

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

by Lorraine Hansberry



THE AUTHOR

Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) was a literary pioneer in almost every sense of the word. She grew up in Chicago in a successful black family. Her father was a prosperous businessman, and important leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois and Langston Hughes often visited the family home. When the family moved into a white neighborhood, the neighbors threatened them with legal action, but Lorraine's father fought their attempts all the way to the Supreme Court and won. After graduation from college, she married Robert Nemiroff, a white Jewish song writer and intellectual whom she met on a picket line. Her husband's success as a songwriter allowed her to devote her time to writing plays, the first of which was *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry eventually opted for a lesbian lifestyle, however, and divorced Nemiroff in 1964. She wrote one other play - *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. A third play, *Les Blancs*, about the struggle for racial justice in South Africa, was completed by Nemiroff after Hansberry died.

A Raisin in the Sun thus reflects to some extent the playwright's own experience. When the play was first staged in 1959, it reached New York only after many difficult battles to obtain funding and a place to put it on. It opened to great acclaim, from both black and white audiences, and won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play of the Year, making Hansberry the youngest playwright (and first black) to be so honored. Her newfound fame gave her the opportunity to speak out against racial injustice and colonialism in Africa, but her life was cut short at the age of 34 when she died of cancer.

A Raisin in the Sun was a radical play, not only because it presented the lives of black people on the stage in a realistic way for the first time, but also because it dealt openly with matters of racism, colonialism, and feminism. It also has a universal appeal because it deals with timeless issues that affect all audiences at all times - family, personal identity, materialism versus spiritual values, and the nature and necessity of dreams and ambitions.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Lena Younger (Mama) - The matriarch of the Younger clan, she is a devout woman, and the glue who holds her family together. She loves her children and wants the best for them. As the play begins, she is expecting a check for \$10,000 from her recently-deceased husband's life insurance.
- Walter Lee Younger - Lena's son, a perpetually angry and frustrated dreamer, he wants to use the insurance money to buy a liquor store with his friends. He works as a chauffeur, but hates his job, which he considers humiliating.
- Ruth Younger - Walter's wife, aging before her time because of the strains of their marriage and the hard work to which she is subjected as a maid in a rich man's house. As the story begins, she finds she is pregnant and considers aborting the child.
- Travis Younger - Walter and Ruth's son, he is ten years old.
- Beneatha Younger - Lena's daughter, she is a college student with the ambition to become a doctor. She is concerned with civil rights and women's roles before such things were fashionable.
- George Murchison - A rich black man who wants to marry Beneatha, but neither shares nor encourages her interests in life.
- Joseph Asagai - A Nigerian student who met Beneatha in college, he aspires to become a leader in his country when it gains its independence. He, too, loves Beneatha, and asks her to marry him and accompany him to Africa.
- Mrs. Johnson - Neighbor to the Youngers, she is a talkative busybody.
- Karl Lindner - The head of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, he tries to talk the Youngers out of moving into his neighborhood, offering to buy their house back from them for more than they paid for it.
- Bobo - Walter's friend, who reports that their other partner in the liquor store venture, Willie Harris, has stolen all their money and run off.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“That’s it. There you are. Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. Man say: I got to change my life, I’m choking to death, baby! And his woman say - Your eggs is getting cold!” (Walter, Ii)

“Seems like God didn’t see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams - but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worth while.” (Mama, quoting Big Walter, Ii)

“Mama, you don’t understand. It’s all a matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I don’t accept. It’s not important. I am not going out and be immoral or commit crimes because I don’t believe in God. I don’t even think about it. It’s just that I’m tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no blasted God - there is only man and it is *he* who makes miracles!” (Beneatha, Ii)

“No - there’s something come down between me and them that don’t let us understand each other and I don’t know what it is. One done almost lost his mind thinking ‘bout money all the time and the other done commence to talk about things I can’t seem to understand in no form or fashion. What is it that’s changing, Ruth?” (Mama, Ii)

