



**Social Studies
School Service**

www.socialstudies.com

Downloadable Reproducible eBooks

Thank you for purchasing this eBook from
www.socialstudies.com or www.writingco.com.

To browse more eBook titles, visit
<http://www.socialstudies.com/ebooks.html>

To learn more about eBooks, visit our help page at
<http://www.socialstudies.com/ebookshelp.html>

For questions, please e-mail eBooks@socialstudies.com

Free E-mail Newsletter—Sign up Today!

To learn about new eBook and print titles, professional development resources, and catalogs in the mail, sign up for our monthly e-mail newsletter at
<http://socialstudies.com/newsletter/>

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Teaching Unit
Individual Learning Packet

A Raisin in the Sun

by Lorraine Hansberry

Written by Marie Y. Smith

Copyright © 2007 by Prestwick House Inc., P. O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938.
1-800-932-4593. www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for classroom use is
extended to purchaser for his or her personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be
copied for resale.

ISBN-13 978-1-60389-009-0

Reorder No. 302697

A Raisin in the Sun

Objectives

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

1. identify and define the literary devices Hansberry uses, such as similes, metaphors, and hyperbole.
2. explain Hansberry's use of allusions and symbolism as literary techniques.
3. identify theatrical conventions, such as monologues and stage directions, and explain how Hansberry uses them.
4. compare and contrast differing viewpoints on heritage, assimilationism, and Afrocentrism.
5. identify and explain the themes of the play, and discuss how they are developed.
6. discuss the growth of the relationship between Ruth and Walter.
7. analyze character growth of all major characters in the play.
8. discuss differing viewpoints on Caucasian oppression in the 1950s and how these affected poor African-American families.
9. identify events and characters based on Hansberry's own life.
10. discuss the differences of opinion among the Youngers, Mrs. Johnson, and George Murchison in relation to the pursuit of dreams.
11. analyze parallels that Hansberry draws between characters' viewpoints and the significance of those parallels.
12. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

A Raisin in the Sun

Lecture Notes

Lorraine Hansberry and *A Raisin in the Sun*

Lorraine Hansberry was born in Chicago in 1930 during the height of the Great Depression. She was born into a very atypical family, not only because the Hansberrys were well-off during this period of extreme poverty for the majority of the country, but also because they were extremely wealthy according to African-American standards in the south side of Chicago. Her father was a successful real estate and banking businessman, her mother was a school teacher, and her uncle was a Howard University professor. Education was important to her family, and many famous literary figures were frequently seen in the Hansberry home, including W. E. B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes.

Although Hansberry's parents could afford to send her to private school, she attended public elementary and high schools. Her elementary school was segregated, with most of the students coming from extremely poor families. Hansberry felt isolated because of her family's wealth, and she spent a lot of time observing the differences between her family life and the other children's. She saw that most of the other African-American children were poor and wore house keys around their necks so they could let themselves into their houses after school. In an attempt to fit in with her peers, Hansberry began wearing a set of skate-keys around her neck so she could pretend to be a "latchkey child." This exposure to the poverty and independence of the African-American children and families during her childhood served as a basis for the development of the Younger family in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Lorraine Hansberry's parents were politically active from the time she was born. Her father was very involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and he once ran for Congress as a Republican. An example of the elder Hansberry's progressive and liberal ideals is when he received Lorraine's birth certificate in the hospital; he crossed out the hospital's designation of "Negro" as Lorraine's race and wrote in "Black" to emphasize his belief in and support of Afrocentric ideology. When Lorraine was eight years old, her family moved to an upper-class white neighborhood. During this time, her father was in the midst of a landmark Supreme Court case, *Hansberry v Lee*, in which he fought the Illinois laws concerning housing discrimination. The white neighbors did not want the Hansberry family to move into their neighborhood, and the hostility grew until a mob gathered at the house and threw bricks and pieces of concrete through the windows of the home. One of the bricks narrowly missed hitting Lorraine in the head. On a continual basis, Mrs. Hansberry had to watch her children walking to and from school to ensure that they were not harmed. The hostility she experienced directly while her family lived in this white community is the same hostility that Mrs. Jackson describes and the Younger family fears in *A Raisin in the Sun* when they decide to move to their new home despite Mr. Lindner's couched resistance.

