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# Individual Learning Packet

## Teaching Unit

# *A Raisin in the Sun*

by Lorraine Hansberry

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# *A Raisin In The Sun*

## **To The Teacher**

Once the students are able to distinguish among the characters, this play is relatively easy to follow and understand. However, the number of characters and their relationships in this play sometimes confuse the slower student. For this reason, we suggest taking the time to read part of Act 1, Scene i with the students and to identify persons and establish relationships. From that point on, it should be an enjoyable and profitable dramatic experience for the students.

## **Introduction**

*A Raisin in the Sun* was Lorraine Hansberry's first and most successful work in her short career. The play opened in 1959 and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as best play for that year.

Langston Hughes was one of the most important figures of the Harlem Renaissance, the revolution in African-American Arts during the 20s. *A Dream Deferred*, by Langston Hughes is the basis of the title of this play by Lorraine Hansbury. Hughes asks, "What happens to a dream deferred? ... Does it dry up like *A Raisin in the Sun*?" Hansberry uses the metaphor of a raisin left to dry up in the sun to describe what happens to the dreams of the characters in the play.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the Youngers, an African American family attempt to claim their own piece of the American Dream. In the white neighborhood where they buy a house, the Youngers are met with threats and danger. Their dreams are crushed when Walter Lee and his family realize that the American Dream or advancing in society and owning a house is closed to African American families.

# *A Raisin In The Sun*

## Test

1. While Asagai appears to love Beneatha, he
  - A. treats her badly.
  - B. frequently ridicules her.
  - C. treats her like a child.
  - D. often ignores her.
  - E. compares her to his first wife.
2. Beneatha appears to
  - A. be desperately in love with Joseph Asagai.
  - B. be upset by Asagai's shallowness.
  - C. be infuriated by Asagai's ignoring her.
  - D. feel admiration for Asagai's intellect.
  - E. Both B and C
3. When Ruth realizes she is pregnant
  - A. she immediately stops drinking because she knows alcohol could hurt the unborn baby.
  - B. she reluctantly goes to a doctor.
  - C. she goes to the woman who is known as an abortionist.
  - D. she throws her package of cigarettes down the toilet.
  - E. Both A and D
4. The \$10,000 on which the plot turns is money that
  - A. Mama has saved all her life.
  - B. Walter has won in a night of gambling.
  - C. Lena received from a medical malpractice suit that was settled out of court.
  - D. was paid out on Mr. Youngers' life insurance.
  - E. was given to the family by the Clybourne Park Improvement Association.
5. Walter resents George Murchison because Walter thinks George
  - A. is just playing with Beneatha and will eventually break her heart.
  - B. looks down on his mother for being a cleaning lady.
  - C. is admired by his wife, Lena.
  - D. stands higher in his mother's eyes than Walter himself does.
  - E. is a spoiled, rich, college kid.

6. When Walter first hears about Mama putting down money for the house, he
  - A. becomes angry that she spent the money in that way.
  - B. is happy that she bought the house but sad about leaving the neighborhood.
  - C. is relieved that his son can grow up in a safer neighborhood.
  - D. tells her that buying a house is a good thing, but not in that neighborhood.
  - E. Both B and C
7. We see from his attitude about books that George Murchison is
  - A. very interested in books and ideas.
  - B. interested only in passing the course.
  - C. not very interested in ideas.
  - D. not very interested in books but very interested in the ideas contained in them.
  - E. Both B and C
8. The title of this play is an allusion to
  - A. the Bible.
  - B. a Greek myth.
  - C. a sonnet written by Shakespeare.
  - D. a poem written by Langston Hughes.
  - E. a novel by Richard Wright.
9. Mama gives Walter \$6,500 because
  - A. she is tired of Walter frequently asking her for money.
  - B. she knows it is the only way to keep her children from fighting over the money if she dies.
  - C. his wife Lena needs the money for an operation.
  - D. he tells her he is leaving and not coming back if he does not get the money.
  - E. she wants him to assume the role of head of the household.
10. The members of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association wants to buy the house from the Youngers because
  - A. they realize that the land the homes are on contain valuable mineral deposits that will make a great deal of money.
  - B. they want to build a little league ballfield on that lot and the two empty lots on each side of the house.
  - C. they do not want Black people moving into their neighborhood.
  - D. the house is in such bad condition that they feel tearing it down would be cheaper than fixing it up.
  - E. Both B and D
11. When Bobo comes to the Younger house, he tells the family that
  - A. he is getting married.
  - B. Willie Harris ran off with their money.
  - C. his wife ran off with Willie Harris.
  - D. Walter is going to be arrested for attempted bribery.
  - E. Both B and C

12. Beneatha's dream is to
- A. get married and have a large family.
  - B. become rich and have all the good things in life.
  - C. go to medical school.
  - D. become a research scientist.
  - E. help Travis get to college.
13. Walter's dream is to
- A. go to college.
  - B. get a job in an insurance company.
  - C. own a liquor store.
  - D. have Travis go to college.
  - E. buy a nice home for his wife and son.
14. More than anything else, Lena desires that
- A. Walter is a satisfied, self-fulfilled man.
  - B. the baby is born healthy.
  - C. they move into their own house.
  - D. Walter and Beneatha stop fighting.
  - E. Travis goes to college.
15. When Beneatha becomes depressed over the loss of the money, Asagai suggests that
- A. she marry George Murchison.
  - B. she return to Africa with him.
  - C. the family move to New York and work in his company.
  - D. she marry him and put her childish notions away.
  - E. Both C and D
16. Walter says that "he called the man" because
- A. he has told Lindner they will take the money he has offered them.
  - B. he has quit his job.
  - C. he realizes that he has to straighten out his life.
  - D. he is apologizing for having insulted George Murchison.
  - E. he has heard that the police want to speak with him about the liquor license.
17. A symbol for the family in this story is
- A. Walter's hat.
  - B. Mama's plant.
  - C. the old apartment.
  - D. the 1950 Buick.
  - E. the song always played on the record player.