“Sometimes it’s like I can see the future stretched out in front of me - just plain as day. The future, Mama. Hanging over there at the edge of my days. Just waiting for me - a big, looming blank space - full of *nothing*. Just waiting for *me*. But it don’t have to be. Mama - sometimes when I’m downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking ‘bout things ... sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars ... sometimes I see guys don’t look much older than me - ” (Walter, Iii)

“No ... something has changed. You something new, boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity, too ... Now here come you and Beneatha - talking ‘bout things we ain’t never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain’t satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; that we kept you out of trouble till you was grown; that you don’t have to ride to work on the back of nobody’s streetcar - You my children - but how different we done become.” (Mama, Iii)

“Well - son, I’m waiting to hear you say something ... I’m waiting to hear how you be your father’s son. Be the man he was ... Your wife say she going to destroy your child. And I’m waiting to hear you talk like him and say we a people who give children life, not who destroys them - I’m waiting to see you stand up and look like your daddy and say we give up one baby to poverty and that we ain’t going to give up nary another one ... I’m waiting.” (Mama, Iii)

“It’s been rough, ain’t it, baby? I guess between two people there ain’t never as much understood a folks generally thinks there is. I mean like between me and you - How we gets to the place where we scared to talk softness to each other. Why you think it got to be like that? Ruth, what is it gets into people ought to be close?” (Walter, Iii)

“My husband always said being any kind of a servant wasn’t a fit thing for a man to have to be. He always said a man’s hands was made to make things, or to turn the earth with - not to drive nobody’s car for ‘em - or - carry they slop jars. And my boy is just like him - he wasn’t meant to wait on nobody.” (Mama, Iiii)

“Listen to me now. I say I been wrong, son. That I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you. What you ain’t never understood is that I ain’t got nothing, don’t own nothing, ain’t never really wanted nothing that wasn’t for you. There ain’t nothing as

precious to me ... There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, nothing else - if it means - if it means it's going to destroy my boy. I paid the man thirty-five hundred dollars down on the house. That leaves sixty-five hundred dollars. Monday morning I want you to take this money and take three thousand dollars and put it in a savings account for Beneatha's medical schooling. The rest you put in a checking account - with your name on it. And from now on any penny that come out of it or that go into it is for you to look after. For you to decide. It ain't much, but it's all I got in the world and I'm putting it in your hands. I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be." (Mama, Iii)

"Just tell me where you want to go to school and you'll go. Just tell me, what it is you want to be - and you'll *be* it ... Whatever you want to be - Yessir! You just name it, son ... and I hand you the world!" (Walter, Iii)

"I seen ... him ... night after night ... come in ... and look at that rug ... and then look at me ... the red showing in his eyes ... the veins moving in his head ... I seen him grow old before he was forty ... working and working and working like somebody's old horse ... killing himself ... and you - you give it all away in a day - " (Mama, Iiii)

"Independence *and then what?* What about all the crooks and thieves and just plain idiots who will come into power and steal and plunder the same as before - only now they will be black and do it in the name of the new Independence - WHAT ABOUT THEM?!" (Beneatha, III)

"See - that's old stuff. You and that boy that was here today. You all want everybody to carry a flag and a spear and sing some marching songs, huh? Yeah. You know what's going to happen to that boy someday - he'll find himself sitting in a dungeon, locked in forever - and the takers will have the key! Forget it, baby! There ain't no causes - there ain't nothing but taking in this world, and he who takes most is smartest - and it don't make a ___ bit of difference *how*." (Walter, III)

"Son - I come from five generations of people who were slaves and sharecroppers - but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. We ain't never been that - dead inside." (Mama, III)

