of chauffeur for a white man, Ruth and Beneatha discount his desires. Beneatha reminds him that the money belongs to Mama rather than directly to them, but her response is disingenuous because she already knows Mama plans to save some of the money for Beneatha's school tuition.

After the others leave, Ruth speaks to Mama about Walter's hopes. Mama is hesitant for at least two reasons she does not approve of liquor, and she would like to buy a house for the family. This possibility excites Ruth, and within this conversation, Mama reveals why this dream is so significant lo her. During this conversation, Beneatha states thai she has another date with George Murchison, a young man she doesn't particularly like. This puzzles Mama since George comes from a wealthy family. The conversation grows more tense, however, when Beneatha defies her mother regarding religion, making statements Mama considers to be blasphemous. The scene concludes when Ruth suddenly faints, an act that will be explained later.

Act I, Scene Two

This scene occurs the following morning, with most of the family cleaning house and waiting for the mailman. Ruth, however, has gone out, and Mama implies that it might be because she's pregnant. Beneatha states that she's about to receive a visitor, Joseph Asagai, from Nigeria. There follows a discussion of European colonialism in Africa although Mama appears somewhat ignorant, Beneatha's knowledge seems particularly new and her attitude self-righteous. At this point, Ruth returns and confirms

that she is pregnant. Although Mama is pleased, Ruth and Beneatha think of the child as simply another financial burden.

They are diverted from their conversation when Beneatha spies Travis outside chasing a rat with his friends. During this confused moment, Asagai arrives. He critiques Beneatha because she has straightened her hair according to the style of the time. He suggests that she is a racial assimilationist that is, that she aspires to white values. Simultaneously, he asserts that a woman's primary sense of fulfillment should come from her role as a wife.

After Asagai leaves, the mailman arrives with the check. Walter returns home, more frustrated than ever, especially when Mama urges him lo go talk to Ruth. Mama is concerned because Walter is going "outside his home to look for peace" and because the "doctor" Ruth has gone to see is an abortionist. Although she expects Walter to be outraged at this possibility, he seems by his silence to agree that abortion would not be such a bad idea.

Act II, Scene One

Later that day, Beneatha appears in an African gown Asagai has given her. Walter is drunk and wants to act like an African warrior, George Murchison arrives to pick up Beneatha, but he is displeased at her appearance and refuses to take her seriously. She is, he says, "eccentric." Waller responds to George antagonistically, describing him as wearing "faggoty-looking white shoes." Ruth understands that something has gone drastically wrong, and that whatever she and Waller once shared, that love is gone.

Mama returns home, stating that she has been doing business downtown. She has in fact bought a house located in Clybourne Park, an entirely white neighborhood. She bought that house not because she wanted to make a political statement but because it was big enough for her family and within her price range.

Act 11, Scene Two

In this scene, Mrs. Johnson, a neighbor, arrives, ostensibly to congratulate the Youngcrs on their impending move. Within the conversation, however, she brings up recent bombings of houses belonging to black families moving into previously all-white neighborhoods. Within this conversation, Mama reveals herself to have more militant feelings than she had previously expressed. When Walter confesses that he has not been to work for three days. Mama begins to rethink her decision and eventually offers some of the money to Walter so that he can buy the liquor store and "be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be."

Act II, Scene Three

At this point, the family mood has improved considerably. Ruth and Walter have gone to the movies for the first time in years, and Ruth has bought curtains for the new house. In the midst of their excitement, a white man knocks at their door, introducing himself as Karl Lindner, from the "New Neighbors Orientation Committee." Although he attempts to present himself not as racist but merely reasonable, his goal is to buy the house back from the Youngers, who refuse his offer. After he leaves, Beneatha asks, "What they think we going to do eat 'em?" Ruth responds, "No, honey, marry "em."

To celebrate their good fortune, the family has bought Mama a set of gardening tools, but in the midst of their celebration, Bobo, a friend of Walter's arrives. He reveals that Willy, their mutual friend and potential business partner, has disappeared widi all of their money. Mama is especially outraged because the money represented everything for which her husband had suffered. The scene ends with the family as dejected as they had been joyous at the beginning.

Act III

Walter has gone to Karl Lindner's apparently to accept his offer, but when Lindner arrives, the family has regained its determination to move. The movers arrive. The play concludes on an ambiguous note for although the family is moving, their life in Clybourne Park will likely be difficult.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

A Raisin in the Sun is Lorraine Hansberry's seminal three-act play about an impoverished black family, set in Chicago's Southside neighborhood sometime between 1945 and 1959.

The setting is the dark family apartment, crowded with "tired" furniture protected with "acres of crocheted doilies." Although constantly cleaned, the apartment is a scene of weariness and poverty. The single main room (described as two in the landlord's lease) is a dingy, crowded combination living room/dining room/kitchen. Its only natural light is provided by a small window in the kitchen.

Offstage to the right, an alcove (a former breakfast room) serves as a bedroom for Ruth and Walter Lee. Their son, Travis, sleeps on a "make down bed" of pillow and blankets on the living room sofa. Offstage to the left is the single bedroom, shared by Mama and Walter Lee's sister Beneatha.

The bathroom, shared with other families on the same floor, is across the hall. The curtain rises on Friday at 7:30 a.m. as an alarm clock starts the Younger family about their morning routine. Ruth, a woman of about 30, enters from the sleeping alcove on the right wearing a housecoat.

She rouses her sleeping 10-year-old son, Travis, from his "make down" bed on the sofa, raises the kitchen window shade to admit a "dusky" light, and puts water on to boil. Calling Travis three times, she succeeds in getting him up, and he takes "today's clothes" and a towel across the hall to the communal bathroom.

Ruth starts breakfast, calling her husband Walter Lee from their alcove. After three shouts, he rises just as she is going into the sleeping alcove to fetch him. Walter Lee is "a young man around 35" and every word he says carries a "quality of indictment."

Feeling queasy, Ruth quickly wipes her face with a damp towel and finger combs her hair in an effort to make herself presentable before Walter Lee enters the kitchen. While Walter waits impatiently for Travis to get out of the bathroom, he asks Ruth, "Check coming today?"

She reminds him that the check is not to arrive until Saturday, the following day. She points out that the check – a $10,000 insurance payment on the death of his father, Walter Younger -- is not his. It belongs to Walter Lee's mother, Lena, called Mama by all.

Reading the *Chicago Tribune*, Walter discusses another bomb test and an article on the illness of the Tribune's owner, Robert McCormick. Ruth feigns an upper-class "tea party" concern for Colonel McCormick's health.

The Youngers continue to spar like many long-married couples, Walter complains about the wait for the bathroom, and Ruth chides him about keeping Travis up after 10 p.m. by entertaining his friends in the living room.

Ruth asks Walter how he wants his eggs and when he replies, "Any way but scrambled" she promptly begins to scramble them. Walter walks to the window, and remarks that in the morning light, just for a moment, Ruth looks like the young girl he married. She shushes him and gets back to work.

Travis returns, quickly summoning his father to the bathroom before the neighbors can slip in. Travis immediately asks about the awaited check, and then tells his mother he needs fifty cents for school today. His mother refuses, insisting they cannot afford it, and forbids him to ask his Grandmother.

Travis asks his mother if he can carry groceries at the supermarket after school to make pocket money. Ruth refuses, shushes Travis, and tells him to make his bed. Travis makes the bed sloppily, sulking. His mother chastises him for his "slubborn ways."

His mother brushes his hair and insists he wear a jacket, telling him to take carfare and milk money, "but not a dime for caps." Ruth teases a sullen Travis, mocking him affectionately until he hugs her and heads for the door.

Meeting his father at the door, Travis asks him for the fifty cents. His father responds by giving Travis the half-dollar, and another one to "buy some fruit or take a taxicab to school." Travis runs out the door overjoyed. Ruth is furious.

Walter reveals his latest scheme to get ahead – a $75,000 liquor store operation he proposes with his friends Willy and Bobo, requiring an initial investment of $10,000 each, plus a few hundred to expedite the liquor license. Ruth calls Willie a "good for nothing loud mouth" and objects to the "graft." Ruth meets each of Walter's imprecations with a variation of "Eat your eggs."

Walter insists that this is not a "fly-by-night" operation. He bemoans the fact that women don't understand the world, and the lack of emotional support from his wife. Their conversation deteriorates, with Ruth saying, "There *are* colored men who do things" accusingly, and Walter Lee responding, "No thanks to the colored woman."

Walter Lee's sister Beneatha enters from the bedroom on the left, which she shares with her mother. "Bennie" is twenty, slim, and her speech is more educated and less southern than Ruth's. Beneatha checks the bathroom across the hall, only to find it occupied by a member of the neighboring Johnson family.

Walter Lee objects to Beneatha's ambition to become a doctor, urging her to become a nurse or a wife "like a normal woman." He objects to some of the insurance being spent on Beneatha's education, and she responds that it's Mama's money, not his. Despite Beneatha's claim that she doesn't care how Mama spends the money, she seems supremely confident that the tuition for medical school will be available.

They continue to argue until Walter leaves for work. He proclaims all black women belong to "The world's most backwards race of people, and that's a fact." Walter slams the door on his way out, then meekly creeps back in, and asks Ruth for carfare – he has given all his money to Travis. Ruth gives him fifty cents and replies "teasingly but tenderly" – "Here -- take a taxi!"

Mama enters from the bedroom she shares with Beneatha, protesting the noise of Walter's exit. She checks a spindly plant she keeps on the windowsill. Noticing Ruth isn't feeling well, Mama makes her don a warm robe, and urges Ruth to stay home from work. Ruth declines, afraid she will lose her job as housekeeper to a white family.

Mama fixes Travis' sloppy bed-making, meanwhile chiding Ruth for not giving Travis a hot breakfast last week. Ruth makes her plea for Mama to invest the insurance check in Walter Lee's liquor store scheme, but Mama objects to liquor on religious grounds. Then Ruth urges "Miss Lena" to spend the money on herself, to take an exotic trip.

Mama discloses her plan to put part of the money away for Beneatha's education, and use the rest as a down payment on a house, so they can all get out of "this rat-trap." She and Big Walter moved into the apartment just two weeks after their marriage. They intended to live there for one year, then buy a little house with a garden in Morgan Park. As time passed, Big Walter became increasingly disappointed. When they lost a baby – "little Claude" – Big Walter became even more depressed, eventually working himself to death.

Mama becomes enraged when Beneatha claims God no longer exists. She exerts her authority as head of the family by insisting her college-educated daughter retract her statement, and admits that at least "in this house," God does still exist. The spirited Beneatha eventually succumbs to her mother's pressure.