18. Walter believes that the \$6,500 he gives to Bobo is to be used to
- A. put a down payment on the liquor store.
  - B. buy stolen whiskey at one third the price, which they could use to stock the liquor store.
  - C. make the final payment on the liquor store.
  - D. bribe an official in Springfield so they could get a liquor license faster.
  - E. Both C and D
19. The setting of this play is
- A. Chicago.
  - B. Los Angeles.
  - C. Boston.
  - D. Houston.
  - E. Philadelphia.

**II. Identify the speaker of the following quotes.**

It is not necessary you remember the speaker; based on your knowledge of the play and the characters, you should be able to have a good idea who the speaker is.

20. "He finally come into his manhood today, didn't he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain."
- A. Karl Lindner
  - B. Mama
  - C. Travis
  - D. Walter
  - E. Beneatha
21. "Can't you give people a Christian greeting before you start asking about money?"
- A. Walter
  - B. Mama
  - C. Asagai
  - D. Ruth
  - E. George
22. "It's all a matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I don't accept."
- A. Walter
  - B. Ruth
  - C. Beneatha
  - D. Mama
  - E. Bobo

23. "You all some eevil people at eight o'clock in the morning."  
A. Walter  
B. Ruth  
C. Beneatha  
D. Asagai  
E. George
24. "He made an investment! With a man even Travis wouldn't have trusted with his worn-out marbles."  
A. Walter  
B. Mama  
C. Asagai  
D. Lindner  
E. Beneatha
25. "Movement, progress...it makes me think of Africa."  
A. Walter  
B. Beneatha  
C. Lena  
D. Bobo  
E. Asagai

### **III. Essays** *(Answer the question or questions designated by the teacher.)*

1. The essence of drama is emotion. Characters on stage come into conflict and engage the audience's thoughts and emotions. Identify one of the scenes in this play that you think is emotionally powerful. Identify the characters involved, the conflict, and what it is that makes the scene moving.
2. By citing comments and references from the play, prove that Walter is the dramatic protagonist of this play.
3. Identify and discuss the conflict between the following characters and/or groups:
  - A. Walter and Ruth
  - B. Walter and Beneatha
  - C. Walter and Mama
  - D. The Younger family and society.
4. Discuss the following statements. Cite comments and incidents in the book to prove your generalizations.
  - A. Walter Younger pursues the American Dream. His dream is not bad, but the way he pursues it is.
  - B. This play is an affirmation of the family's love and strength.
  - C. Discuss Walter's character in this play; prove that although Walter makes mistakes, in the end he asserts his dignity.
  - D. In what way could Walter be a victim of his society?



# *A Raisin In The Sun*

## **Answer Key**

1. C	6. A	11. B	16. A	21. B
2. D	7. E	12. C	17. B	22. C
3. C	8. D	13. C	18. D	23. A
4. D	9. E	14. A	19. A	24. E
5. E	10. C	15. B	20. B	25. E

# *A Raisin In The Sun*

## **Objectives**

*By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:*

1. identify the dramatic protagonist in this play and state in detail why he or she is the protagonist.
2. prove by citing comments and incidents from the play that the following are themes in this play:
  - A. Racial intolerance exists in society.
  - B. Dreams are necessary and important for people
  - C. A strong and loving family can endure setbacks.
3. prove or disprove the following thesis by referring to comments or incidents in the play: "This is a story about the pursuit of the American Dream. Even though Walter's dream was a good one, it was badly pursued."
4. write a short character analysis of the major characters in the play: Walter, Mama, and Beneatha.
5. recognize that conflict is the essential element in a play and identify and discuss the conflict in these relationships:
  - A. Walter and Mama
  - B. Walter and Beneatha
  - C. The Younger family and society
6. recognize the emotional power of this play by identifying a forceful scene, stating who is involved in it, what the conflict is, and what, specifically, makes it an emotionally gripping scene.
7. discuss what elements of this play give it a universal appeal that makes it as meaningful and relevant today as when it was written in the late 1950's.

# *A Raisin In The Sun*

## **Questions for Essay and Discussion**

1. Who is the protagonist of the play? Why does the author choose this character?
2. This play is about racial intolerance in Chicago in the late 1950's. In what ways is this play out of date; in what ways is this play for all times and places?
3. By citing comments and incidents from the play, prove that racial intolerance is a major theme in this play.
4. In what sense is Walter a victim of society; in what sense is he a victim of his own shortcomings?
5. Central to a drama is conflict; identify and discuss the various conflicts and their resolutions in this play.
6. For a play to be good, we have to believe that the characters could be real people; and we have to be interested in what happens to them; we have to care about them. Discuss how Walter, Mama, and Beneatha come across as human beings, rather than merely characters, and explain what makes them interesting.
7. Why does the author go to such lengths to describe the furnishings of the Younger apartment? What do these furnishings and the state they are in say about the family?
8. Why does the author go to such lengths to describe the furnishings of the Younger apartment? What do these furnishings and the state they are in say about the family?
9. What does the absence of light in the Youngers' apartment symbolize? Why does Ruth so desperately hope for sunlight in the new house? How does this idea relate to the title of the play?
10. Describe the relationship that exists between Ruth and Walter at the beginning of the play. How does it change during the play?
11. Compare and contrast Asagai and Murchison. Which boyfriend does Beneatha choose and why?
12. What does Hansberry mean by the term "assimilationist Negro?" Who is called this in the play and why?
13. Why is Mama's little plant so important to her? What does it symbolize in the play? When is it seen for the last time in the drama?

8. Read the poem below, and answer the questions that follow.

*A Dream Deferred, a poem by 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?

- A. What is “a dream deferred?”
- B. According to the poet, how may a dream become unfulfilled?
- C. Describe the tone of the poem.

# A Raisin In The Sun

## Terms and Definitions

*Allusion* - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, or movie outside of the story that the author expects the reader will recognize.

*Protagonist* - the central or main character in a story around which the plot centers.