"There is *always* something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned nothing. Have you cried for that boy today? I don't mean for yourself and for the family 'cause we lost the money. I mean for him: what he been through and what it done to him. Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody most? When they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain't through learning - because that ain't the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in hisself 'cause the world done whipped him so! When you starts measuring somebody, measure him right, child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got to wherever he is." (Mama, III)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play takes place in the ghetto on Chicago's South Side sometime after World War II. The setting is the Younger apartment - home to Lena Younger (Mama), her son Walter and his wife Ruth and son Travis, and Lena's daughter Beneatha. The scene opens on Friday morning as the family is rising for the new day. Ruth wakes Travis, who is sleeping on the sofa, telling him to get to the bathroom (shared with neighbors) while he has the chance, then wakes Walter. The two banter until Travis returns. Travis asks for fifty cents for school, but Ruth says they don't have it; when Walter returns, he gives his son the money. After Travis leaves for school, the ensuing conversation between Walter and Ruth makes it clear that Walter is a dreamer, always involved in some money-making scheme or other. This time, he and his dubious friends are talking about buying a liquor store, and he tries to talk Ruth into influencing his mother to give him the \$10,000 check from his deceased father's life insurance as seed money for the store. Ruth has serious doubts about the viability of the venture.

Beneatha then gets up. She is Walter's sister, a college student of twenty. She has ambitions of going to medical school when she finishes college. Walter, obsessed with the insurance check that is scheduled to arrive the next day, mentions it in every conversation he has. Both Ruth and Beneatha insist that the money belongs to Mama, and that she should be the one to decide how to spend it. Walter accuses Beneatha of coveting the money for her education, and goes on to say that she has been benefitting from the labors of himself (a chauffeur) and Mama and Ruth (domestics in the homes of the rich) while she goes to school. This is clearly an old and oft-rehearsed quarrel. Walter then leaves for work as Mama enters.

Mama wants to know what the quarrel was about, and they admit it was about the expected insurance check. Ruth begs Mama to let Walter use it for the store because it's so important to the man, but Mama is reluctant, as a good Christian, to see him open a liquor store. Ruth is looking poorly, and Mama tells her to call in sick, but Ruth insists that they need the money. Ruth then tells Mama that she should blow the money on a trip to Europe. Mama thinks the idea is ridiculous, then confides her plans - to put some of the money away for Beneatha's education and use the rest for a down payment on a small house of their own in a blue-collar neighborhood. She speaks of how she and her husband had dreamed of getting a home of their own, but had never been able to afford it. Big Walter, depressed because of the loss of their first baby, had basically worked himself to death.

When Beneatha returns, she tells the other women about the guitar lessons she is taking, and they give her a hard time for flitting from one interest to another without ever sticking to anything; she tells them she is trying to "express herself." She's planning on going out with George Murchison, but claims she could never get serious about him because he's shallow - no interest in culture, nor is he supportive of her career aspirations - despite the fact that he's rich. The other women can't understand what they see as a twisted sense of values. Beneatha, throughout the conversation, persists in swearing, to which Mama objects strenuously. Beneatha finally explodes, saying that God has nothing to do with her success - it depends on her hard work alone; in fact, there is no God. Such blasphemy is too much for Mama to handle, and she slaps her daughter across the face, and insists that, in her house at least, there will always be a God. After Beneatha leaves for school, Mama bemoans the chasm growing between herself and her children. As they talk, Ruth passes out and collapses on the floor.

Act I, scene 2 - It is now Saturday morning - the day the check is supposed to arrive. Mama and Beneatha are cleaning the apartment. Ruth has gone to the doctor's, and Travis is begging to go out to play. The phone rings - it is Willie Harris, Walter's friend, wanting to know if the check has arrived yet (he has been at the lawyer's, drawing up papers to buy the liquor store). The phone rings again, and this time it's for Beneatha - Joseph Asagai, a native Nigerian she met in college, wants to stop by the house. Ruth returns from the doctor's with the news that she is pregnant - a fact that seems to depress her and Beneatha, but thrills Mama, naturally. They hear commotion in the street, and call for Travis to come inside. He tells them that he and his friends had cornered a big rat, and that the janitor had caught it and beaten it to death; they haven't had such fun in weeks! Ruth, clearly upset, goes into the bedroom to rest.

Asagai then arrives. It is obvious that he is in love with Beneatha. He has brought her an African tribal robe and records of African music. She is pleased until he makes a comment about her "mutilated hair." He then calls her an assimilationist, which she hotly denies. He then expresses his love for her, but she refuses to be rushed into a relationship. Mama comes in, and Beneatha introduces her to Asagai, who then leaves.