The scene closes with Mama urging Ruth to sing a hymn, while the unsteady Ruth faints.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

Lorraine Hansberry's play is a powerful statement on the social and political issues that moved to the forefront during the 1960's and 1970's, including racism, African American heritage, feminism, lack of economic opportunity, and the marginalization of black men. The themes of poverty, shattered dreams, de facto segregation and hopelessness continue to resonate today. It is the story of an impoverished African American family's struggle, set in an area still highly segregated.

The graceful, lyrical opening description of the Youngers' apartment is nearly the only narrative section of the play, and Hansberry exploits it beautifully. Instead of giving a few dry lines about setting, the opening is heaped with description until the crowded apartment, with its "tired" furnishings becomes a metaphor for the residents, overworked and trapped in shattered dreams. The furnishings have abandoned "all

pretenses but living itself" – a description that could just as well be applied to the residents.

Ruth Younger is a woman of about thirty, once pretty but now tired, care worn, disappointed and diminished by her hard life. Ruth is hardworking, but she has acquired the sense of hopelessness, of futility, that her neighbors call "looking like a settled woman." Ruth is less educated than her husband Walter Lee, and uses more southern colloquialisms, and less standard English. In this first scene, she is feeling queasy in the morning.

Travis Younger is the ten-year-old son of Ruth and Walter Lee. Travis is a typical boy, enthusiastic about playing with his friends, not above playing his mother and father (or grandmother) against each other. He is resourceful enough to earn spending money carrying parcels at the new supermarket. Enjoys playing with cap guns, a popular toy of the period.

Walter Lee Younger is Ruth's lean, intense husband, a disappointed, embittered man in his thirties. Every statement he utters carries a quality of indictment. Walter Lee works as a chauffer to a wealthy white man, but dreams of starting his own business. Long after Travis' bedtime, Walter and his friends Bobo and Willy monopolize the living room, discussing plans to open a liquor store. Walter Lee doesn't want to be a servant all his life – he wants to *be* the boss, both of his business and his family.

He is always called Walter Lee to distinguish from his (now deceased) father Big Walter. Walter Lee has a high school education, and his English is noticeably more standardized than Ruth's or his mothers, perhaps because he associates with his wealthy white boss each day.

Walter Lee is affectionate towards his younger sister Beneatha, but clearly resents her schooling. He advises her to consider nursing or another field more suitable to a young woman. He sees any opportunity Beneatha is given as unnecessary, and diminishing his own resources.

Beneatha Younger is Walter Lee's sister, a slim college student about twenty who dreams of going to medical school because she wants to heal the injured. Beneatha is trying to "find her identity," as her friend Asagai teases her, and is interested in African heritage. More educated than other members of her family, Beneatha's speech is more Midwestern, with fewer southern colloquialisms, although she retains the soft slurring and vowels of the Southside. She indulges in a series of expensive hobbies, such as horseback riding and playing the guitar, which the family can little afford.

Mama (Lena Younger) is the full-bodied, highly spiritual, strong family matriarch in her early 60s. As the play begins, Mama is expecting a $10,000 check – the insurance death benefit for her husband, Big Walter. Mama and Big Walter moved into this apartment shortly after their marriage, considering the move only temporary. It is unknown whether the violent, womanizing Big Walter was an apartment resident when he died – in view of the sleeping arrangements, it seems unlikely.

Mama and Big Walter have fled the Jim Crow laws of the South, which made it illegal for a black person to use a 'white' restroom or water fountain. As late as the year of this production, 1959, it was illegal for a black person to sit in the front of the bus in Atlanta. Mama's family was sharecroppers and manual laborers. She and Big Walter escaped the legislated segregation of the South, but failed to realize their dreams of equal opportunity and integration in the North.

Mama marvels that Walter Lee wants to much more than she and Big Walter ever dreamed of. In her day, it was enough to know your son would not be required by law to sit at the back of the bus, or to know he would have career options other than sharecropping.

The dark apartment, with one small window that even in the morning admits only a "dusky" light, is a metaphor both for the resident's skin color, and their lack of opportunity. Mrs. Johnson is the plump, cheerful neighbor from down the hall. Mrs. Johnson represents the Negro who has perfectly adapted to racism. Her views of the limited potential of black men, and the value of segregation, are as harmful as Mr. Lindner's opinions. The spindly plant, carefully nurtured by Mama, symbolizes the dying hopes and dreams of the members of this impoverished black family.

Action and dialogue livened with humor are deftly used to reveal the relationships among family members –affectionate, yet simmering with long-held resentments. Walter Lee, in particular, turns his resentment for his broken dreams back on his race in general, and black women in particular. The good-natured sibling gibes are illustrated when Walter Lee says (to Beneatha), "You a horrible-looking chick at this hour." Beneatha replies, "I dissected something that looked just like you [in college Biology class] yesterday."

The same deft humor and understanding apply to the marital relationship. Although Ruth tries to make herself presentable before her husband enters the room, she scrambles Walter Lee's eggs (despite his request) and makes disparaging remarks about black men. Nevertheless, she teases both Travis and Walter Lee when they are angry, an attempt to reestablish friendly relations.

The dialogue is a faithful reproduction of the Southside dialect of the period. Ruth and Mama, particularly, use southern expressions and words. Ruth calls Travis "slubborn," apparently meaning stubborn. The more educated Walter Lee and especially the college student Beaneatha, have more Midwestern inflections, and use more Standard English phrasings, although their speech retains the distinctive rhythms of their neighborhood.

The central conflict emerges during this scene. Every member of the family (except Travis) has had their hopes and dreams dashed by the realities of the poverty of Chicago's Southside. The ten thousand dollar check for life insurance from the violent, womanizing laborer Big Walter (Walter Lee and Beneatha's father, Mama husband) seems their final opportunity. Beneatha dreams of using the check for tuition to medical school, Ruth suggests Mama take an indulgent trip. Mama dreams of a house of their own in a middle-class neighborhood.

The money is most important to Walter Lee, who sees it as his final opportunity to become an entrepreneur, to establish a business that will lift his family out of poverty forever, and establish him as the undisputed head of the family, his father's powerful male heir.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

The next morning (Saturday), Beneatha and Mama have the dingy apartment torn apart, cleaning it from top to bottom, while Ruth visits the doctor. Travis begs permission to play outside with the other boys, while Beneatha sprinkles roach poison in the cracks. Walter fields a phone call from his friend Willie, and rushes out.

Ruth returns from the doctor's, confirming Mama's suspicions that she is pregnant, and reveals she is considering an (illegal) abortion. Beneatha objects that there is no room in the crowded apartment for a baby, but Mama claims to be thrilled at the prospect of a granddaughter.

Beneatha looks out the window and spies Travis and the boys playing with a rat "as big as a cat." They make a sport of chasing the rat into a corner and beating it with sticks. Travis is reluctant to leave the game, but the horrified women force him to come inside.

Beneath's college friend, Nigerian student Joseph Asagai, calls and she invites him to visit. Mama objects because the apartment is in disarray. Beneatha cautions her mother not to embarrass her in front of Asagai, by revealing her ignorance of African culture. When Asagai appears, Mama repeats Beneatha's comments on Africa. Beneatha is embarrassed by her mother's phoniness and poorly disguised ignorance. Asagai brings Beneatha records of Nigerian music, and traditional robes from his sister's wardrobe. Thrilled, Beneatha tries the robes on. Asagai compliments her, saying she looks good in the robes, despite her chemically straightened "mutilated hair."

Joseph Asagai is clearly attracted to Beneatha, although he holds traditional views of women. When he gives Beneatha the nickname Alaiyo -- "One for Whom Bread –Food -- is not enough" in the language of his Yoruba tribe, she feels at last that he understands her.

The long-awaited $10,000 check arrives. Walter returns, clutching business contracts for the liquor store, excited about the check and ignorant of Ruth's pregnancy. The women, excited over Ruth's pregnancy, ignore Walter Lee. Mama hints that Ruth has important news, but Walter brushes it aside in his enthusiasm for the money. Finally he shouts, "WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE LISTEN TO ME TODAY?" Walter Lee asks his mother for the money and is bitter when she refuses.

Finally, Mama tells Walter Ruth is expecting, and considering an abortion. Ruth confirms both. Mama urges Walter Lee to welcome this new addition, and to forbid Ruth to have an abortion. He is unenthusiastic about the new baby. Mama urges him to "stand up," to act like the head of the family and insist that Ruth forget about the abortion. Walter is reluctant, not rejoicing in another mouth to feed, and waivers.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This chapter introduces several of the important issues the play addresses. The first is abortion, still illegal in 1959. Hansberry paints a sympathetic portrait of Ruth, a woman who has neither the energy, the money nor the space to spare for another child. Many at the time assumed abortionists and their clients should go to jail. The audience is challenged to understand how Ruth is pushed into this decision, not as a criminal, but by a criminal lack of opportunity.

The offstage scene of Travis innocently playing with a rat portrays the family's greatest fear. They are afraid that growing up in the ghetto, Travis will come to accept the disgusting conditions as normal. Even worse, that he will accept the poverty and lack of hope as normal, everyday parts of life. Travis represents the future, and for him to succumb to their hateful environment would be a permanent defeat.

Joseph Asagai is Beneatha's college friend and suitor. He has just returned from a summer in his homeland of Nigeria. He shares African culture with Beneatha, and brings her gifts, but teases her about "finding her identity." Asagai is the most balanced, healthy individual in the play, probably because he has had limited exposure to racism. He dreams of returning to Nigeria with Beneatha, his "beautiful black princess," but it is doubtful he supports her dreams of medical school.

Joseph Asagai introduces the thematically important element of African cultural heritage into the play. Most Americans of the time, black as well as white, knew little of the rich cultural heritage of Africa. They assumed it was an underdeveloped continent inhabited by uncivilized savages. Beneatha and Asagai's conversation introduces some of the rich cultural background, which continues in the next scene. Most important, it established the African American community as having a unique and valid culture at a time when many viewed 'Negroes' as simply ignorant and lacking culture. In the 60s and 70s, pride in African culture became, for many black Americans, the vehicle to self-esteem.

Beneatha's decision to cut off her processed hair in favor of a short 'natural' hairstyle was shocking to audiences. For generations, black men and women had endured hours of treatment with malodorous chemicals to make 'bad' curly hair more like the 'good' straight hair of Caucasians. Pressured by society, black people struggled to become something they were not. Beneatha's radical style, later popularized as the Afro, was a political statement about self-acceptance, pride in heritage, and the distinctive beauty of blacks.

Feminism is a central theme of the play. Beneatha is an intelligent, outspoken, independent college student who dreams of becoming a doctor. Her two suitors – George Murchison and Joseph Asagai – are very different, but each expects her to assume a traditional female role. George makes it clear that women attend college only to become cultured dinner companions for their husbands. Thinking is not required, or even acceptable. Joseph's nickname for Beneatha suggests he acknowledges her restless aspirations and critical intellect. But he also makes it clear he expects his wife

to become familiar with his culture, to devote herself to husband and children in the traditional subservient way.