Lorraine Hansberry attended the University of Wisconsin for two years before she moved to Greenwich Village in New York City, where she studied African Culture and History with W. E. B. Du Bois at the Jefferson School for Social Sciences in New York. She took a job with the African-American newspaper, *Freedom*, which was run by the activist Paul Robeson. She started as a secretary, but soon began writing articles and editorials about the way the media represented African-Americans as stupid, immoral, or subhuman.

Hansberry died at the age of 35 from pancreatic cancer.

African-American Life in Chicago in Early Twentieth Century

In the early 1920s, opportunities for African-Americans improved due to increased access to jobs, more involvement in local and state government, and expansion of the African-American middle class. The Great Depression, however, reversed many of these gains. According to government statistics, 40% of people on public assistance rolls were African-American. The African-American community began to fight back, taking steps like boycotting stores that refused to hire minorities. During and immediately following the Depression, the Chicago African-American arts community began to flourish and rival the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, but the authors focused on the reality of living in the urban ghetto.

The large migration of southern African-Americans that had started around the turn of the twentieth century began to slow during the Depression, but it accelerated again during World War II because of the spike in industrial production lines created to support the war. Moreover, as agricultural jobs in the South were replaced with mechanical equipment, more and more unskilled African-Americans moved to the Chicago area, and the African-American population grew from 278,000 in 1940 to 813,000 in 1960. In the 1930s, the Congress of Industrial Organizations overcame racial discrimination in the steel and meatpacking industries so that African-American employees began to move into entry-level management positions. This was an exception to the normal course of employment opportunities for African-Americans, however. Retail and construction jobs were denied to African-Americans. African-American public-service officers (e.g., firefighters, policemen, bus drivers) were allowed to work only in their own neighborhoods. As a result, high unemployment was a chronic problem in African-American neighborhoods. Crime, violence, prostitution, and drug problems were not addressed by the Chicago police, and overcrowding only escalated these problems. The Chicago Housing Authority attempted to purchase more land for public housing in the mid-1940s, but the white majority responded with violence and destruction of the properties.

In the 1950s, African-Americans began to fight back against this constant discrimination with a non-violent movement in the form of boycotts, sit-ins, and peaceful protests. One of the most famous boycotts was of the public bus system in Montgomery, Alabama. Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested after she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., became involved and organized the Montgomery Improvement Association. Because African-Americans refused to ride the buses into the city, the businesses in downtown Montgomery suffered. In June 1956, the U.S. District Court ruled that racial segregation on the Montgomery bus line was unconstitutional; this ruling was confirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court, declared all Alabama segregation laws to be unconstitutional.

Several other significant rulings were made in the federal court system. In May of 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, ruled that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. The Interstate Commerce Commission banned segregation in buses and all waiting rooms involved in interstate travel, on November 25, 1955. Probably the most significant law of all, however, was the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which was the first civil rights legislation passed by Congress since those immediately following the Civil War. President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act into law on May 6, 1960.

Production of *A Raisin in the Sun*

A Raisin in the Sun was Lorraine Hansberry's first play. With support from the African-American community in which she had been working, it opened on Broadway in March 1959. Although other African-American playwrights had had plays produced in New York, it was difficult to get the financial backing for this play because the cast, producer, and director were also African-American; the fact that everyone involved in the production was African-American made many people consider the project especially risky.