*Conflict* – the struggle that propels the action. There are three types of conflict: *man versus man* (Example: a typical Western, in which the sheriff confronts the outlaws); *man versus nature* (Example: a story about someone surviving in a small boat on the ocean); *man versus himself* (Example: the main character of a story fighting his or her own drug abuse). Most books include all three types of conflict.

*Simile* - a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*. Example: I am as hungry as a horse.

*Symbol* - an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction. Example: The sea could be symbolic for “the unknown,” since the sea is something which is physical and can be seen by the reader, but has elements which can not be understood, it can be used *symbolically* to stand for the abstraction of “mystery,” “obscurity,” or “the unknown.”

*Theme* - the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different devices: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them.

In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: “real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance.” In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: “youth fades and death comes to all.”

# *A Raisin in the Sun*

## **Study Guide Teacher's Guide**

### **ACT I, SCENE ONE**

#### **Vocabulary**

undistinguished-common, nothing special

exasperated-irritated, provoked

viciously-violently, cruelly

vindicated-cleared of an accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt

proposition-suggested plan

vengeance-with violence or fury

tentatively-uncertainly

furtively-secretly, sneaky

futile-useless

tyrant-ruler who exercises power in a harsh, cruel manner, a dictator

1. In what city does the play takes place?

*The play takes place in Chicago's south side.*

2. The living room setting seems overtaken by weariness. Name two details that suggest this.

*Crocheted doilies and couch covers hide the worn upholstery*

*Tables or chairs are placed over the frayed carpet*

*Carpet is dull and faded. One small window allows in the only light in the small apartment*

3. Who are the first family members to appear?

*Walter, Ruth, and Travis are the first to appear.*

4. Two references are made to a check. How does Ruth react to each of these references?

*Walter asks if the check has come yet. Ruth is annoyed with the question and tells him that it is not supposed to come until the next day.*

*Travis then states, "check comin' tomorrow, huh?" Ruth answers by telling him to get his mind off the money.*

5. According to his mother, why is Travis getting so little sleep?

*Travis is hanging out all night, talking with his "crazy, good-for-nothing" friends.*

6. Why does Travis ask Ruth for fifty cents?

*Travis asks Ruth for fifty cents because his teacher told all students to bring the money to school.*

7. What is the plan Walter, Willy Harris, and Bobo been figuring out?

*Walter and his friends would like to buy a liquor store for \$75,000. Each would contribute \$10,000 to the down payment of \$30,000.*

8. Why is Walter upset with his wife's reaction?

*Walter says that Ruth ignores his dreams and pays little attention to what he says.*

9. What does Walter want from Ruth?

*Walter wants Ruth to support him and his dreams, listen to him, encourage him, and make him feel like a man.*

10. Walter says, "We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds"? What does he mean?

*Walter feels that African-American women do little to stand up for and support African-American men.*

11. What is Walter's job?

*Walter is a chauffeur for a rich white man.*

12. Describe the tone that Beneatha uses with her brother.

*Beneatha is sarcastic and "nasty" when she speaks to her brother.*

13. Why is Walter upset with Beneatha's plan to go to medical school?

*Walter is afraid that his mother will use the \$10,000 check to pay for Beneatha's college tuition. That will eliminate Walter's chances for using the money to buy his share of the liquor store.*

14. What does Beneatha mean when she says, "forgive me for ever wanting to be anything at all"?

*She is angry that her brother does not recognize her dreams and feels that he is selfish for denying her right to want to be a success.*

15. What does Walter tell Beneatha she should do with her life? In reality, he has a deeper, underlying conflict. What is Walter's hidden fear?

*Walter says that Beneatha should be a nurse or get married. He believes that women should not do "men's" jobs and that being a doctor is overstepping the boundaries of her gender. Walter is afraid that if the women in his family are able to take care of themselves, they will not need him. He also feels inferior to the women in his life because he must always depend on them for financial and emotional support. Feeling dependent makes Walter angry, frustrated, and less manly.*

16. What does the reader discover about the check that Mama is waiting to receive?

*The check is the payment of a life insurance policy for Beneatha's father who died recently.*

17. How does Beneatha feel about the liquor store?

*Beneatha feels that buying the liquor store is a waste of money. She does not feel that Walter has the ambition and ability to make a success of such a business and is thankful that her mother will not agree to the plan.*

18. Ruth suggests that Mama might help Walter by giving him some of the money for his dream of buying the liquor store. How does Mama respond?

*She tells Ruth that they are "not business people...just plain working folks."*

19. How much money is the check for, and how does Mama intend to use it? How does Ruth say Mama should spend the money? What does this say about the differences in their characters?

*The check is for \$10,000. Ruth says that Mama should take a trip to Europe or South America. She should forget about her family and go away to have a good time.*

*Mama is practical and thrifty. She has been in poverty for her entire lifetime and considers the money as much of a burden as it is a blessing.*

*Ruth is a dreamer and sees money as the way out of depression, frustration, and obligation.*

20. Mama says that her late husband once grieved deeply. What event led to Big Walter's grief?

*Mama says that Big Walter, her late husband grieved deeply when they lost one of their children early in their marriage. Big Walter loved his family more than anything else.*



21. Beneatha thinks deeply and is frustrated with her life. What does she say she wants to do that makes her mother and Ruth laugh loudly?

*Beneatha says that she needs to express herself. Mama and Ruth believe that there are much more important things to do and feel that Beneatha is immature and silly.*

22. How does the reader know that Beneatha does not want to marry George Murchison?

*George Murchison does not believe in her dream of becoming a doctor. Beneatha says that George is shallow and could never understand what is important to her.*

## ACT I, SCENE TWO

### Vocabulary

inappropriately-unbecomingly, wrongly, improperly  
heathenism-“religion” of those who do not believe in God  
forlornly-sadly, hopelessly  
assimilation-integration, absorption  
insinuatingly-cleverly, shrewdly  
haphazardly-randomly, irregularly  
coquettishly-coyly, flirtlingly  
arrogant-self-important, overconfident  
eccentric-unusual, peculiar  
oppressive-cruel, unfair  
cliché-overused word or phrase  
sarcastically-ironically, mockingly  
plaintively-sorrowfully  
menacingly-threateningly

1. What happens at the very end of Act I, Scene One? What is the setting of the start of Act I, Scene two?

*At the end of Act I, Scene One, Ruth passes out and falls to the floor. At the beginning of Act I, Scene Two, the family is cleaning the apartment.*

2. During the cleaning scene, several details further explain the Youngers’ living conditions. Name one that offers a complete picture of the environment in which the Youngers live and explain why it does so.