Torn between a man who requires 'assimilation' and one who demands she adapt to an unfamiliar homeland, Beneatha sees her hopes of medical school dwindling. Beneatha's situation was realistic for the time. Although more women were attending college in the 50's, there were few employment options. Many female college graduates ended up working as secretaries. Most women still did not work outside the home after marriage. Many male members of the audience likely shared Walter Lee's opinion, that Beneatha should become a nurse and forget about being a doctor.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Later Saturday: Ruth is ironing. Beneatha emerges in full Nigerian regalia with headdress, coquettishly fanning herself like a Japanese Geisha. She does a Nigerian folk dance. Walter enters under the influence of alcohol and joins her, dancing on the table.

George Murchison enters to take Beneatha to the theater. He is Beneatha's pretentious, wealthy suitor. He enjoys flaunting his worldliness and the fact that he has been to New York to the untraveled Ruth. His family plans to take over a hotel on Lake Shore Drive, Chicago's most prestigious address, which he familiarly calls "The Drive."

Beneatha tolerates George's company but displays little attraction to him. George disparages Beneatha's interest in Africa. He urges Beneatha to act more "normal," sophisticated and docile. Beneatha continues to be as outspoken and opinionated as ever. George demands that Beneatha change out of the Nigerian robes to go to the theater. Beneatha removes the headdress to reveal she has cut off her processed hair, leaving a "natural" short style. George is shocked, but after Beneatha changes into street clothes, he decides the hairstyle is becoming.

George and Walter disagree. George calls Walter bitter, and Walter belittles George's fancy shoes, and education. He suggests George has settled for too little. George exits, insulting Walter Lee by calling him Prometheus. Walter Lee ignorantly assumes George invented the term.

Alone for a moment, Walter Lee and Ruth reflect on their shattered dreams. It is clear the feelings they once had for each other are fading under the onslaught of their daily life and disappointments. They argue about the baby and an abortion seems likely.

Mama returns from an errand. She refuses to answer any of any of Walter's questions about the check, merely telling him she has been out on "business." When Travis comes in, Mama takes him in her lap. She confides to him that she has spent the money on a house with three bedrooms, their own bathroom and a yard.

Walter and Ruth are incredulous to learn the house is not in a black neighborhood, but in the all white Clybourne Park. Mama insists that she is only thinking of price. A similar house in a black neighborhood would cost twice as much. They will barely be able to afford the payments with everyone working, as it is. Ruth is thrilled at the prospect of a home for her family, a garden, and enough room for a baby.

Walter rails against Mama, accusing her of ignoring him and treating him like a child. He proclaims that she will never allow him to be the head of the family.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Beguiled by African culture, Beneatha betrays her lack of knowledge by waving the fan like a Japanese Geisha, rather than a Nigerian woman. Her enthusiasm is undiminished, and Walter, who instinctively knows a traditional African dance, joins her.

George Murchinson is Beneatha's sophisticated, well-educated, condescending, suitor. Walter Lee dislikes George personally, but pressures Beneatha to marry him because his family is well-to-do. George has little regard for Beneatha's intellect or ambitions, and instead wishes she were more like other girls – polite and docile. He ridicules her interest in African culture, and considers most black people beneath him.

George is thoroughly unappealing. He represents the bourgeois Negro male, who has sold out to the predominant white culture. The hotel George's family so grandly aspires to would have been on the south – or Negro – end of Chicago's scenic Lake Shore Drive. It shows George's acceptance of the strictures of white society. Even his greatest aspirations are mere shadows, pale imitations that white society allows him. George is condescending towards other black people, preferring to look, act and dress like his white counterparts. He thinks himself superior to other black people, in education, status and wealth.

Even as George speaks disparagingly of Africa, he is educating the audience in the riches of African heritage – Bantu poetry, Ashanti empires and the great Songhay civilizations. These great cultures – indeed, the very concept that Africa had cultures, and was not simply a continent of barbarians – would have been news to the audience in 1959.

George demonstrates his arrogance by insulting Walter Lee. He calls Walter Lee Prometheus, a reference to the Greek god who gave fire to humans. Zeus punished Prometheus by chaining him to a mountain, where an eagle ripped out his liver every day. Every night it grew back, to be torn out again, for thousands of years. This torture ended only when Hercules liberated Prometheus as one of his twelve labors. The comparison is apt because Walter Lee wants to enflame humanity with the desire to succeed, to have goals beyond what is allowed by a racist society. Walter Lee's high school education does not extend to Greek mythology, so he assumes Prometheus is a name invented by George.

Walter Lee's ultimate defeat comes when his mother decides how the insurance money will be spent, without consulting him. His authority limited by his lack of financial opportunity, Walter Lee bitterly assures his mother she is the head of the family. Poverty, a menial job as a rich white man's chauffer, and his mother's strength honed by the struggle to survive have rendered Walter Lee a perpetual child in his family.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

It is Friday night, a few weeks later. Packing crates are stacked in the living room as the family prepares to move. The moving men will arrive soon. Beneatha and George return from a date. George lectures Beneatha about her opinionated ways "I don't go out with you to hear all about quiet desperation or to hear all about your thoughts." He leaves. Beneatha says George is a fool, and for once Mama agrees.

Enter the enthusiastic, gossipy Mrs. Johnson from across the hall. She is discussing a newspaper article on the recent bombing of a black family in a white neighborhood. Accepting a slice of sweet potato pie and a glass of milk, she piously hopes the same thing doesn't happen to the Youngers in Clybourne Park. Mrs. Johnson believes Negro's shouldn't reach too high. She quotes Booker T. Washington, "Education has spoiled many a good plow hand" and suggests that Walter Lee's job as a chauffer is fine. Mama disagrees, saying no black man should have to be a servant. Mrs. Johnson leaves, and Ruth notes that the black people have two obstacles to overcome: the Ku Klux Klan, and Mrs. Johnson.

Just then Walter Lee's wealthy employer, Mr. Arnold phones. Ruth and Mama are surprised to learn that Walter Lee has missed work for three days, and if he does not return tomorrow, Walter Lee will lose his job. Mr. Arnold explains that he will have to hire someone else. Walter enters. He has been drinking. Under Mama and Ruth's questioning, he admits he has been driving around all day. He has spent the past three days cruising in a borrowed car during the day, and lounging in a jazz club called the Green Hat in the evenings. After the loss of all hope, Walter has given up.

Mama mourns her part in Walter Lee's despair. She gives him the $6,500 remaining after the down payment on the house. Mama directs Walter Lee to put $3,000 in a savings account for Beneatha's education. She tells him he can do as he chooses with the remainder. Walter Lee is amazed his mother trusts him with the money.

In a tender conversation, he urges Travis to dream big. Walter Lee fantasizes about his business successes, holding conferences in a large office with secretaries, owning a black Chrysler and a Cadillac convertible for Ruth, and a large home with a gardener named Jefferson. Most of all, he dreams of sending Travis to a great school anywhere in the world.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

George's comments to Beneatha make it clear he is not interested in her opinions. Rather than engage in discussions of Henry Thoreau's famous statement "Most men live lives of quiet desperation," George prefers women to be agreeable and docile. The

purpose of a college degree is not thought, he tells Beneatha, implying that a degree is only useful if it makes a woman a more agreeable wife for a wealthy man like him.

When Raisin in the Sun was first produced in 1959, feminism was just emerging as an issue. During World War II, many women worked in factories and the defense industry, to free men to enlist. "Rosie the Riveter" was a popular patriotic poster girl. Once the war ended in 1945, however, women were expected to give up their jobs and return home to be dutiful mothers, wives and daughters. Any women working outside the home was presumed to be taking a job away from a returning veteran.

While lower class women continued to work from economic necessity, job opportunities for females were severely restricted. Most people assumed that men should earn more than women, for the same work. Many women, particularly educated women, chafed under the re-imposed societal restrictions.

Mrs. Johnson is the plump, cheerful neighbor from down the hall. Mrs. Johnson represents the Negro who has perfectly adapted to racism. Her views of the limited potential of black men, and the value of segregation, are as harmful as Mr. Lindner's opinions.

George Murchison and Mrs. Johnson are portrayed critically, as negative examples of some members of the black community. George is arrogant and condescending, accepting the limits placed on him by society and focusing on his supposed superiority to other blacks. Rather than object to racism, George adopts a negative view of most African American people. This is illustrated in his disinterest in – even distain for— African culture.

Mrs. Johnson represents a stereotypical response to racism. She is unfailingly enthusiastic and cheerful, seemingly satisfied with the status quo. Despite her protests that she "goes where she wants to," Mrs. Johnson has accepted the strict confines of her role as defined by white society. Mrs. Johnson disparages education for African Americans, quoting the words of Booker T. Washington in the process. She actually serves as a mouthpiece for racism, cautioning the Youngers that they will be bombed if they move to a white neighborhood. Although her threats are disguised as well-meaning concern, Mrs. Johnson conveys the same message as Mr. Lindner: You are not wanted in Clyborne Park.

Ruth is voicing Hansberry's opinion with she observes that the Negroes have two obstacles to overcome – the Ku Klux Klan, and Mrs. Johnson. She suggests that to succeed, African Americans have to overcome opposition from within their own ranks, as well as from without. Each, it is implied, is equally caustic.

The scene with Mrs. Johnson was cut from the original production, to save production costs and time. The producers were concerned that audiences would not sit still for a three-hour play by an unknown playwright – and a young, black, female playwright at that! Just producing a realistic play about the everyday lives of a lower class black

family was risky. The themes of racism, feminism, African heritage and limited job opportunities were volatile.

Fortunately, Lorraine Hansberry's forceful, realistic play was a tremendous success with the predominantly white, upper class New York theatergoers. Hansberry was awarded the prestigious New York Drama Critics Circle Award. She went on to write another play. After a brief illness, Hansberry suffered a premature death at the age of 35.

Many of the actors appearing in the original production of Raisin in the Sun directed by Lloyd Richards became theater and film icons, including Ruby Dee, Sidney Poitier, and Louis Gossett.

When Mama gives Walter Lee the money at the end of this scene, we see an instant transformation. Gone is the bitter, angry man, replaced by a tender father who urges his son to dream of greatness. Walter Lee describes work in a towering office, a large home, two cars, even a gardener. We clearly see Walter Lee's fondest hopes and dreams painted in all their glory, the other side of the acidic despair that haunts him. It is these very dreams – and the unwillingness or inability to abandon them – that cause all of Walter Lee's misery.