To keep the play at a workable length and to keep costs as low as possible, a few characters and several significant scenes were eliminated from the first production, including:

- the character of Mrs. Johnson, which eliminated the foreshadowing of the opposition and potential violence that the Youngers would encounter in their new home;
- the scene in which Travis and his friends chase and eventually kill the huge rat, which is a stark image of the living conditions in the ghetto;
- Beneatha's haircut, which symbolizes her acceptance of Asagai's beliefs in their African heritage;
- the discussion between Walter and Travis of Walter's dream to own a business that he can eventually hand over to Travis, which shows Walter's dream as he intended—a legacy for his family

A Raisin in the Sun was an immediate success with both audiences and critics. Although it was up against plays by Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Archibald MacLeish, *A Raisin in the Sun* won The New York Drama Circle's Critics Award as the best American play in 1959. Hansberry was the youngest playwright and first African-American to receive this award. The white press lauded Hansberry's play as much more than a portrayal of the African-American ghetto, implying that the play and message would be realistic even if presented by white characters. Hansberry responded to this attitude by saying, "I don't think there is anything more universal in the world than man's oppression to man." But she then continued to describe her characters as African-Americans specifically from the south side of Chicago.

Some of the more militant African-American critics, however, perceived the play as pro-assimilationist. When these critics became aware of the deleted scenes, they claimed that the purpose was to make the play more palatable for white Broadway audiences. Amiri Baraka, an African-American playwright who criticized *A Raisin in the Sun*, later changed his stance on the play, saying in 1987, "The Younger family is part of the black majority, and the concerns I once dismissed as 'middle class'—buying a house and moving into 'white folks' neighborhoods'—are actually reflective of the essence of black people's striving to defeat segregation, discrimination, and national oppression."

Significance of *A Raisin in the Sun*

Hansberry did not expect the overwhelmingly positive reaction to her play, but she did understand the need for the predominantly white Broadway audiences to learn what life was like for a poor African-American family. Until the opening of *A Raisin in the Sun*, most roles portrayed African-Americans as happy-go-lucky people, content in their lives and subservient to the white majority. *A Raisin in the Sun* was the first play on Broadway to challenge this idea of a contented family by presenting the image of a large family which aspired to a better life living in a cramped one-bedroom apartment. When asked in an interview about the success of her play, Hansberry said, “The intimacy of knowledge which the Negro may culturally have of white Americans does not exist in the reverse.” She was fully aware of the lack of awareness that most white Americans had about the struggles and dreams of most African-Americans.

Not only did this play present a realistic view of life in the African-American ghetto, but it also exposed the conflict within the African-American community about how to react to the oppression felt from the white community. Through the conversations that Beneatha has with George and Asagai, Hansberry presents the opposing ideals of assimilation (living in a fashion more like the white community) and celebration of heritage (understanding and honoring the African heritage of the community). Through these scenes, Hansberry was able to begin to address such concepts as the impression of African-American beauty, feminism, and the relationship between African-Americans and their African heritage.

Hansberry drew on her success with *A Raisin in the Sun* to become more outspoken about the interrelationship among American race relations, the Civil Rights Movement, and political struggles in Africa in which the African people tried to rid themselves of foreign rule. In a speech in 1959, Hansberry said, “I for one, as a black woman in the United States in the mid-Twentieth Century, feel that I am more typical of the present temperament of my people than not, when I say that I cannot allow the devious purposes of white supremacy to lead me to any conclusion other than what may be to the most robust and important one of our time: that the ultimate destiny and aspirations of the African peoples and twenty million American Negroes are inextricably and magnificently bound up together forever.” Hansberry devoted much effort to raising funds and awareness about the international problems of oppression.

Significance of the Title

Lorraine Hansberry grew up with famous artists visiting her home, one of whom was Langston Hughes. Hughes was one of many famous African-American artists in a movement known as the Harlem Renaissance in New York City, a group of musicians, writers, and poets who expressed their personal and cultural experiences, hopes, and dreams about their future in the United States. This group of artists hoped to introduce a new equality and acceptance of African-Americans in mainstream society. In 1951, Hughes wrote the poem “A Dream Deferred” in which he described the reality of these dreams being crushed, particularly in the post-World War II era when the white middle class fled from the city to the prosperous suburbs—a period known as “white flight.”

Hansberry drew the title of her play from a line of this Hughes' poem, which reflects the theme of the play. Hughes asks what happens to a dream if it is not fulfilled immediately, and then he lists various options, none of which is good. The first possibility is that the dream will "dry up like a raisin in the sun." The final option is that the dream might explode. Hansberry presents the conflict between a dream that grows in significance and stature, even though the hope of achieving the dream does not grow.