*The women are spraying for bugs and cleaning the apartment. No matter how much they clean, they will never be rid of the bugs because the building in which they live is old and neglected. The Youngers are excited and energetic as they wait for the postman to arrive with the check.*

3. Why is Ruth upset when she returns home? Why do you suppose she is so unhappy?

*Ruth tells her family that she is two-months pregnant. She is upset because the apartment is already overcrowded; she is overworked, and there is not enough money to provide for her family now.*

4. When Travis enters the room, he too is upset. What is his news, and how does Beneatha react?

*Travis comes in from outside to announce that he has just seen a rat “as big as a cat” and that the janitor beat it to death with a stick.*

5. Identify Joseph Asagai. What is implied about the relationship between Beneatha and Asagai?

*Joseph Asagai is an African from Nigeria. At one time, he is a fellow student and in love with Beneatha. He is devoted to the study of his Nigerian heritage, an interest that he shares with Beneatha.*

6. What does Asagai give to Beneatha as a gift? Why is Beneatha pleased with it? How does Asagai react?

*Asagai gives Beneatha some records and a robe for Nigerian women. Beneatha is pleased because she is searching for her identity and wants to know all she can about her African heritage. He admires how she looks in them but criticizes her for changing her hair. Asagai believes that African-American women should wear their hair naturally. Straightening it, as Beneatha does, seems to Asagai, a denial of heritage and an attempt to fit in with the white culture.*

7. What stereotypes about women does Asagai reveal? What is Beneatha’s opinion about a relationship with Asagai?

*Asagai believes that women should seek marriage rather than identity. He says that American women talk too much about liberation. Beneatha believes that there should be more to a relationship than physical attraction. She desires a man who will be her equal, take the time to listen to her dreams, and provide emotional support for her. Asagai disagrees and says that his feelings for Beneatha are all that matters.*

9. What is Asagai’s Nigerian name for Beneatha? What does the name mean in English?

*Asagai’s Nigerian name for Beneatha is Alaijo which means, “one for whom ...food is not enough.”*

10. Why does Beneatha thank Asagai for the nickname?

*Beneatha thanks Asagai because the name tells her that he has listened to her desire to search for herself.*

11. When the postman brings the check for \$10,000, Mama is overjoyed and then worried. Explain her conflicting feelings.

*\$10,000 arrives in the mail, but she is also scared. She has never had so much money, and she is worried that she will not do the right thing with it. The idea of so much money worries Mama, for she fears that it will ruin her family. Mama is also sad that the money came to her because her husband died, and she is alone to make decisions.*

12. What does Walter ask as soon as he comes in the door? Why does he shout? Report Walter's reaction to Mama's refusal to invest in a liquor store.

*Walter wants to know if the mail and the check have come. He shouts because he is excited and hopeful that he will get the money to realize his dream. Walter is angry that Mama refuses to consider his plan to invest the money in the liquor store. He shouts and says that Mama did not even listen to his plans and is not considering the rest of his family in her refusal to give Walter the money.*

13. What concern does Mama have about Walter's frequent times away from home?

*Mama believes that Walter is having an affair because he goes outside to look for peace.*

14. How does Walter explain his discontent about his job and his future?

*Walter is discontent because he has a trivial job and a boss who treats him like a slave. He feels that there is no future for him, that he will never advance his career or make a better life for himself. He is also frustrated because he sees an opportunity, knows that he can make it work, but is unable to grab his dream because he lacks the money to invest in his future.*

15. Why is Mama "proud of...what we done"? Who is "we" in her statement?

*She is telling Walter that African-Americans no longer had to live in fear of being lynched and that they had gained freedom and dignity that was not possible in earlier times. She is proud that she and Big Walter were able to give their family a home, that they kept their kids out of trouble, and that they no longer have to ride in the back of the bus. They have finally achieved equal rights in society.*

16. Why does Walter crumple his papers, make an angry speech, and head out of the apartment?

*Mama tells him that she will not invest the money in his plan to buy the liquor store.*

17. What news does Mama tell Walter about Ruth? What is Walter's initial reaction?

*Mama tells Walter that Ruth is pregnant and thinking of having an abortion. Walter does not believe her at first. She orders him to stand up and be a man like his father was. Mama directs Walter to tell his wife that he will not allow an abortion and that they will welcome this baby into the family. Walter is stunned and angry and leaves*

19. To what does Mama refer when she says, "You are a disgrace to the memory of your father."?

*Mama feels that Walter will not stand up to Ruth and for his family as Big Walter had. She is disappointed that Walter is more committed to money than he is to his family.*

20. Describe Walter. What are his dreams, his frustrations, his problems?

*Walter is a dreamer. He makes lots of plans, but he does nothing to make them happen. Walter relies on the women in his life to provide for most of his needs, both financial and emotional. There is a void in Walter's life that has caused him to lose hope, and he resorts to self-pity. Because of his inaction and selfishness, he appears doomed to a disappointing future.*

21. By the end of Act I, what have we learned about Ruth?

*Ruth is frustrated with her life in the crowded apartment, their poverty, and her husband's dependence on her and his mother. She feels that she must provide all of the financial and emotional support to a family who doesn't respect her or her decisions. As she deals with another crisis, she has reached the end of her ability to cope and favors an abortion so that she will not have yet one more person to drain away her life and resources.*

22. By the end of Act I, what have we learned about Beneatha?

*Beneatha does not seem to fit in with her family. She reaches higher and works harder at her dreams. Unlike others in the family, she is not just a dreamer. She is a doer, setting goals and working to make them come true. She is confident and unfazed by society's expectations of her as an African-American woman. Beneatha is largely self-sufficient, relying on no one else to get her where she wants to be. Her attitude about money is limited to its use to help her get to her dreams. Knowledge is one character trait that defines Beneatha: she cannot get enough of it. She wants to learn all that she can about herself and her ancestry so that she might fulfill her potential as a person.*

23. Which of Mama's values are revealed in Act I?

*Mama's character is rooted in family values. She sees the world and defines success by her family's character. Mama is loyal, sensible, and strong. Most of all she is proud.*

24. What negative situations in the Youngers' lives are making their conflicts worse? What positive aspects may help them resolve their problems?