This scene clearly illustrates Walter Lee's differences. Unlike Mrs. Johnson, he does aspire to more than life has given him so far. Unlike George Murchison, those dreams do not involve denigrating other black people, but center around providing an excellent education – and the unlimited opportunities it provides—to his son Travis.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

The scene opens on Saturday, moving day, one week later. Ruth is singing a hymn and packing the final boxes. She shows Beneatha the new curtains she bought, and daydreams about taking a long, hot soak in their very own bathtub. Ruth confides that she and Walter Lee went to the movies and held hands like newlyweds. Walter Lee enters with a new air of authority and good humor.

There's a knock at the door. Beneatha admits a stranger, a white man. He is Mr. Lindner of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association. He hems and haws, mentions the bombings and "caring about the other fellow." At first the Youngers believe Lindner is welcoming them to the neighborhood, but then Lindner says, "our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities." They realize he is trying to persuade them not to move to Clybourne Park.

On behalf of the association, Lindner offers to buy the house at a price higher than the Youngers paid. Beneatha demands thirty pieces of silver for the house. Walter kicks Lindner out.

Mama enters, exclaiming because the packing isn't finished. Walter Lee explains Lindner's proposal to Mama, while she fusses with her spindly plant. Walter and Ruth give Mama a gift – a set of gardening tools for the new yard. Travis presents Mama with a dressy, elaborate hat, for gardening. Mama models the hat and everyone admires it.

There's a knock at the door. Bobo, Walter Lee and Willy's business partner, enters. He admits that Willy has run off with all the money for the liquor store. Walter Lee is crushed. All of the money is gone . . . Walter Lee never put Beneatha's medical school money in a savings account. He gave it to Willy instead, sure that the investment would pay off. Mama bemoans Walter Lee losing their legacy, everything Big Walter worked his entire life for, in a single day.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

The scene opens with Ruth spontaneously singing a hymn – the very hymn, in fact that Mama urged her to sing to dispel her troubles at the end of Act I Scene I, before Ruth's collapse. This scene is filled with the singing of spirituals, perhaps as an indication that the younger members of the family have had their faith in God's mercy renewed by their good fortune.

The carefree mood is quickly dispelled when a strange white man appears at the door. Initially please when they believe Mr. Lindner intends to welcome them, they quickly become saddened to learn he is offering them a bribe not to move to Clybourne Park.

Lindner is a skillful portrait of the milder face of racism. Rather than use violence or threats, he is a mild-mannered, rather ineffectual person. He meekly talks about coming together in conversation and neighbors getting alone. With Lindner, the insidious nature of covert racism – often more hurtful than violence – is revealed.

Beneatha, always the bright student, is the first to recognize Lindner's intent. She proposes that he give them thirty pieces of silver, a reference to the payment Judas received for betraying Jesus in the Bible. Her comment clearly illustrates her feeling that Lindner is asking the Youngers to betray everything good they have strived for over the years.

While the family is still reeling from this blow, they suffer an even worse catastrophe. Walter Lee's friend and business partner Bobo appears to confide that he has misled Walter Lee about the amount of money Bobo invested in their business. The deception is insignificant now, however, because Bobo reluctantly admits that their mutual friend and partner Willie has stolen all of the money.

Despair overcomes Walter Lee. As much as he rails against racism and the hostility of the white culture, it is easier to bear than the thought that one of his own, a friend, has betrayed him, ending all their dreams. Walter Lee sees himself as a fool, throwing away the money for Beneatha's education as well as his own capital, in his first decision as the head of the family.

The play's title is taken from the poem, "Harlem" by Harlem Renaissance writer 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?"

Here we clearly see the results of so many deferred dreams. Mrs. Johnson's deferred dreams have turned to her habitual syrupy sweet enthusiasm. Ruth's have dried up. George Murchenson's have been turned against his own people. Beneatha's have begun to fester like deep sores. Walter Lee is crushed by the weight of his dreams, which are not just deferred, but crushed, denied, obliterated. As the scene ends, the full weight of that denial comes crashing down on us.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

An hour later, a cheerful Joseph Asagai comes to assist with the move. Beneatha sees her dreams of becoming a doctor destroyed without the money for tuition. Asagai reminds Beneatha that the money was not hers to begin with. He shares his dreams of political independence in an Africa freed from colonialism.

"What about corruption?" Beneatha asks. What if the new rulers are as violent and ruthless as the old? Asagai says that is a problem for another time, the dream of independence alone is worth giving up his life. There is something wrong in a house where all dreams depend on a man's death, Asagai says. He asks Beneatha to return to Nigeria with him.

There is dissention in the family, so united and joyous in the previous scene. Beneatha berates Walter Lee and he leaves in a huff. Mama mourns the death of all her dreams. She realizes they will have to stay in the apartment. They can fix it up with a second hand bureau, partition off a corner of Ruth and Walter Lee's alcove for the baby.

Humiliated, Walter Lee returns. He has called Mr. Lindner to tell him they will accept his offer on the house. Feeling the bitter sting of defeat, Mama objects to taking Lindner's money to "tell us we wasn't fit to walk the earth." She says in five generations of sharecropping and menial labor, "We ain't never been that poor. We ain't never been that-- dead inside."

Walter wonders aloud why some men can buy pearls for their wives, and others cannot. Who decides who is worthy of pearls? "I want my wife to wear pearls," He says.

The moving men arrive, pointless now, since of course the Youngers can't afford to move. They face an eternity in this forlorn, filthy apartment. Mr. Lindner enters, eager to close the deal.

Walter tells him they have decided to move into the house after all, because Big Walter earned every brick of it with his years of back-breaking manual labor. Mr. Lindner objects. Soon he leaves, resigned. The moving men begin carrying boxes out. The family exits as well. Mama turns to Ruth, the only one left in the dingy apartment, and tells her Walter Lee finally cam into his manhood today, like a rainbow after rain. Mama gives the apartment she has lived in since her marriage to Big Walter a last lingering look. They exit.

Mama rushes back in, picks up her forgotten plant from the table, and leaves "for the last time."

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

Joseph Asagai illustrates the contrast between the problems of emerging from colonialism faced by Africans, and the problems of racism faced by African Americans. Beneatha's questions about independence are well founded. History later showed that some of the new African rulers were as corrupt and violent as their colonial counterparts.

Asagai is unconcerned by this possibility. He sees African independence from European domination as a great opportunity, a magnificent problem to be solved. He is willing to embrace any complications springing from that opportunity – including corruption, even including his own death. Asagai is the strongest, healthiest, most stable character in the play. He portrays a man with a great cause to fight for, and the tools for the fight.

By contrast, Walter Lee is a man with a burning desire, with great dreams, but neither the tools nor the opportunity to fight for them.

Asagai's statement – that there is something wrong in a house where all dreams depend on a man's death – succinctly states the central theme of the play. There is a great deal wrong with a house – or a world – where racism limits opportunity for so many.

As Mama considers how a corner of Ruth and Walter's sleeping alcove could be screened off for the baby, we are confronted with the death of dreams – made more intolerable because they are just out of reach. Staying in the apartment is at once unthinkable, and inevitable. Even so, she objects to taking Lindner's money for the house. To do so is the death of all hope – a loss far greater than Willie's theft. Five generations of menial labor by sharecroppers, laborers and servants has been ground to dust.

Walter wonders aloud how some men can buy pearls for their wives, and others can not afford them. We see again that his dreams are not of material possessions, but of a better life for his family. Determined to salvage some part of the dream, to keep hope alive despite the setbacks, Walter, making a unilateral decision as head of the family, tells Mr. Lindner they will not accept his money.

As the excited family moves out, Mama returns to fetch her forgotten, anemic plant – like the family's hopes, struggling, spindly, but still alive.

Characters

Joseph Asagai

Joseph Asagai is a friend of Beneatha's who has been out of town all summer. He is from Nigeria and introduces Beneatha to Nigerian culture. He brings her a native African dress, for example, and also encourages her to let her hair grow naturally rather than have it straightened although this encouragement is phrased in terms of an insult. He, in other words, introduces issues that would become prominent in the United States during the decade following the production of this play (issues related to African American pride and heritage). On the other hand, he discourages Beneatha from acting independently as a woman, arguing that the only true feeling a woman should have is passion for her husband.

Bobo

Bobo is an extremely minor character. He appears near the end of the scene to convey the bad news that his and Walter's friend has absconded with their money. He feels as dejected as Walter since the amount of money he had contributed consisted of his entire savings.

Mrs. Johnson

Mrs. Johnson is a neighbor of the Youngers, and she is portrayed as nosy and manipulative. In her primary scene, she appears to be jealous of the Youngers's good fortune and seems to want to ruin it for them by raising dieir fears. In some versions of this play, her role is eliminated.

Karl Lindner

Karl is a white man and the represent of the Neighborhood Welcoming Committee for Clybourne Park, where the Youngers plan to move. Although Karl attempts to present himself as a reasonable man, he has racist motives in attempting to persuade the Youngers not to move to his neighborhood. Although he himself might not commit violence, his goals are consistent with those who would commit violence in order to keep neighborhoods segregated.

Mama

See Lena Younger

George Murchison

George is Beneatha's date, though she doesn't take him seriously as a future mate. In the elder Youngers's eyes, his primary attractive quality is his access to wealth. Yet his presence also raises the issue of class tensions within the black community. He claims to have no interest in African culture and is exactly the opposite of the idealist Joseph Asagai.

Beneatha Younger

Beneatha is the younger sister of Walter, the daughter of Mama, sister-in-law of Ruth, and aunt of Travis. Throughout the play, she struggles for an adult identity, determined to express her ideas but often failing to do so tactfully. She dates a wealthy college friend, George Murchison, whom she describes as boring, in part because he is so conventional. She is also interested in Joseph Asagai, another college acquaintance whose home is Nigeria. She eventually follows his desire that she should adopt a more native African style. Also significant to the play is her desire to be a doctor, a goal for which she will need some of the money Mama has inherited.

Lena Younger

Mama's roie in the play is quite significant. She is a woman with dreams but also with the wisdom to know when to act on them. She receives a $ 10,000 insurance payment as a result of her husband's death and longs to buy a more comfortable house for her family. Yet when she realizes how much a business would mean to Walter, she gives him a substantial portion of the money, hoping this will encourage him to live more fully. She is also, however, a woman of strong conviction, as is apparent in the scene when Beneatha suggests that God is imaginary but more significantly in the scene when Walter seems to agree with Ruth regarding the abortion. At this point, she recognizes that her family's enemy has been transferred from their culture to their own hearts. Mama is clearly the source of the family's strength as well as its soul.

Ruth Younger

Ruth is married to Walter and hence the daughter-in-law of Mama and sister-in-law of Beneatha. She is the mother of Travis. She clearly loves her husband and family but also clearly feels the stress of poverty. Although she is enthusiastic about the family owning its own home, she urges Mama to help Walter invest in the liquor store because il means so much to him. During the course of the play, Ruth realizes she is pregnant and considers seeking an abortion, which would have been illegal at the time. By the end of the play, the implication is that Ruth will have this baby and that the family will direct its energy away from self-destruction.