Themes

Throughout the play, Hansberry emphasizes the theme of the importance of having dreams in our lives. Each of the family members has a specific dream that keeps him or her going through the challenges of their impoverished lives. Hansberry emphasizes the importance of these dreams through the conflict that arises within the Younger family when each person wants to use the insurance money to attain his or her own specific dream. Hansberry weaves the elements of family relationships, heritage, and pride through their pursuit of their dreams.

The Value of Dreams—The main characters of *A Raisin in the Sun* struggle to live in a small, one-bedroom apartment in an old, run-down tenement. Each character has a separate dream, but all of the dreams involve getting out of the ghetto for a better life. Hansberry uses the Younger family to show that the definition of a better life may be different for different people, and this can cause conflict. Walter believes in the typical middle-class dream of owning his own business as a way to improve his family's life. He ignores Ruth's opinions about both his choice of business and business partner, and he does not pay attention to his mother's moral objection to being involved with liquor. When Walter loses the money, he decides that he can still attain his dream by taking advantage of Mr. Lindner's offer. However, when his mother has his son present during the discussion with Mr. Lindner, Walter ultimately learns that his understanding of the American dream has to include justice and equality, which he would cast aside if he took Lindner's money. Mama and Ruth both have the dream of moving out of the ghetto, and once Ruth tells Mama that she is pregnant, Mama decides to put a down payment on a house. Mama's dream is to have a safe place for her children and grandchildren to live, and she selects a house in an all-white neighborhood.

Pride—Each of the Youngers portrays pride in his or her dream and life. Even though they are poor, they are all proud. Mama frequently speaks of Big Walter's pride, and she always wants to make their current house look as good as she possibly can, despite the old furniture, stains in the carpet, and holes in the floorboards. Her pride is also evident in the house that she selects for her family. She is proud enough to believe that her family can live successfully in a white neighborhood. Even when Mr. Lindner subtly threatens the family, Mama is too proud to change her mind. She has instilled her sense of pride in both of her children. Beneatha believes that she is capable of beating the odds to become a doctor. Walter also believes in himself, as is evident in his determination to own his own business. During the confrontation with Mr. Lindner, Walter explains that African-American pride is the reason he is refusing Lindner's offer to buy the Claybourne house.

The Importance of Family—Mama’s message throughout the play is that family is more important than anything else in life. When the family members begin to argue about how to spend the insurance money, Mama and Ruth focus on moving out of the ghetto, a move that they both feel is the best use of the money for the entire family. Walter also supports the notion of the importance of family, but his dream is to create a legacy for his son. Walter does not see the need to waste money on Beneatha’s education, and when he loses the money for her tuition, Beneatha denies him as her brother. However, when threatened from the outside (Mr. Lindner), the family presents a united front and comes together to reject Mr. Lindner’s offer. By the end of the play, they have been able to come to agreement about a single dream for the family rather than argue over each person’s individual dreams.

Importance of Heritage—Lorraine Hansberry grew up in a family that celebrated its African heritage, which she expresses through Beneatha and Asagai, a Nigerian native. Afrocentrism, or the pride in African heritage, was a little-known concept when *A Raisin in the Sun* was first performed, but Hansberry very clearly illustrates the truths and misconceptions about her own heritage through Beneatha’s interactions with George Murchison and with Asagai. Through Asagai, Beneatha learns about African culture, language, music, and dress. Hansberry uses the visit of Asagai to have Beneatha give her mother (and the audience) a lesson on African history and on her concerns about the stereotypical images of Africans through Tarzan movies of the 1950s. Beneatha’s conversations with George show Hansberry’s dislike of African-Americans who give up their heritage to become more like the white culture to which they aspire. George claims Beneatha is descended from “...a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts.” Beneatha immediately becomes angry and with disdain, points out George’s ignorance of his own heritage. When the play first opened, these attitudes were unknown in American culture, but as the Civil Rights Movement became more active, Hansberry’s views were remembered as prophetic.