*Many problems plague the Youngers. They live in poverty and in cramped quarters. They are the victims of racism and the society that traps them where they are. Walter's lack of a work ethic and his dependence on other family members prevents him from achieving self-sufficiency. Beneatha is a woman with intellect and curiosity, traits that she finds endlessly frustrating as she attempts to make her way in a white male world. Mama must deal with all of her family's problems, for as the matriarch, she must hold them together. Additionally, Mama must now face the world alone and find solutions to problems that once were Big Walter's responsibility.*

*Family love and responsibility make all of the Youngers' problems manageable. As long as they have each other, no problem is insurmountable.*

## **ACT II, SCENE ONE**

### **Vocabulary**

eccentric-strange

oppress-to hold back, to prevent from achieving

assimilate-to blend into a group or culture

monologue-to speak thoughts aloud on stage

Prometheus-a Greek god who made man in the image of gods and made him stand upright

plaintively-pleading

menacingly-threateningly

tentatively-carefully

1. What is the setting at the beginning of this scene? How is it different from the end of Act I?

*At the beginning of Act II, Ruth is ironing, and Beneatha bursts from her room, wearing the Nigerian costume that Asagi gave her. She is dancing and the mood is light-hearted. It stands in contrast to the tension at the end of Act I following the argument with Walter Lee and Mama.*

2. What does Beneatha mean when she says, "Enough of this assimilationist junk!"?

*Beneatha is tired of trying to blend in with white society. She wants to distinguish herself and represent her culture. She is tired of attempting to style her hair, dress in conservative clothing, and being what she is not. Now, she is ready to proudly display her African-American heritage.*

3. What is Walter's reaction to Beneatha's mood?

*Walter appears intoxicated, but he joins Beneatha in her dance and tribute to African culture. He is spirited and plays the part of an African chief in this impromptu play.*

4. What is George's reaction to Walter and Beneatha performing their African dance?

*He is rattled by Beneatha's appearance and embarrassed by the dance. It is clear that George wants this "ridiculous" display to end.*

5. George says: "We're going to the theatre—we're not going to be in it." What does he mean?

*Walter Lee and Beneatha are dancing, singing, talking loudly, and otherwise appear out of place in their apartment. It looks as if they should be on stage performing. Beneatha's dress looks like a costume to George, and the whole scene makes him very nervous. He wonders what others will say.*

6. Explain three differences between George Murchison and Joseph Asagai.

*A. George is an "assimilationist Negro" who does all that he can to go unnoticed in a crowd.*

*Asagai likes to parade his heritage and lives for the moments that he can stand out in a crowd.*

*B. George thinks that Beneatha's search for herself is silly and that she should forget it. Asagai applauds her struggle to find herself, giving her an African name to further encourage self-discovery.*

*C. George is conservative, unquestioning, and accepting of rules and traditions. Asagai questions everything and constantly searches for meaning and change.*

7. What is Beneatha's definition of assimilationism? How does this definition present conflict for Beneatha?

*Beneatha says that "assimilation" means giving up your culture and heritage in order to submerge oneself within the dominant culture. She feels that to do so is to become oppressed and held back by that dominant culture.*

*At the same time, Beneatha wishes to become a doctor and reap the financial and societal rewards of that position. Her dreams represent the dreams of the dominant culture and set her apart from African-American society.*

8. What does Walter say about George's father? Why does Walter feel that he and George's father have much in common?

*Walter reveals that George's father is a highly successful investor. He thinks big and is not afraid to act on his ideas. George's dad is rumored to be buying a big hotel in a shrewd business move. Walter considers himself a businessman like George's father. He, too, has dreams and is an "operator" who would like to talk with George's father so that he might share his ideas.*

9. What does Walter say that reveals his search for something important or impressive to do? How do we know that he is also feeling misunderstood?

*Walter's dreams are stated with these words: "Man, I got me some ideas," "I got some plans that could turn this city upside down."*

*Walter's frustrations are evident when he states, "Man, I'm a volcano. Here I am a giant, surrounded by ants...Ants that can't even understand what the giant is talking about."*

10. How do Walter and Ruth describe their relationship?

*Walter says that they have become so negative with each other that they can no longer speak "softly" or with affection. He questions how that could have happened. Ruth says that because Walter does not come to her to talk and laugh that she feels neglected and afraid. She would like to return to the days when they were close, but says that she doesn't know how to do that.*

11. What news does Mama bring home, and why do Ruth and Walter react as they do? Why is this both good news and bad news?

*Mama tells Walter and Ruth that she has bought a house with the money from the insurance settlement. Walter explodes in anger, but Ruth is thrilled. She will now have the space she has dreamed of having. It is a mixed blessing though, for the home is in an all white neighborhood, and that is a frightening prospect for the family. They fear rejection and sense danger in moving to this neighborhood.*

12. Do you think that Walter's closing comments to Mama beginning "What do you need me..." are justified? Explain your answer.