Finally, the long-awaited check arrives. Mama opens it, and she and Ruth just stare at it for awhile, dreaming of what might be. Mama then asks Ruth why she referred to the doctor she visited as "she" - suspecting she visited an abortionist rather than their regular family doctor. Before she can question her, Walter comes in and asks about the check. Mama tells him he needs to talk to his wife, but all he can think of is the money. Mama tells him that there will be no investing in liquor stores, and he explodes. Mama calms him down and speaks of her worries about how he and Beneatha have changed, how their values have become distorted. Walter insists that she doesn't understand him, then she tells him that Ruth is expecting, and that she is considering an abortion. Walter says she would never do such a thing, but Ruth shouts from the bedroom that she would, and in fact has made a down payment to the abortionist. Mama waits for Walter to assert himself and tell her not to destroy the baby, but Walter simply walks out of the house in silence.

Act II, scene 1 - Later the same day, Ruth is ironing in the apartment when Beneatha emerges from the bedroom dressed in her new Nigerian robe. She then puts on the record of African music and begins dancing what she thinks is an African folk dance. Walter then enters, obviously drunk, and soon joins her in the dance, and begins to cry out the words of his people from the distant past, with Beneatha spurring him on. Then George Murchison enters and the spell is broken. He tells Beneatha to get changed so she doesn't look like a fool when they go out in public. She ceremoniously removes her headdress, revealing close-cropped natural hair, to the astonishment of the rest. When they disparage her appearance, she speaks of being proud of her heritage, but George makes fun of her, insisting that her "heritage" is nothing more than a bunch of ratty grass huts. Walter then returns and begins criticizing George's preppy attire, especially his white shoes. Walter then begins to talk about all the big ideas he has, and insists that George should introduce him to his father so he can share these ideas with him. George can barely tolerate the drunken tirade as he waits for Beneatha to change. When Beneatha emerges, she is dressed for the evening, but her hair is still natural, and George and Ruth both compliment her sincerely on it.

After they leave, Walter yells at Ruth, who wonders what has happened to their marriage, and questions again whether she should just abort the baby. She calms him down and they make up, then Mama enters. She tells them that she has signed the papers to buy a house. She describes

the house, and it surely sounds good, but then she tells them that it is in Clybourne Park - an all-white neighborhood - and their mood changes. Ruth quickly recovers and rejoices at the prospect of leaving their dingy apartment for a house with some sunlight in it. Walter, however, is more bitter than ever at the death of his dream of buying the liquor store.

Act II, scene 2 - The scene takes place on a Friday night a few weeks later. The apartment is full of boxes packed for the move. Beneatha enters with George. He wants to cuddle and she wants to talk, and he clearly resents her lack of interest in physical affection. He ridicules her interest in ideas, telling her that her body should be enough, because that's what men are interested in. She tells him to go home. When Mama arrives, she tells him George is a fool. Then Mrs. Johnson, their neighbor, comes in. She is an incessant talker, and depressingly cheerful all the time. They engage in boring small talk, then Mrs. Johnson lets drop the news that a black family in a white neighborhood just had their house bombed. She continues to make unintentionally offensive comments until she finally and mercifully leaves.

After her departure, the phone rings - it is Walter's boss's wife wanting to know why Walter hasn't come to work. Ruth makes the excuse that he's sick, though he's really been drinking again. She then finds that he hasn't been to work for three days and is in danger of losing his job. He then tells them he's spent the last three days driving around in Willie Harris's car, then drinking at night. Mama, in despair, wonders what has become of her family. Then she apologizes for thwarting Walter's dream, and gives him the rest of her money - she used \$3500 for the down payment on the house, but tells him to take \$3000 and put it into a savings account for Beneatha's medical school, then to take the remaining \$3500 and put it in a checking account in his name, to be used as he chooses - he is now officially being made head of the house. After the rest retire, Travis enters and Walter shares with him his hopes and dreams of riches and family happiness, promising that by the time Travis is seventeen, the family will be wealthy and he will be able to go to whatever school he wishes to attend and be whatever he wants to be in life.