Feminism — By having three generations of women living in one apartment, Hansberry is able to show the changing attitudes toward women’s roles in the family and in society. Consistently referring to Lena as “Mama,” rather than by her first name, Hansberry shows that Mama’s identity is completely defined by her family. Mama, who is in her sixties, has been forced to become the head of the family because of the death of her husband. She openly talks about his relationships with other women during their marriage, and she accepts this as normal in the course of a marriage. As soon as she can, Mama turns over the responsibility for the money to Walter simply because he is a man, and she feels she has robbed him of his manhood by making the decision to buy the house. In her early thirties, Ruth is much more verbal about her discontent with her husband; however, even though she does not agree with his plan to purchase the liquor store, she encourages Mama to give him the money, and she attempts to get Beneatha to quit being antagonistic toward Walter. Ruth works several jobs outside the home to help support the family. Beneatha, who is only in her twenties, is the most outspoken about women’s roles in society. She refuses to accept a lesser role because she is a woman, and she constantly challenges Walter about his chauvinistic attitudes.

Symbolism

Lorraine Hansberry uses several symbols throughout the play to support the themes she is presenting:

Mama's Plant—This plant that sits on the windowsill in the kitchen symbolizes her family. In the beginning of the play, she is concerned that the plant never gets enough light or water, but she takes great care to keep it as healthy as she can. With her careful persistence, the plant never dies, but it does not flourish as it would in ideal conditions. Mama dreams of having a house of her own where the family will have enough room to live comfortably, and she can have a yard large enough to plant a full garden. Seeing the plant as her family, Mama takes the best care she can of the family, despite the dismal surroundings in which they live. Because the plant never dies, Mama never loses hope in her dream of a better life.

Beneatha's Hair—At the beginning of the play, Beneatha has straight hair, similar to that of the white middle-class students at her school. Through discussions with Asagai and George, Beneatha struggles with her desire to become successful without becoming assimilated into the white American culture. During one conversation, Asagai asks why she has her hair straightened to look like a white person, rather than allowing it to grow naturally. After he leaves, Beneatha gets her hair cut into a natural Afro, which symbolizes her acceptance of her African heritage.

Money—Regardless of their specific use of the money, each of the adults in the play views the money as a means of achieving his or her dream. Walter Lee wants to buy a liquor store and become an independent business owner; Beneatha wants to go to medical school; Ruth and Mama want to buy a new house so the family can move out of the ghetto. Mama also sees the money as a symbol of her recently deceased husband, and she realizes that it is only through his death that their dreams for their children can possibly be fulfilled.

Nigerian robes—Asagai brings Beneatha a gift of authentic Nigerian robes when he returns to Chicago from his homeland. When she puts the cloth on her body, she assumes the role of a Nigerian princess. These robes symbolize the true African heritage of the Younger family and Asagai.

Dialect

Throughout *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry uses language and dialect to develop her characters and show their lack of education and their poverty. Hansberry drew on her childhood experiences in the south side of Chicago to develop the different dialects used by her characters. For example, her family was well-educated, as is evident in Beneatha's and George's use of standard English. However, Mama's speech shows her lack of education and reflects the dialect reflected in the poverty-stricken homes of the children with whom Hansberry attended school.

Because this is a play, Hansberry's written dialectic provides clues on how the actors should deliver their lines.

Plot Structure of a Play

The plot of typical stage or screen play is structured around three acts. Even in plays that have only one intermission (and thus, apparently, only two acts), and films, in which there are no apparent act breaks, the writer frequently structures the plot and character development along a three-act plan.

ACT I: The audience is introduced to the setting, the characters, and the dramatic situation or conflict. This is the part of a story that introduces the characters, shows some of their interrelationships, and places them within a time and place. The following facets of the exposition are revealed in Act I:

the dramatic premise—what the story is about

the dramatic situation—the circumstances surrounding the action

the inciting incident—an event that sets the plot in motion; it occurs approximately halfway through the first act.

Act I ends on **Plot Point 1**, an event that drives the main character from his or her “normal” life toward some different conflicting situation that the story is about. It is often defined as “the moment the hero takes on the problem.”