*The comments are unjustified because it is Lena's money, and Walter is still living under his mother's care. Walter is unwilling to find the way to his dreams himself, so the loss of the money is a blow for him.*

## ACT II, SCENE TWO

### Vocabulary

presumably-probably

rebuffs-snubs, rejects

revelation-new, important information

desperation-hopelessness

1. Explain the disagreement between Beneatha and George regarding studying or education. How does the argument end?

*George feels that education is a way to a degree and, therefore, a path to financial success and acceptance into mainstream society. He feels that the books and learning are necessary to pass the tests to earn the degree, but they are otherwise inconsequential.*

*Beneatha reads to learn more about the world and about herself. Her reason for going to school is to learn all that she can. The degree that she will earn is just a bonus.*

*The argument ends when Beneatha says, "I see," and leaves. She now sees that there is nothing between George and her.*

2. Beneatha thanks her mother for understanding her. Specifically what understanding does Beneatha mean?

*Beneatha is thankful that her mother understands that Beneatha thinks George is a "fool" and that she should waste no more time on him.*

3. Explain Walter's attitude about his job. As a result, what does Walter try to do?

*Walter hates his job and considers it menial work. He despises feeling like a slave to his white boss. Walter escapes by drinking and having a good time.*

4. When Walter returns, what does Mama learn?

*Walter has not worked in three days. Instead, he borrowed a car, drove all over the city and beyond, and spent a great deal of time drinking and talking to some musicians in a bar. He seems to have been chasing his dreams.*

5. What does Mama do after she hears about Walter's three days?

*She blames herself for Walter's unhappiness. Mama says that she, like everyone else, has ignored her son and his problems. She failed to recognize Walter's potential and treated him like a child.*



6. Explain what Mama means when she talks to Walter about dreams again.

*Mama wants Walter to know that there is nothing more important to her than her son's happiness. She wants Walter to know that he means more to her than the money.*

7. Walter says, "You trust me like that?" To what is he referring?

*Mama tells Walter that she wants him to take the remaining money and put one half in Beneatha's account. She then says that the remaining money is Walter's to put in his account and spend it as he wishes.*

8. What suggests that Walter may not fulfill that trust?

*He picks up the money and is overwhelmed with the possibilities. Travis asks if he is drunk because he appears so happy. Walter then begins to fantasize about his future. There appears a danger that he will waste the money, trying to reach that illusive goal of being rich and important.*

9. Describe the fantasy world that Walter paints to Travis when he tells him of his plans for the future.

*Walter sees himself as an executive with many important meetings and lots of people working for him. In that world there is more money than the family can spend, a huge home with a gardener, and nice cars for everyone. In the fantasy, Walter has become the family caretaker and is respected not only by society, but also by his family.*

## **ACT II, SCENE THREE**

### **Vocabulary**

exuberance-enthusiasm

amiably-pleasantly, good-naturedly

ludicrous-ridiculous

1. What is the atmosphere at the opening of the scene?

*Ruth is busy packing for the move. She is excited and has bought some curtains for the new house. There is an atmosphere of anticipation for the changes to come.*

2. How has the Younger family changed at the end of the week?

*Ruth is happy because of the move and because she and Walter have been doing things together. Walter is deeply happy and asks Ruth to dance with him. All are joking and laughing.*

3. Identify Walter's change in attitude toward Beneatha.

*Walter is no longer angry with Beneatha. He teases her, and they laugh.*

4. What dream does Mr. Lindner mention?

*He mentions that he would like to see the time when all people of all races could sit down together and work out their differences.*

5. Explain the irony in Beneatha's statement: "This, friends, is the Welcoming Committee!"

*The irony of the statement is that although Linder represents a Welcoming Committee, his purpose is actually to convince the Youngers to stay out of the neighborhood.*

6. Where is the irony in Lindner's statement: "People can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened."

*He congratulates the Youngers for being hard-working, honest people: the same way he describes the people in his neighborhood. Yet, he feels threatened by their move and is making a subtle threat to the Younger family.*

7. Why does Lindner claim to want them not to live there?

*He says that Negroes are much happier when they live in their own communities.*

8. Why does Walter throw Mr. Lindner out of the house?

*Walter throws Linder out when he realizes that the man has been sent to threaten him.*

9. When she is asked about her plant, Mama replies, "It expresses me." Explain the significance of the wording that she chooses. Also, explain the symbolism in what she states.

*Mama uses the word, "expresses" because she knows that Beneatha uses that word to show what she is searching for. The plant represents the move to the white neighborhood and the danger they face. The Youngers are fragile too, and Mama is always the one who "fixes" what goes on in the family. She is the nurturer, and she cares for the plant as she cares for her family.*

10. What does Mama receive from her family after she returns home?

*The family presents her with a set of gardening tools.*

11. How is the gift to Mama appropriate?

*A garden is a permanent statement of the family's intention to stay in their new home.*

12. Explain the allusions to Scarlett O'Hara.

*The allusions refer to Mama's spunk and determination. Mama, like Scarlet O'Hara, stands by her home and her family no matter what consequences arise*

13. Why does Ruth look "as though somehow she senses death"?

*She recognizes the terrified look on Bobo's face, and she knows that Walter has done something terrible.*

14. Identify Bobo.

*Bobo is one of Walter's "business" partners.*

15. What news does Bobo bring to Walter?

*Bobo tells Walter that their money is gone. Willie took off with all of it.*

16. Why does Walter say, "That money is made out of my father's flesh"?

*The money came to the family with the death of Walter's father and the arrival of the insurance money.*

17. Besides the money, what else will the loss mean for the family?

*Beneatha will have no money for school, and Walter's dream is lost. Walter will also have to face the pain that he has brought to Mama.*

18. Why is the ending scene appropriate to the Younger family and to Mama in particular?

*The Youngers never give up, and they never lose faith in God. Mama calls upon God to help them.*

## Act III

### Vocabulary

ominous-foreshadowing evil

plunder-take by force

retrogression-regress; go backwards

pronouncements-announcements or opinions made with authority

raucously-loud

1. Why is the lighting in Act III different from the lighting in Act I?

*“The sole natural light the family may enjoy in the course of a day is only that which fights its way through this window.” This description helps to describe the Youngers’ apartment in Act I. It symbolizes the lack of hope and dreams that have faded with time and failed attempts to reach their dreams.*