Act II, scene 3 - Saturday a week later - it's now moving day. Ruth and Beneatha are putting the finishing touches on the packing. Ruth can't wait to get to the new house and take a long bath in her own tub. She tells Beneatha how much Walter has changed - he's been happy, to the extent that they even went to the movies together the night before and held hands, which they hadn't done in ages. Walter then enters, obviously in a good mood, and starts to dance with Ruth. When Beneatha comments, Walter teases her about being so race-conscious all the time.

Then a strange man knocks at the door - a white man named Karl Lindner, representing the Clybourne Park Improvement Association. He is very polite, but obviously very nervous. After a while beating around the bush, he gets to his point - the residents of Clybourne Park agree that people are happier when they live among their own kind, though, of course, racial prejudice is the farthest thing from their minds. He then offers to buy the house back from the Youngers at a small profit to the family. Walter throws him out of the house, sickened by such hypocrisy.

Mama then arrives, and they tell her of Lindner's visit. They laugh together about it, then Mama starts to prepare her small window plant for the trip to the new house. As Walter hugs his mother, they present her with a neatly-wrapped present. The box contains brand-new gardening tools. Travis then runs out and brings in a big box containing an overly-elaborate gardening hat he bought himself. As they laugh at the ridiculous encumbrance, Mama praises it and gives the boy a hug.

The doorbell rings again. Walter opens it to see his friend Bobo, who tells him that Willie Harris has run off with all their money, including the money Mama gave Walter for Beneatha's education. Mama, in shock, begins to strike Walter and then collapses in tears.

Act III - An hour later, everyone is still in shock, and Asagai arrives at the door. He is optimistic as usual, but Beneatha has lost her idealism. She is now convinced the world is full of crooks and swindlers, and wonders whether she wants to be a doctor after all, since the world's real problems can't be fixed. Asagai speaks of his dreams for his homeland, and invites Beneatha to return to Nigeria with him as his wife, to share his dreams. Beneatha, stunned, can only sit and think.

After Asagai leaves, Walter emerges from his bedroom and, as Beneatha hurls insults at him, he begins rummaging through the packed boxes. He finally finds a white piece of paper, with which he rushes out the door. Mama then comes in, obviously despondent, and puts her plant on the window sill, announcing that they needed to call the movers and tell them that the move had been canceled. Ruth tries to convince her that they can still move, even if they have to work twice as hard to make it happen, but Mama is already making plans to spruce the old place up a bit. Walter then comes rushing in; he has called Lindner and taken him up on his offer to repurchase the house. With the rest of the family looking on in disgust, Walter gets down on his knees and mimics the words he will speak to Lindner, groveling before him like a slave. Mama then lectures Beneatha on the need to love people when they need it most.

Travis then comes in to announce that the moving men have arrived, and Lindner walks in at the same time. Ruth summons Walter from the bedroom, and Mama sits quietly with her hands in her lap. Walter approaches Lindner and tells him that they will be declining his generous offer and moving into the house. After Lindner leaves, the family rejoices at Walter's newfound manhood. They then bustle around gathering things before the movers enter, bantering with one another as they used to do. After the rest leave, Mama gently picks up her plant and, in a dignified manner, leaves the apartment.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. The title of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* was taken from the following poem, *Harlem*, by Langston Hughes, written in 1951:

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?

- In what ways does the play illuminate the truth of Hughes' poem? What characters in the play embody the different responses to a dream deferred that Hughes mentions? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
2. What is the significance of Mama's plant in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*? What does it symbolize? What does it communicate about the character of Mama? How does it contribute to the major themes of the play?
 3. Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* has enjoyed long-lasting success because it both communicates the reality of the experience of black people in America and captures universal aspects of what it means to be human. Which do you consider the most important strength of the play - its universality or its authenticity as a voice of black experience? Why? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
 4. Discuss the ways in which Walter experiences growth from the beginning of the play to the end in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. What causes the changes in his character? What are the marks of manhood at which he arrives, and what do these have to do with the major themes of the play?
 5. Analyze the centrality of Christianity to the character of Mama in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. What are the central Christian values that define her character? To what extent does the playwright advocate these values? Support your conclusions with details from the play.