ACT II: This part of the story develops a series of complications and obstacles, each leading to a crisis of some sort. The problem that has been set up in Act I now becomes more dangerous and difficult. Often, the complications involve an important piece of the back-story (exposition) that has remained hidden until Act II.

obstacles—In the second act, main characters encounter obstacle after obstacle that prevent them from achieving their dramatic need. Each obstacle is usually bigger, more intense, more daunting than the previous one (rising action). The stakes increase even as the obstacles increase in intensity.

first culmination—the point where a main character seems close to achieving his or her goal/objective; then, everything falls apart.

Act II ends on **Plot Point 2**, which thrusts the story in another unexpected direction. Plot Point 2 occurs at the moment the protagonist appears beaten or lost, but leaves some suggestion that something might happen to turn the situation around. Still, at the end of Act II, the protagonist seems to be almost destroyed and at the lowest point in the drama, physically and/or emotionally.

Act III comprises the final portion of the play. In terms of plot, it typically contains the **climax (second culmination)**—the point at which the plot reaches its maximum tension and the forces in opposition confront each other at a peak of physical or emotional action

denouement—the brief period of calm at the end of a play where a state of equilibrium returns

The growth of dynamic characters and the revelation of static characters, follow a pattern that essentially parallels the plot. For example, at the first culmination, the audience might catch a glimpse of the hero's arrogance in celebrating a victory he believes to be inevitable. Plot Point 2 might be the occasion in which a character finally develops strength of will – or a hidden strength might be revealed. These freshly developed or newly revealed traits will, of course, impact on Act III's plot events.

A Raisin in the Sun

Questions for Research and Discussion

1. Identify three symbols in the play and discuss their importance.
2. Research Hansberry's life and find passages in the play in which she draws upon aspects of her life in the characters, situations, etc. Which characters best voice Hansberry's own opinions?
3. Identify specific scenes that illustrate changes in the relationship between Ruth and Walter, and discuss the significance of these changes to the themes.
4. Research the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and discuss what part each character would play in the movement.
5. Discuss the significance of Africa and African heritage in this play. How does it affect the characters' attitudes? How is their heritage significant to each character in the novel? How do these attitudes shape the characters?
6. Research life in the late 1950s in Southern Chicago. How does this relate to Hansberry's portrayal of the characters?
7. Discuss the importance of allusions in this play. How do these allusions help to develop the characters? How are these various allusions used? Why are so many of them biblical in nature?
8. The character of Travis is a very small role. Discuss his importance throughout the play. Why would Hansberry include him, but give him very little dialogue and interaction?
9. Discuss the differences between plays and novels. How do these differences affect character and plot development? Why would Hansberry have written this as a play rather than as a novel?
10. Research the issues of class and gender stereotyping. Discuss how these stereotypes play a role in *A Raisin in the Sun*. How do they affect the characters' actions? How do they affect the plot?
11. Hansberry's epitaph reads, "I care. I care about it all. It takes too much energy not to care...The *why* of why we are here is an intrigue for adolescents; the *how* is what must command the living. Which is why I have lately become an insurgent again." Review the play and identify specific scenes the support this idea of Hansberry's. How does Hansberry's epitaph reflect the play? Where in the play do you see these ideas?

Free Response (Essay) Items

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1

Authors often draw parallels between certain characters in a play or novel in order to have the reader pay attention to the differences and question their significance.

Write a well-constructed essay discussing the parallels between the characters of George Murchison, Mrs. Johnson, and Mr. Lindner. Be certain to discuss what each contributes to the theme of oppression and white supremacy. Do not simply write a summary of their three characters.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2

Authors use symbols in order to subtly influence a reader's perception of things in a play or novel. Write a well-crafted essay about the use of symbols in *A Raisin in the Sun* and how Hansberry uses them to advance her themes. Be certain to cite specific symbols and discuss their use.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3

The use of allusions is a literary technique that allows authors to expand the meaning of their work by associating it with persons and events—whether actual or fictional—with which the reader is already familiar. Write a well-constructed essay analyzing Hansberry's use of allusions in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Do not simply provide a list of allusions.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4

Novelists and playwrights often use a single character to represent an important theme or idea in their work. Write a well-crafted essay analyzing how Hansberry uses Mama to exemplify the importance of family. Make certain you supply specific textual evidence to support your claims. Avoid simple plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5

A dynamic character is one who, for better or worse, experiences a change in his or her attitudes, beliefs, values, or emotions during the course of the story. Choose a dynamic character from *A Raisin in the Sun* and analyze this character's change through the course of the play. Do not merely summarize the plot or provide a character study.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 6

Read the opening stage directions, ending with the stage direction describing Walter.