*In Act III, “there is a sullen light of gloom in the living room, gray light not unlike that which began the first scene of Act I.” Now, the lack of light has become more severe, for now there is no hope; the dreams have been within reach and are now shattered. The Youngers have given up all hope of moving forward.*

2. Why has Beneatha lost a hold on her dream? Why does she no longer care about making the world a better place?

*Because Walter has lost the money, she feels that medical school for her is out of the question now. She has become sour and pessimistic about life and people due to this disappointment.*

3. Explain Beneatha's “life as a circle” speech. What is the symbolism of her idea?

*Beneatha feels that life is just a continuous march toward a dream that has no end. We hold the picture of our dreams as we march around endlessly in that search. Beneatha says that the circle is the lack of progress in the world of minorities and women. The people tell us that things will change and there will be freedom, but in the end, the promises are false and the progress is minimal.*

4. According to Asagai, Beneatha should be grateful to Walter. Why?

*Asagai believes that the only goals worth reaching are the ones that we work for. He tells Beneatha that had Walter not lost the money, she would have been cheated out of the opportunity of reaching her dreams independently. Beneatha could feel pride in her achievements only if she did it on her own.*

5. What does Ruth say to Mama when Mama starts talking about calling to cancel the moving van?

*She says that they still should go ahead and buy the house. If they work at it, they can make the monthly payments.*

6. Walter comes in and says that he called “the man.” What does Walter say that he has learned? Why did he call Lindner?

*He says that he has learned that you have to be a “taker” in life. He is going to sell the property to Lindner so the family can make a profit on it.*

7. Why does his sister say, “He’s no brother of mine”?

*She thinks he has betrayed his race to sell that property to the association of homeowners since the association wants to buy it just to keep Blacks out.*

8. When Linder arrives, what does Walter tell him?

*Walter says that they are a proud family and that his father earned the house “brick by brick.” Walter tells him that they will be moving into the house and that they want to be good neighbors. He refuses the money, and in so doing, regains his pride and his family's respect.*

9. What causes Walter to say what he does to Linder?

*Travis, his son, is standing right next to him, and Walter realizes that he really is debasing himself if he goes through with the sale.*

10. What does Mama mean when she says, “He finally come into his manhood today, didn’t he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain”? What literary term is used?

*He stood up and took on a man’s responsibilities. A simile is the term. It implies a better future for them after their difficulties.*

# *A Raisin in the Sun*

## **Study Guide Student Guide**

### **ACT I, SCENE ONE**

#### **Vocabulary**

undistinguished-common, nothing special

exasperated-irritated, provoked

viciously-violently, cruelly

vindicated-cleared of an accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt

proposition-suggested plan

vengeance-with violence or fury

tentatively-uncertainly

furtively-secretly, sneaky

futile-useless

tyrant-ruler who exercises power in a harsh, cruel manner, a dictator

1. In what city does the play takes place?
2. The living room setting seems overtaken by weariness. Name two details that suggest this.
3. Who are the first family members to appear?
4. Two references are made to a check. How does Ruth react to each of these references?

5. According to his mother, why is Travis getting so little sleep?
6. Why does Travis ask Ruth for fifty cents?
7. What is the plan Walter, Willy Harris, and Bobo been figuring out?
8. Why is Walter upset with his wife's reaction?
9. What does Walter want from Ruth?
10. Walter says, "We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds"? What does he mean?
11. What is Walter's job?

12. Describe the tone that Beneatha uses with her brother.
13. Why is Walter upset with Beneatha's plan to go to medical school?
14. What does Beneatha mean when she says, "forgive me for ever wanting to be anything at all"?
15. What does Walter tell Beneatha she should do with her life? In reality, he has a deeper, underlying conflict. What is Walter's hidden fear?
16. What does the reader discover about the check that Mama is waiting to receive?
17. How does Beneatha feel about the liquor store?



18. Ruth suggests that Mama might help Walter by giving him some of the money for his dream of buying the liquor store. How does Mama respond?
19. How much money is the check for, and how does Mama intend to use it? How does Ruth say Mama should spend the money? What does this say about the differences in their characters?
20. Mama says that her late husband once grieved deeply. What event led to Big Walter's grief?
21. Beneatha thinks deeply and is frustrated with her life. What does she say she wants to do that makes her mother and Ruth laugh loudly?
22. How does the reader know that Beneatha does not want to marry George Murchison?

## **ACT I, SCENE TWO**

### **Vocabulary**

inappropriately-unbecomingly, wrongly, improperly  
heathenism-“religion” of those who do not believe in God  
forlornly-sadly, hopelessly  
assimilation-integration, absorption  
insinuatingly-cleverly, shrewdly  
haphazardly-randomly, irregularly  
coquettishly-coyly, flirtlingly  
arrogant-self-important, overconfident  
eccentric-unusual, peculiar  
oppressive-cruel, unfair  
cliché-overused word or phrase  
sarcastically-ironically, mockingly  
plaintively-sorrowfully  
menacingly-threateningly

1. What happens at the very end of Act I, Scene One? What is the setting of the start of Act I, Scene two?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. During the cleaning scene, several details further explain the Youngers’ living conditions. Name one that offers a complete picture of the environment in which the Youngers live and explain why it does so.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why is Ruth upset when she returns home? Why do you suppose she is so unhappy?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. When Travis enters the room, he too is upset. What is his news, and how does Beneatha react?

5. Identify Joseph Asagai. What is implied about the relationship between Beneatha and Asagai?
6. What does Asagai give to Beneatha as a gift? Why is Beneatha pleased with it? How does Asagai react?
7. What stereotypes about women does Asagai reveal? What is Beneatha's opinion about a relationship with Asagai?
9. What is Asagai's Nigerian name for Beneatha? What does the name mean in English?
10. Why does Beneatha thank Asagai for the nickname?
11. When the postman brings the check for \$10,000, Mama is overjoyed and then worried. Explain her conflicting feelings.