Travis Younger

Travis is the son of Walter and Ruth. His role in the play is minor; he serves primarily as a foil permitting the other characters to raise the issues of the play. He is at the cusp of adolescence, simultaneously attempting stereotypic adult masculine reticence and longing for childlike affection. He is received affectionately by the other characters.

Walter Lee Younger

Walter is the son of Mama, the husband of Ruth, the brother of Beneatha, and the father of Travis. He works as a chauffeur, a job he finds unsatisfying on a number of levels but most particularly because he does not desire to be anyone's servant. Although he is in his mid-thirties, his living situation encourages him to believe he is perceived nearly as a child. He longs to invest his father's insurance money in a liquor store because he wants to achieve financial success through his own efforts. When his friend runs off with the money, Walter feels particularly hopeless. Lronical ly, however, he achieves a sense of himself as an adult and leader of his family in part through this event. By standing up to Karl Lindner when it would have been easier to accept Lindner's financial offer, Walter asserts himself forcefully into his culture and although his choices may make his life difficult in some ways, he will not be spiritually defeated.

Themes

Race and Racism

The clear primary theme of *A Raisin in the Sun* has to do with race and racism. The Youngers live in a segregated neighborhood in a city that remains one of the most segregated in the United States. Virtually every act they perform is affected by their race, Ruth is employed as a domestic servant and Walter as a chauffeur in part because they are black they are the servants, that is, of white people. They are limited to their poorly maintained apartment in part because they have low-paying jobs but also because absentee landlords often do not maintain their property. Travis chases a rat, while Beneatha and Mama attempt to eradicate cockroaches, both activities which would not occur in wealthier neighborhoods.

The most significant scene which openly portrays racism, however, is the visit with Karl Lindner. Although he does not identify himself as racist, and although his tactics are less violent than some, he wants to live in an all-white neighborhood and he is willing to pay the Youngers off to stay out of white neighborhoods. This type of racism is often dangerous because it is more easily hidden.

Prejudice and Tolerance

Closely related to the theme of race and racism is the theme of prejudice and tolerance. Karl Lindner and his neighbors are clearly prejudiced against black people. Yet other forms of prejudice and intolerance also surface in the play. Walter responds to George Murchison aggressively because George is wealthy and educated; educated men seem to Walter somehow less masculine. Similarly, although Joseph Asagai encourages Beneatha to feel proud of her racial identity, he discourages her from feeling proud of her intellectual abilities because he believes professional achievements are irrelevant to a proper woman.

Civil Rights

Also related to the theme of race and racism as well as to the theme of prejudice and tolerance is the theme of Civil Rights. Although this play would debut before the major Civil Rights movement occurred in the United States during the 1960s, it raises many of the issues that would eventually be raised by the larger culture. "Civil Rights" generally refer to the rights a person has by law such as the right to vote or the right to attend an adequate schools and are often also referred to as human rights. The central civil rights issue in this play is, of course, the idea of segregated housing. Mama Younger has the money to pay for a house she wants, but people attempt to prevent her from doing so because of her race. At this moment, she is not trying to make a political point but rather to purchase the best house available for the money. Houses available in her own ghetto neighborhood are both more costly and less well-kept.

American Dream

The "American Dream" includes many ideas, but it is primarily the belief that anyone who comes to or is born in America can achieve success through hard work. Walter Younger aspires to achieve part of this American Dream, but he is frustrated at every turn. Although he is willing to work hard, opportunities for him are few because he is black. His culture has relegated him to the servant class. When some money does become available to him, his business opportunities are also few for few businesses historically thrived in minority neighborhoods. Yet by the end of the play, whether or not he achieves the American Dream, he does achieve a sense of himself as an individual with power and the ability to make choices.

Sex Roles

While questions of race are certainly prominent in the play, an equally significant, if less prominent, issue involves gender. Mama understands that in order to experience himself as an adult, Walter must experience himself as a man that is, he must be the leader of a family. Of course, in order for Walter to be the leader, the women must step back. And even within their stations as servants, Walter and Ruth's roles are further divided according to their sex Walter is the chauffeur, Ruth the domestic servant. More blatantly, however, Joseph Asagai asserts that women have only one role in life that of wife and presumably mother. And although Beneatha longs to be a doctor, she is also caught up in the romance of potentially being Asagai's wife. This tension points out the fact that individuals can be exceptionally progressive in one area of their lives while being much less progressive in other areas.

Style

Setting

Among the most important elements of *A Raisin in the Sun* is its setting. Because the Youngers are attempting to buy a new home in a different neighborhood, their current apartment and neighborhood achieve particular significance. The play takes place in a segregated Chicago neighborhood, "sometime between World War II and the present," which for Hansberry would be the late 1950s In other words, the play occurs during the late 1940s or the 1950s, a time when many Americans were prosperous and when some racial questions were beginning to be raised, but before the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

More specifically, the play occurs in the Youngers' apartment, which Hansberry describes in detail: "Its furnishings are typical and undistinguished and then- primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accomodate the living of too many people for too many years." The furnishings, that is, come to represent the hard lives of the characters, for though everything is regularly cleaned, the furniture is simply too old and worn to bring joy or beauty into the Youngers' lives, except in their memories. Other details of the setting also contribute to this closed-m feeling: the couch which serves as Travis's bed, the bathroom which must be shared with the neighbors.

Allusion

Two significant allusions are prominent in this play one literary and one historical. The title of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is taken from a poem by Langston Hughes,"Harlem." Langston Hughes was a prominent African American poet during the Harlem Renaissance, a period during the 1920s when many African American writers achieved considerable stature. The poem asks whether a dream deferred, or put off, dries up "like a raisin in the sun" or whether it explodes. During the play, Mama realizes that some members of her family are drying up, while others such as Walter are about to explode, and she realizes that their dreams can be deferred no longer.

The other major allusion is to Booker T. Washington, who is quoted by Mrs. Johnson as saying "Education has spoiled many a good plow hand." Booker T. Washington was a prominent African American during the late nineteenth century; perhaps his most well-known speech is his "Atlanta Exposition Address." Washington argued that Negroes should not aspire to academic education but should learn trades such as mechanics and farming instead. He also suggested that Negroes should not agitate for political rights and that while the races might intermingle for business purposes, they should live separate social lives. His primary opponent during this time was W. E. B. DuBois, who argued for equality and desegregation. Within the context of the play, Washington is understood as a negative example.

Climax

The climax of a work of literature occurs at the point when the tension can get no greater and the conflicts must resolve. In longer works, there may be several points of heightened tension before the final resolution. The climax of *A Raisin in the Sun* occurs when Karl Lindner visits the house for the second time, when Walter is about to accept his offer but changes his mind. The audience understands that while the Youngers may now achieve their dreams, their lives in this racist culture will remain difficult.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing occurs when a later event is hinted at earlier in the work. This occurs in *A Raisin in the Sun* when Ruth faints at the end of Scene One. This is a standard, almost stereotypic, way to convey pregnancy, which Ruth will confirm later in the play and which will become significant through the family's response to it.

Symbolism

A symbol is an object that has value in itself but also represents an idea something concrete, in other words, that represents something abstract. One of the symbols in *A Raisin in the Sun* is Mama's straggly plant. She wants to take this to the new house, although she plans to have a much more successful garden there, because this plant "expresses ME" Though the plant has struggled to live and seems to lack the beauty for which it would ordinarily be valued, it is significant to Mama because it has survived despite the struggle, as her family has survived.

Historical Context

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s

A Raisin in the Sun directly addresses the issue of segregated housing in the United States. While many neighborhoods remain effectively segregated today, such segregation was legally enforced during the 1950s. Despite several Constitutional Amendments subsequent to the Civil War, African Americans were denied many civil rights a full century later. In 1954, the case of Brown vs. Board of Education was tried in Kansas; it reached the United States Supreme Court in 1955. The Court found that segregated education was inherently unequal education, effectively outlawing the practice of "separate but equal" school systems. Also in 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott occurred, with blacks and some whites refusing to ride city buses that forced blacks to sit in the back. In 1958, the public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas were closed by the Governor in an attempt to defy the Supreme Court's ruling. In 1959, the bus system of Atlanta, Georgia, was integrated, although the Governor asked riders to continue "voluntary" segregation. Ironically, in that same year, the United Nations voted to condemn racial discrimination anywhere in the By the 1960s, Civil Rights demonstrations became common and resulted in much new legislation, although cultural implementation of those ideas would take much longer.

Literature and Arts in the 1950s

Artistically and culturally, the 1950s are commonly thought of as a repressed decade, often with good reason. It wasn't until 1959, for example, that *Lady Chatterly's* Lover by D.H. Lawrence was permitted to be distributed in the United States. Definitions of obscenity shifted during this decade, as did many other cultural assumptions.

A Raisin in the Sun was only one of several significant plays which opened on Broadway during this period. Others include *Sweet Bird of Youth* by Tennessee Williams, *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee, and *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson. Musicals that year included *Once upon a Mattress* starring Carol Burnett and *Gypsy* starring Ethel Merman and Jack Klugman. *The Sound of Music* also premiered starring Mary Martin.

Significant works also appeared in other forms of literature. E. B. White published his famous version of William Strunk' s *The Elements of Style*, a grammar book that has become a standard in composition. Philip Roth published his collection of short stories, *Goodbye, Columbus*, while Saul Bellow published *Henderson the Rain King*. In Germany, Gunter Grass published his masterpiece, *The Tin Drum.*

Daily Life in the 1950s

Although the 1950s are known as a decade of prosperity, a significant number of Americans still lived in poverty. A study published by the University of^Michigan demonstrated that 30% of families lived on or below the poverty line in 1959. In 1958, U.S. unemployment reached nearly 5.2 million. Simultaneously, some extremely wealthy Americans were able to avoid paying income taxes completely.

Because of technological discoveries, many aspects of daily life changed during the fifties. American automakers began to manufacture compact cars and computers began to be developed. Television became a popular source of home entertainment. People began to do the majority of then-shopping at supermarkets rather than at small markets. Frozen orange juice concentrate became a popular item as did "heat and eat" frozen dinners (often called TV dinners).

Popular movies released in 1959 included *Ben Hur* starring Charlton Heston, Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* starring Gary Grant and Eva Marie Saint, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* with Millie Perkins and Shelley Winters. Rock and roll fans were saddened by the deaths of Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens. Other musical performers included Paul Anka and Neil Sedaka. Perhaps the most famous toy ever the Barbie doll was also introduced this year; it would not be until 1968, however, that a black version of the doll would be produced.