6. Discuss the role of money in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Choose three characters from the play and compare and contrast their views of money, and how these views impact their behavior and their attitudes.
7. Dreams clearly play a central role in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. According to the playwright, what are the consequences, respectively, of a dream fulfilled, a dream deferred, and living without dreams? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
8. Compare and contrast George Murchison and Joseph Asagai, Beneatha's two boyfriends, in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. What do the two men represent? How does Beneatha's interaction with them help to communicate the themes of the play? Be sure to use specifics to support your arguments.
9. In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, is the insurance money the family expects to receive a blessing or a curse? Why do you think so? Support your arguments with details from the play.
10. Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* presents racism, not only in the form of overt prejudice through the character of Karl Lindner, but also as a subtle underlying presence that colors all of black experience. Discuss the ways in which this more subtle form of racism is presented in the play. How does it affect the lives of the members of the Younger family? To what extent has this situation changed in the last 45 years, and to what extent does it remain the same?
11. Discuss the process by which the Youngers are united as a family through the course of events narrated in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. What forces threaten to tear them apart? What ultimately brings them together? What message does the playwright communicate to the audience through this process?
12. To what extent does the character of Beneatha in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* foreshadow the rise of feminism in America? What characteristics does Beneatha display that later would be viewed approvingly by feminists? Are these characteristics approved by the playwright? Why or why not? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
13. Discuss Beneatha's search for identity in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. What does the playwright suggest that the source of her identity ought to be? In what ways does this attitude foreshadow some of the aspects of the Civil Rights movement of the sixties? Be specific.
14. Discuss the extent to which the character of Walter provides a commentary on the state of black manhood in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. In what ways is Walter not a man at the beginning of the play? How does he achieve his manhood as the play progresses, and of what does his manhood consist? Evaluate from Scripture Hansberry's view of what makes a man a man.

15. Much of the history of America has involved the assimilation of people from a wide variety of cultures into the American melting pot. In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, however, such assimilation is seen as degrading. Do you agree? What is more important for the success of America as a nation, developing a sense of a unified culture or maintaining cultural distinctives and identities from one's heritage? Why? Be sure to incorporate biblical insights into your answer.
16. Discuss the extent to which Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* illustrates the truth that a person's life is controlled not so much by his circumstances as by how he responds to those circumstances. Evaluate this insight, and the way it is communicated in the play, from the standpoint of Scripture.
17. In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Karl Lindner and Joseph Asagai are both advocates of segregation in their own ways. How are their visions of the importance of racial identity the same, and how are they different? Why does the playwright approve of the one and disapprove of the other? Is she being inconsistent in doing so? Why or why not?
18. Two characters in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* who never appear on stage yet greatly influence the action of the play are "Big Walter" Younger, the deceased patriarch of the Younger clan, and Willie Harris, the thief who makes off with the family's money at the end of the play. How do they impact both the action of the play and the development of its characters? How do they help to communicate the themes of the play?
19. Compare and contrast Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in their commentaries on the American Dream. Which is more hopeful? Why do you think so? Which gives a more realistic picture of the nature of the dream that has motivated so many Americans throughout the country's history?
20. In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, to what extent is Mama, in her refusal to cede leadership of the family to her son, responsible for the deficiencies in Walter's character, and to what extent is Walter himself responsible for his own immaturity and selfishness? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
21. When confronted with a critic who said that *A Raisin in the Sun* had a happy ending, Lorraine Hansberry reportedly snapped, "I invite him to come live in one of the communities where the Youngers are going!" Do you consider the ending of the play a hopeful one, or merely a sign of the unending struggle portrayed through most of the narrative? Support your conclusion with details from the play.
22. To what extent is Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* a prophetic piece of literature? In your answer, consider that the play was produced in 1959, and incorporate your knowledge of developments in American society in the sixties and beyond.

23. Using what you know about the history of America in the years since Lorraine Hansberry wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, continue the story of the Younger family from their move to Clybourne Park to the end of the seventies. Be sure to consider the future of each member of the family, and tie your narrative both to what you know about the characters and specifics of the history of the twenty years that followed.