

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Close Reading Worksheet Three Act I, Scene II

Answer on this sheet. Write notes or sentences as directed by your teacher.

1. How does this scene add to the picture of the Younger living conditions?
What is the atmosphere?
2. Identify Joseph Asagai.
3. What subconscious concern surfaces in Bennie's remarks to Ruth?
4. Why is Beneatha pleased with the robes Asagai brings her?

How does Asagai react?

5. What is implied about the relationship between Beneatha and Asagai?
6. What stereotyped value judgments does Asagai make about women?

What is Beneatha's opinion about a relationship with Asagai?

7. Why does Beneatha thank Asagai for the nickname of Alaiyo?
8. What causes the sudden break in conversation?
9. What is Walter's main concern upon his arrival? Why does he shout?

Report Walter's reaction to Mama's refusal to invest in a liquor store.

10. Besides his concern about money, what does Mama say she notes about Walter?
11. Walter tries to explain his discontent, both about his job and about his future. Briefly state the cause of his discontent.
12. When Mama refers to being "proud of ... what we done," to what is she referring?
13. Why does Mama abruptly tell Walter about Ruth's plan regarding the baby?
14. Explain Mama's statement: "You are a disgrace to the memory of your father."

Enrichment

Research Nigeria with special focus on the following: roles of women, government, and religion.

• TEACHER'S GUIDE

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Package Prepared by
Dr. Thelma Devoe
Bunker Hill Community College
Charlestown, Ma.

Biographical Information

Lorraine Hansberry was born in Chicago in 1930. Although she was the daughter of a prominent black realtor and banker, she attended public schools on Chicago's rough South Side, learning much there about the lives of less fortunate blacks. After spending two years at the University of Wisconsin, she left to study art, soon shifting her attention to the theater. In 1950 she moved to New York's Greenwich Village and worked at a variety of jobs while perfecting her writing skills. She married songwriter and publisher Robert Nemiroff in 1953; he and a group of their friends provided the financial backing for *A Raisin in the Sun*, which opened on Broadway in March, 1959. It was the first play by a black woman ever produced on Broadway, and the first directed by a black in fifty years. Hansberry's promising career was cut short by cancer; she died in 1965 shortly after the opening of her second play.

Major Works

- *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* (1964). In the only other play produced in her lifetime, Hansberry traces the struggle between commitment and withdrawal in the life of a Greenwich Village intellectual.
- *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* (1969). Hansberry's husband assembled this theatrical collage of her unpublished writings after her death.
- *The Drinking Gourd* and *Les Blancs* are two plays which were not produced or published in Hansberry's lifetime. The first is a historical drama about slavery; the second portrays a black European seeking to be faithful to his African heritage.

Chief Characteristics

Lorraine Hansberry's concern is for the common human qualities shared by people of all colors. She prefers, she says, "writing plays about people who happened to be Negroes, rather than Negro plays." Hansberry emphatically rejects the stereotypes of black people presented in most fiction and drama by whites, from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Porgy and Bess*. Her comments on *A Raisin in the Sun* reveal her intent: "The things I tried to show were the many graduations in even one Negro family, the clash of the old and the new, but most of all the unbelievable courage of the Negro people."

In the Younger family, the author creates a group of believable people who have different dreams. The reader is challenged to choose between the cautious integrity of Ruth and Mama, who seek to nurture and protect what they have grown, and the larger, more precarious dreams of Walter and Beneatha. As in her other plays, Hansberry allows each side to have its say, exposing human strengths and weaknesses evenly and honestly.

Related Reading

- *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller (1949). Like the Youngers, the Lomans are caught between grand dreams of success and the cruel realities of economic circumstance.
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee (1960). Scout Finch learns about prejudice and character while growing up in a small southern town.
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou (1971). Another young, gifted black woman tells the story of her own growing up.
- *Black Voices*, edited by Abraham Chapman (1968). This collection includes fiction and poetry by many black writers, including Langston Hughes, whose poem, "A Dream Deferred," gave Hansberry the title for her play.

Postreading Writing Assignment

Several themes emerge in this drama, as shown by the statements below. Determine the theme which is clearest to you, and trace its development. Refer to specific content and style of the drama which contribute to that clarity.

- "There is always something left to love."
- "The truth is that people are puny, small and selfish."
- "I'm a *man*—and I think my wife should wear some pearls in this world."
- "We come from people who had a lot of pride."