Critical Overview

A Raisin in the Sun is easily Lorraine Hansberry's best-known work, although her early death is certainly a factor in her limited oeuvre. From its beginning, this play was critically and commercially successful. After a brief run in New Haven, Connecticut, it opened on Broadway in 1959, where it ran for 530 performances. Although this was the first play written by a black woman to appear on Broadway, it received the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. A later adaptation won a Tony Award for best musical in 1974.

Newspapers reviewers were lavish in their praise of this performance. According to Francis Dedmond in an article published in *American Playwrights since 1945*, various critics complimented the work's "moving story" and "dramatic impact" as well as the play's "honesty" and "real-life characters." Magazine writers were equally enthusiastic. According to an article in *Plays for the Theatre*, this play is "one of the best examples" of work produced by minority playwrights during the late 1950's and 1960's.

Because of this early success, the play was translated into more than thirty languages and performed on stage as well as over the radio in several countries. To celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1983 and 1984, several revivals occurred. Reviewers remained enthusiastic.

Critics agree that this is a realistic play that avoids stereotypic characters. This realism permitted the black characters to be understood and sympathized with by a primarily white audience. By avoiding extremist characters by creating Karl Lindner as a nonviolent if prejudiced man rather than as a member of the Ku Klux Klan for exampie Hansberry was able to persuade her audience of the constant if subtle presence and negative effects of racism. According to Glendyr Sacks in the *International Dictionary ofTheatre-1: Plays*, "Interest in the play... was undoubtedly fuelled by the unusual experience, for a Broadway audience, of watching a play in which all but one character was black. Furthermore, the tone of the play was not didactic. Its values were familiar,... and to some extent audiences and critics, both predominantly white, must have felt some relief that the protest implicit in the play was not belligerent." While some contemporary critics would suggest that realism is outdated, others argue that the play's influence on subsequent black works has been highly pervasive. Literature can be politically and culturally challenging, in other words, even if its form is conventional. Because the play is not overt in its protest, some later critics viewed it as assimilationist, an ironic situation since the play itself protests against assimilationism.

Some critics, however, did critique *A Raisin in the Sun* for its realism. Gerald Weales, in an article published in *Commentary* in 1959, claimed that "The play, first of all, is old fashioned. Practically no serious playwright, in or out of America, works in such a determinedly naturalistic form." He continued, "in choosing to write such a play, she [Hansberry] entered Broadway's great sack race with only a paper bag as equipment." He also suggests that the plot is "mechanical" and "artificial." His criticism, however, seems to be primarily against the genre in general rather than against Hansberry's

manipulation of it. The tone of this article indicates that no realistic play would win Weales's favor. By the end of his article, he does concede that *A Raisin in the Sun* is a good play with "genuinely funny and touching scenes throughout."

Hansberry herself responded to the reception of her play in an article she published in the *Village Voice* in 1959. She occasionally appeared amused at both the type and amount of response her play received. Some critics, she suggested, seem to think that any negative reaction at all would be inherently racist, while others seem to disdain emotional appeals in literature in general. On the other hand, she stated that the play has been "magnificently understood." She suggested that her characters choose life and hope despite the fact that the culture in general seems enamored with despair because the Youngers and people like them have had "'somewhere' they have been trying to get for so long that more sophisticated confusions do not yet bind them." Despair, in other words, is a luxury they cannot afford.

In part, though, this play remains popular specifically because of its realism. It presents characters whose values and goals are emotionally accessible to virtually any American audience, yet who through their eventual dignified responses to their situation achieve heroic status. Perhaps Hansberry's greatest contribution to subsequent drama was her ability to present black characters as admirable figures.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Domina is a poet and author who also teaches atHofstra University. In this essay Domina examines both the racial and gender roles played out in Hansberry's drama.

In many ways, *A Raisin in the Sun* seems to forecast events that would transpire during the decade following its initial production and beyond. The play raises issues of racial interaction and justice, as well as gender roles, class, and the nature of the American dream. It situates these questions, however, within the context of individual choice and individual heroism. Each of the characters in this play attempts to achieve a meaningful life within a struggle against cultural impediments, and an analysis of the characters' responses to racism will reveal the nature of their heroic qualities.

When the play opens, the Younger family has no clear leader. Its power structure is complicated, especially in terms of American norms. Because the American nuclear family was unabashedly patriarchal in the 1950's, Walter would seem to be the head of the household. Yet although he might (or might not) make the most money, he is not the family's breadwinner in the traditional sense, since Ruth and occasionally Mama also work. At this point in history, most married women especially most white married women did not work outside the home. Although these norms varied by race, white norms were so culturally dominant that they were aspired to even by members of other races. Despite his positions as husband and father, Walter continues to live because of economic necessity in his mother's house. And even Travis knows that he can make extra money by delivering groceries, an activity his mother forbids because of his age. Regardless of the details, though, Walter obviously cannot support this family alone.

It is Mama who has the money, though only because of an imminent insurance payment due her because of her husband's death. Although the other characters agree that this check is rightfully Mama's, they also each speculate about how it should be used. They also, though, claim an implicit right to it, since as Walter says, "He was my father, too." Yet this check will ironically be the catalyst for a shift in the family's leadership responsibilities, from Mama to Walter. As Mama says, Walter will "come into his manhood" when he begins to make decisions for the family at the end of the play. This phrase is telling, however; Walter cannot achieve adulthood without achieving "manhood" with its gendered implications. Walter cannot be a man, in other words, unless he is making decisions for women. His success at the end of the play, therefore, depends on a sexism that is simply more explicit when it is presented by Joseph Asagai.

Asagai is a Nigerian man studying in the United States. Although he discusses ideas with Beneatha, whom he begins to date, he also argues that "between a man and a woman there need be only one kind of feeling.... For a woman that should be enough." Implicitly, for a man that feeling exists but need not be enough. Even if Beneatha can escape the subjugation of American racism through a return to Africa, in other words, that return itself implies a subjugation to male authority.

Yet Beneatha is herself ambivalent regarding her own dreams. Speaking with Asagai, she describes a childhood incident in which a friend, Rufus, was seriously hurt: "I remember standing there looking at his bloody open face thinking that was the end of Rufus. But the ambulance came and they took him to the hospital and they fixed the broken bones and they sewed it all up." Beneatha is so amazed at this ability and at the hope it offers that she aspires to perform medical wonders herself. "I always thought it was the one concrete thing in the world that a human being could do," she says. "Fix up the sick, you know and make them whole again. That was truly being God." Asagai critiques this last statement: "You wanted to be God?" But Beneatha clarifies her point: "No I wanted to cure." Asagai on the other hand claims to live the dreams of the future. Relying on the most romantic of cliches, Asagai urges Beneatha to return to Africa with him: "three hundred years later the African Prince rose up out of the seas and swept the maiden back across the middle passage over which her ancestors had come." Beneatha1 s last lines in the play occur when she is telling Mama of this proposal, though she seems to misunderstand Asagai's implications. "To go to Africa, Mama be a doctor in Africa," she says. She apparently doesn't realize that Asagai's understanding of her as an African princess is inconsistent with her vision of herself as an African doctor; he wishes her to be a subservient wife to him according to male-dominated social mores.

A major distinction, however, between Asagai's interpretation of gender roles and Mama's turning the leadership of the family over to Walter is the place of dignity in each decision. Asagai's statement that "for a woman it should be enough" to have a husband will have the effect of limiting Beneatha's dignity, of precluding her from completely realizing her dreams. Mama's manipulation of circumstances so that Walter can "come into his manhood" has the effect of increasing his dignity and providing a venue for him to realize his dreams.

For to the extent that the play reveals the effects of racism, it considers racism specifically within the context of a particular family's dreams. Mama makes her decisions, in other words, based on her love for her family rather than primarily on an ideological opposition to segregation. "I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family," she says to Walter when he objects to her choice.' "Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses." And it is eventually the family members' ability to live by their own decisions rather than to simply react to the decisions of others which affords them their greatest dignity. When Walter appears entirely to give up, Beneatha says of him, "That is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat," recalling the rat Travis had chased in the alley with his friends. "There is nothing left to love" in him, she tells her mother. But Mama disagrees: "There is *always* something left to love.""

The audience will recall that Mama cares for all living things, even those that do not seem to thrive. *Characters in 20th-century Literature* described Mama as a "commanding presence who seems to radiate moral strength and dignity." According to Hugh Short in an article published in the *Critical Survey of Drama*, "the theme of heroism found in an unlikely place is perhaps best conveyed through the symbol of Lena's plant. Throughout the play, Lena has tended a small, sickly plant that clings

tenaciously to life despite the lack of sunlight in the apartment. Its environment is harsh, unfavorable, yet it clings to life anyway somewhat like Walter, whose life should long ago have extinguished any trace of heroism in him."

Walter finally realizes that "There is *always* something left to love," even in himself, when he remembers his own father's pride. He declines Lindner's offer because "my father my father he earned it for us brick by brick.... We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors." Walter realizes that just as his dreams cannot be realized for him by others, neither can they be destroyed for him by others. He rises into renewed dignity not simply because he has access to some money but because he has a renewed sense of himself. According to Qun Wang in *Reference Guide to American Literature*, "even though Lena represents the family's link to the past and tradition, she is very supportive of her children's choices for the future." Throughout the play, Mama has been trying to lead Walter into the realization of his own dignity, and it is finally through her forgiveness and trust that he achieves it.

Earlier, Mama had assumed certain things about her children's pride because of the example she and her husband had set. Although she had recognized that "Something eating you [Walter] up like a crazy man," it is only when Walter passively agrees with Ruth's decision regarding the abortion, however, that Mama, in her shock, begins to realize how desperate he feels. He is not like his father after all: "I'm waiting to hear how you be your father's son. Be the man he was... I'm waiting to hear you talk like him and say we a people who give children life, not who destroys them." When Walter fails to respond, Mama is indignant: "you are a disgrace to your father's memory." She considers him a disgrace not only because he won't argue against Ruth's proposed abortion, but because his motive seems to be financial; he has become obsessed with money rather than remembering the values she and his father sought to teach him. Here, Mama begins to realize that she must actively intervene if Walter is to find the inner resources to honor his father's memory. In relinquishing her role as matriarch, she therefore actively participates in the renewal of Walter's hope.

It is in this sense that the characters are heroic. In choosing life, they defy their struggle. In defying their struggle, they refuse the possibility of defeat.

Source: L. M. Domina, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1997

Critical Essay #2

In this appraisal of Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, *Weales examines the play's dramatic qualities and offers his ideas as to why it won the New York Drama Critics' Award in 1959.*

Weales is an American drama critic; he is a winner of the George Jean Nathan Award for drama criticism and the author of numerous books on drama.