12. What does Walter ask as soon as he comes in the door? Why does he shout? Report Walter's reaction to Mama's refusal to invest in a liquor store.
13. What concern does Mama have about Walter's frequent times away from home?
14. How does Walter explain his discontent about his job and his future?
15. Why is Mama "proud of...what we done"? Who is "we" in her statement?
16. Why does Walter crumple his papers, make an angry speech, and head out of the apartment?
17. What news does Mama tell Walter about Ruth? What is Walter's initial reaction?

19. To what does Mama refer when she says, “You are a disgrace to the memory of your father.”?
20. Describe Walter. What are his dreams, his frustrations, his problems?
21. By the end of Act I, what have we learned about Ruth?
22. By the end of Act I, what have we learned about Beneatha?
23. Which of Mama’s values are revealed in Act I?
24. What negative situations in the Youngers’ lives are making their conflicts worse? What positive aspects may help them resolve their problems?

## **ACT II, SCENE ONE**

### **Vocabulary**

eccentric-strange

oppress-to hold back, to prevent from achieving

assimilate-to blend into a group or culture

monologue-to speak thoughts aloud on stage

Prometheus-a Greek god who made man in the image of gods and made him stand upright

plaintively-pleading

menacingly-threateningly

tentatively-carefully

1. What is the setting at the beginning of this scene? How is it different from the end of Act I?
2. What does Beneatha mean when she says, “Enough of this assimilationist junk!”?
3. What is Walter’s reaction to Beneatha’s mood?
4. What is George’s reaction to Walter and Beneatha performing their African dance?
5. George says: “We’re going to the theatre—we’re not going to be in it.” What does he mean?
6. Explain three differences between George Murchison and Joseph Asagai.

7. What is Beneatha's definition of assimilationism? How does this definition present conflict for Beneatha?
8. What does Walter say about George's father? Why does Walter feel that he and George's father have much in common?
9. What does Walter say that reveals his search for something important or impressive to do? How do we know that he is also feeling misunderstood?
10. How do Walter and Ruth describe their relationship?
11. What news does Mama bring home, and why do Ruth and Walter react as they do? Why is this both good news and bad news?
12. Do you think that Walter's closing comments to Mama beginning "What do you need me..." are justified? Explain your answer.

## **ACT II, SCENE TWO**

### **Vocabulary**

presumably-probably

rebuffs-snubs, rejects

revelation-new, important information

desperation-hopelessness

1. Explain the disagreement between Beneatha and George regarding studying or education. How does the argument end?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Beneatha thanks her mother for understanding her. Specifically what understanding does Beneatha mean?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Explain Walter's attitude about his job. As a result, what does Walter try to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. When Walter returns, what does Mama learn?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What does Mama do after she hears about Walter's three days?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Explain what Mama means when she talks to Walter about dreams again.



7. Walter says, "You trust me like that?" To what is he referring?
8. What suggests that Walter may not fulfill that trust?
9. Describe the fantasy world that Walter paints to Travis when he tells him of his plans for the future.

## **ACT II, SCENE THREE**

### **Vocabulary**

exuberance-enthusiasm

amiably-pleasantly, good-naturedly

ludicrous-ridiculous

1. What is the atmosphere at the opening of the scene?
2. How has the Younger family changed at the end of the week?
3. Identify Walter's change in attitude toward Beneatha.
4. What dream does Mr. Lindner mention?
5. Explain the irony in Beneatha's statement: "This, friends, is the Welcoming Committee!"
6. Where is the irony in Lindner's statement: "People can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened."
7. Why does Lindner claim to want them not to live there?
8. Why does Walter throw Mr. Lindner out of the house?

9. When she is asked about her plant, Mama replies, “It expresses me.” Explain the significance of the wording that she chooses. Also, explain the symbolism in what she states.
10. What does Mama receive from her family after she returns home?
11. How is the gift to Mama appropriate?
12. Explain the allusions to Scarlett O’Hara.
13. Why does Ruth look “as though somehow she senses death”?
14. Identify Bobo.
15. What news does Bobo bring to Walter?
16. Why does Walter say, “That money is made out of my father’s flesh”?
17. Besides the money, what else will the loss mean for the family?
18. Why is the ending scene appropriate to the Younger family and to Mama in particular?

## **Act III**

### **Vocabulary**

ominous-foreshadowing evil

plunder-take by force

retrogression-regress; go backwards

pronouncements-announcements or opinions made with authority

raucously-loud

1. Why is the lighting in Act III different from the lighting in Act I?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why has Beneatha lost a hold on her dream? Why does she no longer care about making the world a better place?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Explain Beneatha's "life as a circle" speech. What is the symbolism of her idea?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. According to Asagai, Beneatha should be grateful to Walter. Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What does Ruth say to Mama when Mama starts talking about calling to cancel the moving van?

6. Walter comes in and says that he called “the man.” What does Walter say that he has learned? Why did he call Lindner?
7. Why does his sister say, “He’s no brother of mine”?
8. When Linder arrives, what does Walter tell him?
9. What causes Walter to say what he does to Linder?
10. What does Mama mean when she says, “He finally come into his manhood today, didn’t he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain”? What literary term is used?

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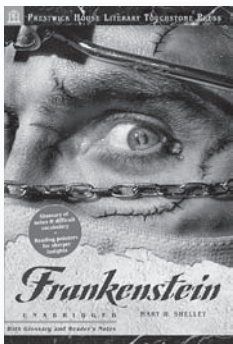
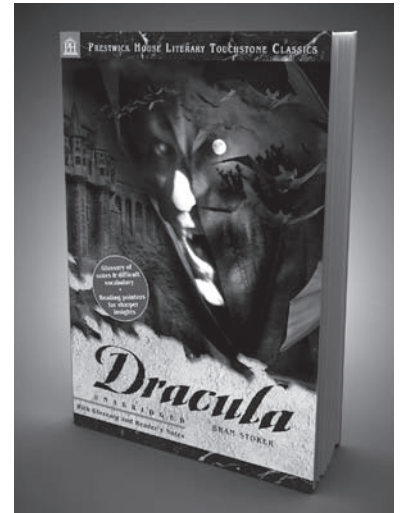
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