On the day that the New York Drama Critics' Award was announced, a student stopped me as I walked across the campus where I pass as an expert on the theater and asked a sensible question. Had *A Raisin in the Sun* won because it was the best play of the year, or because its author, Lorraine Hansberry, is a Negro? Even if the play is a good one (and, with reservations, I think it is), even if it were indisputably the best of the year, the climate of award-giving would make impossible its consideration on merit alone. Whenever an award goes to a playwright who is not a veteran of Broadway or to a play which is in some way unusual, the special case is almost certainly as important a factor in the voting as the play itself. The only contender this year mat might have been chosen on its own merits (of which I think it has very few) was Tennessee Williams's *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Had J. B. got the award and the smart money assumed it would and assumed, correctly, that it would also get the Pulitzer special consideration would have derived from the image of Archibald MacLeish as the poet invading Broadway, and from the critical piety that longs for verse on the commercial stage. Had *A Touch of the Poet* got the award, respect for O'Neill as America's greatest playwright and the suspicion (unfounded) that this is very likely the last full-length play to be unearthed from the O'Neill papers and put on stage would have received ballots along with the play itself. It is, then, only sensible to assume that Lorraine Hansberry's being a Negro, and the first Negro woman to have a play on Broadway, had its influence on the voting critics.

Even if the balloting had been purely aesthetic, the award to Lorraine Hansberry would have been greeted as the achievement of a Negro hailed in some places as an honor to American Negroes, dismissed in others as a well-meaning gesture from the Critics' Circle. Such reactions are inevitable at this time. Any prominent Negro Marion Anderson or Jackie Robinson or Ralph Bunche becomes a special hero to the Negro community an example of what a Negro can be and do in the United States; such figures are heroes, also, to white Americans who feel a sense of guilt about what the average American Negro cannot be and do. Lists are still compiled, I suppose, of prominent American Jews or famous Americans of Italian or German or Irish origin, but they are no longer urgently needed, by in-group or out, as are the lists of the successful American Negroes. So long as the Negro remains an incompletely integrated part of American society (equal but separate, m the non-legal meaning of the phrase), the achievements of singer, baseball player, or diplomat may be admired as such, but his race will not be ignored by Negro or white.

The Negro artist and intellectual is particularly marked by this situation. Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, for example, admirable writers both, are Negro writers in a way that Saul Bellow and Herbert Gold are not Jewish writers. A cntic may note, as Richard Chase did recently in COMMENTARY, that in *Henderson the Rain King* for the first time Saul Bellow does not use Jewish characters, but this is not the kind of operation that followed Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, by which it was possible to view the book as a Negro novel without Negro characters.

The playwright who is a Negro is faced with a special problem. Broadway has a tradition of Negro shows, inevitably folksy or exotic, almost always musical, of which the only virtue is that Negro performers get a chance to appear as something more than filler. The obvious reaction to such shows is the protest play, the Negro agit-prop, which can be as false to American Negro life as the musicals. A playwright with serious intentions, like Miss Hansberry, has to avoid both pitfalls, has to try to write not a Negro play, but a play in which the characters are Negroes. In an interview (*New York Times*, March 8,1959), Miss Hansberry is reported as having said to her husband before she began *Raisin,* "I'm going to write a social drama about Negroes that will be good art." However good the art, unfortunately, the play will remain, in one sense, a Negro play. The *Times* interview made quite clear that Miss Hansberry was aware that she was writing as much for the American Negro as for the American theatre. Similarly, an article on Sidney Poitier, the play's star, in the *New York Times Magazine* (January 25, 1959), made the point that Poitier avoided roles that might "diminish the Negro's stature as a human being." Whatever his ambitions as an artist, the Negro playwright, like the Negro actor, is still forced into a propaganda role. The publicity for *A Raisin in the Sun*, the news stones about it, the excitement it stirred up among Negroes (never until *Raisin* had I seen a Philadelphia theatre in which at least half the audience was Negro) all emphasize that it is a play written by a Negro woman about Negroes, a fact which could hardly have been forgotten when the Critics' Award was passed out.

Having suggested that objectivity is impossible with respect to *A Raisin in the Sun*, I should like to make a few objective remarks about it. The play, first of all, is old-fashioned. Practically no serious playwright, in or out of America, works in such a determinedly naturalistic form as Miss Hansberry in her first play. The semi-documentary movies that cropped up at the end of World War II, and then television, particularly in the Chayefsky school of drama, took over naturalism so completely that it is doubtful whether the form will ever again be comfortable in the theater. It is now possible to accept on stage the wildest fantasy or the simplest suggestion; but the set that pretends to be a real room with real doors and real furniture has become more difficult to accept than a stylized tree. Ralph Alswang's set for Raisin, as murky and crowded and gadgety as the slum apartment it represents, is ingenious in its detail; but the realistic set, like the real eggs the young wife cracks for an imaginary breakfast, reaches for a verisimilitude that has become impossible. *Raisin* is the kind of play which demands the naturalism that Miss Hansberry has used, but in choosing to write such a play, she entered Broadway's great sack race with only a paper bag as equipment. Her distinction is that she has won the race this year, which proves, I suppose, that narrow naturalism is still a possible if anachronistic form.

If the set suggests 1910 and Eugene Walter, the play itself in its concentration on the family in society recalls the 30's and Clifford Odets. It tells the story of the Younger family and their escape from a too-small apartment on Chicago's South Side to a house in which they have space and air and, unfortunately but not insurmountably, the enmity of their white neighbors. The conflict within the play is between the dreams of the son, Walter Lee, who wants to make a killing in the big world, and the hopes of his mother and his wife, who want to save their small world by transplanting it to an environment in which it might conceivably flourish. The mechanical means by which this conflict is illuminated the insurance money, its loss, the representative of the white neighborhood association are completely artificial, plot devices at their most devised. Take the loss of the money, for example. From the first moment that Walter Lee mentions his plans for a profitable liquor store, his connections, the need for spreading money around in Springfield, the audience knows that the money will be stolen; supposedly, in good naturalistic tradition, the audience should sit, collective fingers crossed, hoping that he might be spared, that the dream might not be deferred and shrivel, like a raisin in the sun, as the Langston Hughes poem has it. I found myself, fingers crossed, hoping that the inevitable would not come, not for the sake of Walter Lee Younger, but for the sake of the play, of which the solid center was already too hedged with contrivances. No one's crossed fingers did any good.

Of the four chief characters in the play, Walter Lee is the most complicated and the most impressive He is often unlikable, occasionally cruel. His sense of being trapped by his situation class, race, job, prospects, education transfers to his family, who become to him not fellow prisoners but complacent jailers. Their ways of coping with their condition are his defeats, for to him the open-sesame that will release him (change his status? change his color?) is money. The play is concerned primarily with his recognition that, as a man, he must begin from, not discard, himself, that dignity is a quality of men, not bank accounts. Walter Lee's penchant for taking center stage has forced his wife to become an observer in his life, but at the same time she is an accusation. For most of the play she wears a mask of wryness or the real cover of fatigue, but Miss Hansberry gives her two scenes in which the near-hysteria that lies beneath the surface is allowed to break through. The mother is a more conventional figure the force, compounded of old virtues and the strength of suffering, that holds the family together. She is a sentimentalized mother figure, reminiscent of Bessie Burgess in *Awake and Sing*, but without Bessie's destructive power. The daughter, who wants to be a doctor, is out of place in this working-class family. Not that her ambition does not belong with the Youngers, but her surface characteristics the flitting from one expensive fad to another could not have been possible, on economic grounds alone, in such a household. Although Miss Hansberry, the daughter of a wealthy real estate man, may have enjoyed poking fun at a youthful version of herself, as reported in the *Times* interview, the result of putting the child of a rich man into a working-class home is incongruous.

Despite an incredible number of imperfections, *Raisin* is a good play. Its basic strength lies in the character and the problem of Walter Lee, which transcends his being a Negro. If the play were only the Negro-white conflict that crops up when the family's proposed move is about to take place, it would be an editorial, momentarily effective, and nothing more, Walter Lee's difficulty, however, is that he has accepted the American

myth of success at its face value, that he is trapped, as Willy Loman was trapped, by a false dream. In planting so indigenous an American image at the center of her play, Miss Hansberry has come as close as possible to what she intended a play about Negroes which is not simply a Negro play.

The play has other virtues. There are genuinely funny and touching scenes throughout. Many of these catch believably the chatter of a family the resentments and the shared jokes and the words have the ring of truth that one found in Odets or Chayefsky before they began to sound like parodies of themselves. In print, I suspect, the defects of *Raisin* will show up more sharply, but on stage where, after all, a play is supposed to be the impressive performances of the three leads (Poitier, Ruby Dee, and Claudia McNeil) draw attention to the play's virtues.

A Raisin in the Sun deserved the Critics' Award as much as any other play of this season, and more than most. That statement, however, is as much an accusation of the season as it is praise of the play. Every fall, when the advertisements begin to bloom in the pages of the New York *Times*, I am filled again with certainty that something is about to happen on Broadway. Every spring, when the results are in, I am aware of a dream deferred, a raisin shriveled. This season, however, has been duller than most. I cannot recall any moment of real excitement. There were small pleasures, small merits, but no revelations. The one real experiment in form, Shimon Wincelberg's *Kataki*, a full-length monologue play (and it came from television), was put quietly to sleep by tepid reviews. It is perverse to expect something really fine, I suppose. The Ibsens, the Shaws, the Chekhovs have always been the exceptions in the theater and they have had to make their way against the theater itself. The Broadway business is at present congenial to adaptations of novels and television plays, to mechanical comedies, to the Pinero-like seriousness of William Inge and Robert Anderson, to anything that is safe, even though a high percentage of the safeties turn out to be bombs.

American fiction, it seems to me, is alive now and aware of its life. American drama, except perhaps for musical comedy (*Candide*, after all, is the best American play in many years), is, if not dead, often deadly and does not particularly care that it is. Arthur Miller is the only one of the postwar American playwrights whose concern with the theater is likely to engender excitement and he, perhaps wisely, works slowly and appears infrequently. Even Tennessee Williams, whose mixture of old expressionism and new neuroticism once had vitality, seems now mechanical in his flamboyance; *Sweet Bird of Youth*, for all its acclaim, looked to me like the same old rabbit out of the same old hat. There is something sad about the fact that the Critics' Award went to a play that not only uses an outdated form, but often uses it clumsily. I do not want to disparage Miss Hansberry's achievement with *A Raisin in the Sun*. It is a first play and a good one; more important, it has hold of one of the central dramatic problems of our time. If one were to compare her with Chekhov, however, as Brooks Atkinson did in his review, the comparison could hardly be as flattering as the *Times* critic made it. I hope that Lorraine Hansberry will go on to write more plays and that all of them will be as good as or better than A Raisin in the Sun, but I do not expect to find in them any real hope for a vital American theater. *A Raisin in the Sun* is the best play of the year, but the

American theater today is an old man in a dry season. Where does that leave us? Waiting for fall, of course.

Source: Gerald Weales, "Thoughts on *A Raisin m the Sun*," in *Commentary*, Vol. 27, no. 6, June, 1959, pp 527-30.

Critical Essay #3

In this review, originally published in the March 21, 1959, issue of the magazine, Tynan offers his assessment of A Raisin in the Sun's debut performance, praising the play's dramatic virtues.

A dramatist and screenwriter, Tynan served as drama critic for the New Yorker/rom 1958 to 1960.

The supreme virtue of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansbeny's new play at the Ethel Barrymore, is its proud, joyous proximity to its source, which is life as the dramatist has lived it. I will not pretend to be impervious to the facts; this is the first Broadway production of a work by a colored authoress, and it is also the first Broadway production to have been staged by a colored director. (His name is Lloyd Richards, and he has done a sensible, sensitive, and impeccable job.) I do not see why these facts should be ignored, for a play is not an entity in itself, it is a part of history, and I have no doubt that my knowledge of the historical context predisposed me to like *A Raisin in the Sun* long before the house lights dimmed. Within ten minutes, however, liking had matured into absorption. The relaxed, freewheeling interplay of a magnificent team of Negro actors drew me unresisting into a world of their making, their suffering, their thinking, and their rejoicing. Walter Lee Younger's family lives in a roach-ridden Chicago tenement. The father, at thirty five, is still a chauffeur, deluded by dreams of financial success that nag at the nerves and tighten the lips of his anxious wife, who ekes out their income by working in white kitchens. If she wants a day off, her mother-in-law advises her to plead flu, because it's respectable. ("Otherwise they'll think you've been cut up or something.") Five people the others being Walter Lee's progressive young sister, and his only child, an amiable small boy share three rooms. They want to escape, and their chance comes when Walter Lee's mother receives the insurance money to which her recent widowhood has entitled her. She rejects her son's plan, which is to invest the cash in a liquor store; instead, she buys a house for the family in a district where no Negro has ever lived. Almost at once, white opinion asserts itself, in the shape of a deferential little man from the local Improvement Association, who puts the segregationist case so gently that it almost sounds like a plea for modified togetherness. At the end of a beautifully written scene, he offers to buy back the house, in order as he explains to spare the Youngers any possible embarrassment.

His proposal is turned down. But before long Walter Lee has lost what remains of the money to a deceitful chum. He announces forthwith that he will go down on his knees to any white man who will buy the house for more than its face value. From this degradation he is finally saved; shame brings him to his feet, the Youngers move out, and move on; a rung has been scaled, a point has been made, a step into the future has been soberly taken.

Miss Hansberry's piece is not without sentimentality, particularly in its reverent treatment of Walter Lee's mother, brilliantly though Claudia McNeil plays the part, monumentally trudging, upbraiding, disapproving, and consoling, I wish the dramatist had refrained

from idealizing such a stolid old conservative. (She forces her daughter, an agnostic, to repeat after her, "In my mother's house there is still God.") But elsewhere I have no quibbles. Sidney Poitier blends skittishness, apathy, and riotous despair into his portrait of the mercurial Walter Lee, and Ruby Dee, as his wife, is not afraid to let friction and frankness get the better of conventional affection. Diana Sands is a buoyantly assured kid sister, and Ivan Dixon is a Nigerian intellectual who replies, when she asks him whether Negroes in power would not be just as vicious and corrupt as whites, "I *live* the answer." The cast is flawless, and the teamwork on the first night was as effortless and exuberant as if the play had been running for a hundred performances. I was not present at the opening, twenty-four years ago, of Mr. Odets' *Awake and Sing*!, but it must have been a similar occasion, generating the same kind of sympathy and communicating the same kind of warmth. After several curtain calls, the audience began to shout for the author, whereupon Mr. Poitier leaped down into the auditorium and dragged Miss Hansberry onto the stage. It was a glorious gesture, but it did no more than the play had already done for all of us. In spirit, we were up there ahead of her.

Source: Kenneth Tynan, in a review of *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) in the *New Yorker*, Vol. 69, no. 15, May 31,1993, pp. 118,122

Adaptations

A Raisin in the Sun was released as a film by Columbia Pictures in 1961. Its cast included Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil, Diana Sands, and Louis Gossett Jr. This version was produced by David Susskind and Philip Rose. This film is distributed by Columbia Tristar Home Video.

An American Playhouse version of the play was released for television in 1989. It is distributed through Fries Home Video and stars Danny Glover, Esther Rolle, and Starletta DuPois, and is directed by Bill Duke.

Another video which was originally a filmstrip provides a supplment to the play. It is also called *A Raisin in the Sun* and is available from Afro-American Distributing Company.

A cassette sound recording of the play is available from Harper Audio. It stars Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil, Diana Sands, and Lloyd Richards. This cassette was produced in 1972.

Topics for Further Study

Research segregation laws that applied to various U.S. cities in the 1950s. Examine the arguments people made in efforts to change these laws.

Investigate the history of a particular neighborhood with which you are familiar. Analyze how its ethnic composition has shifted over decades or centuries and discuss the causes and effects of those shifts.

Write an argument for or against owning or investing in a liquor store. Try to use specific examples or statistics in your essay. Consider the ethical as well as economic issues involved.

Research the recent history of Nigeria. Compare its national events with the predictions Joseph Asagai makes in the play.

Compare how extended families functioned in the 1950's (or another time period of your choice) with the way they function today.

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Schools and neighborhoods were racially (and sometimes ethnically) segregated, often by law. These laws received several major court challenges during this decade; many of the laws were declared unconstitutional.

Today: Many neighborhoods and schools remain segregated despite legal and cultural attempts to reverse this situation. On the other hand, many schools, including prestigious universities, are completely integrated. Yet Affirmative Action, the practice through which this integration was in part achieved, is currently being challenged in several states.

1950s: The computer microchip was invented by an employee of Texas Instruments and began to be widely produced. This invention would come to revolutionize the technological industry. Computers and computerized products were generally limited to military and industrial purposes and were not common household products. Computers that did exist were much larger than an average-sized living room.

Today: Nearly every American home contains one or more likely several-products that rely on computer microprocessors. These include not only personal computers complete with modems but also digital watches and clocks, compact disc players, and remote control devices for televisions and videocassette recorders.

1950s: Senator Joseph McCarthy held his famous Senate hearings which attempted to demonstrate Communist infiltration of many U.S. institutions, including the Army. Although he is eventually censured by the Senate, these hearings destroy the lives of many apparently innocent Americans.

Today: With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the demise of the Soviet Union, and the internal conflicts in many Eastern European countries, Communism is no longer perceived as a threat by most Americans. The United States has emerged as the single world superpower.

1950s: Dr. Jonas Salk developed the polio vaccine; this and other medical advances significantly decreased the rate of childhood illness by the end of the decade.

Today: Many childhood illnesses have been controlled in the United States, although the infant mortality rate remains comparatively high for a developed country. Other illnesses, however, such as cancer and AIDs (Acquired Immune Deficiency syndrome), have become more prominent and receive considerable attention within the medical community as well as within the general culture.

1950s: The Universal Copyright Convention occurred when most Western nations agreed to protect the copyright of work produced in each other's countries For example, a novel originally printed in England could not be reprinted in the United States without the author's permission.

Today: Most nations respect the idea of copyright. However, the rise of the internet has complicated this issue, since it is now so easy to distribute copyrighted material in this new form. New laws are likely to be written regarding the electronic ownership of material.

What Do I Read Next?

Native Son by Richard Wright, which was published in 1940, opens with a scene in which a family attempts to kill a rat. The protagonist, Bigger Thomas, becomes a chauffeur and eventually kills the daughter of his boss.

The *Selected Poems ofLangston Hughes*, pub-lishedml987,containmuchoftheworkHughes published, including the poem "Harlem." Hughes' s poems both protest injustice and celebrate beauty.

To Be Young, Gifted, and Black is a collection of autobiographical writings by Lorraine Hansfaerry published after her death in 1969. It remains one of the most well-known autobiographies of the 1960s.

Coming of Age in Mississippi, published by Anne Moody in 1968, is the story of one young woman's work during the Civil Rights movement. It focuses particularly on voter registration in the American South.

Up from Slavery is a collection of autobiographical essays by Booker T. Washington, published in 1901. Although he is often considered a hero, he seems to argue for "separate but equal" social arrangements between the races.

The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. DuBois was published in 1903. DuBois presents a more radical argument than Washington, and he predicts that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line,"

Further Study

Dedmond, Francis "Lorraine Hansberry" in *American Playwrights since 1945: A Guide to Scholarship, Criticism, and Performance*, edited by Philip C. Kohn, Greenwood, 1989, pp. 155-68.

This is a thorough article which provides an assessment of Hansberry's reputation through her career. In addition, it includes a useful resource list.

Hansberry, Lorraine "Willie Loman, Walter Younger, and He Who Must Live" in the *Village Voice*, Vol IV, no. 42, August 12,1959, pp 7-8.

Hansberry discusses positive and negative responses to her play and compares it to *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller

Howes, Kelly King, editor. "Lorraine Hansberry" in *Characters m 20th Century Literature, Book II*, Gale, 1995, pp 204-09.

This article approaches the play through an analysis of its characters It provides an extensive discussion of each of the characters and compares them to other significant characters in American literature

Sacks, Glendyr. "Raisin in the Sun" in *International Dictionary ofTheatre-1. Plays*, edited by Mark Hawkins-Dady, St. James Press, 1992, pp. 649-50.

This article is a basic plot analysis which provides some cultural context.

Short, Hugh. "Lorraine Hansberry" in *Critical Survey of Drama*, edited by Frank Magill, Salem Press, 1994, pp 1086-94

This article discusses *A Raisin in the Sun* in the context of Hansberry's other plays. Describing this play as the most successful, Short analyzes it according to its theme of heroism.

Wang, Qun "A Raisin in the Sun" in *Reference Guide to American Literature*, edited by James Kamp, St James Press, 1994, pp 1031-32

This article briefly describes the major characters as well as situates Hansberry as a playwright within the canon of American literature

Weales, Gerald "Thoughts on *A Raisin in the Sun" in Commentary*, Vol 27, no 6, June, 1959, pp 527-30.

This review is among the more negative Hansberry received. Weales critiques the traditional form of the play, suggesting that the form guarantees stereotypes despite the qualities of the play that Weales himself praises.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed�for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as �The Narrator� and alphabetized as �Narrator.� If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. � Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name �Jean Louise Finch� would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname �Scout Finch.�
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Night. Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the Criticism subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on Winesburg, Ohio. Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition, Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. Richard Wright: Wearing the Mask, in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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