Then write a well-constructed essay in which you analyze how these stage directions help to set the reader's expectations for the play. Do not simply summarize the directions.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 7

Read the passage from Act 2, Scene 2 starting with "WALTER: You wouldn't understand yet, son...", and ending at the end of the scene.

In this passage, Walter describes his dreams and beliefs to his son. Write a well-constructed essay on Hansberry's use of the theatrical convention of the monologue to develop Walter's character and reveal his inner feelings and attitudes. Be certain to cite specific examples from the text. Do not simply summarize his dreams and goals, but discuss how his statements affect the reader's perception of Walter as a character.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 1–7

Read the passage in Act 1, Scene 1, beginning with “WALTER: You know the check is coming tomorrow” and ending with “RUTH: That was Walter Lee...”

1. What literary device is Hansberry using in Beneatha’s statement “And then there are all those prophets who would lead us out of the wilderness...into the swamps!”
 - (A) verbal irony
 - (B) dramatic irony
 - (C) allusion
 - (D) symbolism
 - (E) humor
2. All of the following are bits of exposition we learn about the characters EXCEPT
 - (A) Beneatha and Walter are brother and sister.
 - (B) Beneatha and Walter’s father has recently passed away.
 - (C) Walter is a chauffeur.
 - (D) Walter aspires to buy a liquor store.
 - (E) Beneatha aspires to be a doctor.
3. All of the following are conflicts introduced in this scene EXCEPT
 - (A) gender conflict.
 - (B) racial inequality.
 - (C) generational conflict.
 - (D) sibling rivalry.
 - (E) marital disharmony.
4. Beneatha’s angry responses to Walter suggest that she
 - (A) is a cruel person and likes to torment others.
 - (B) cares deeply for her family.
 - (C) is a passionate person given to following her emotions.
 - (D) is constantly angry.
 - (E) greatly dislikes her brother.
5. Walter’s emotional state in this scene can best be described as
 - (A) angry.
 - (B) melancholy.
 - (C) violent.
 - (D) frustrated.
 - (E) inebriated.

6. What does Mama's first remark seem to suggest about Mama and the family?
- (A) Mama values family peace and propriety.
 - (B) The family is prone to violence.
 - (C) Mama does not care about her family.
 - (D) Mama cannot stand anger in her household.
 - (E) The family is slowly drifting apart.
7. The simile, "*Her bearing is most like the noble bearing of the women of the Heroes of Southwest Africa*" serves to show that Mama is
- (A) elderly.
 - (B) tired.
 - (C) hardworking.
 - (D) dignified.
 - (E) longsuffering.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 8–10

Read the passage from Act 1, Scene 2, beginning with “BENEATHA: What did you bring me?” and ending with Asagai’s telling Beneath the meaning of her new nickname.

8. Beneatha’s attitude toward Asagai can best be described as
 - (A) argumentative.
 - (B) passionate.
 - (C) stand-offish.
 - (D) playful.
 - (E) childish.

9. When Asagai criticizes Beneatha for “mutilating” her hair, he most likely means that she
 - (A) has her hair straightened.
 - (B) colors her hair.
 - (C) cuts her hair in a severe style.
 - (D) fashions her hair into braids or dread locks.
 - (E) teases and sprays her hair excessively.

10. Which of the following quotes best shows Asagai’s ability to move beyond American issues of race and discuss human behavior?
 - (A) “Assimilationism is so popular in your country.”
 - (B) “It is true that this is not so much a profile of a Hollywood queen as perhaps a queen of the Nile.”
 - (C) “Between a man and a woman there need be only one kind of feeling.”
 - (D) “It’s just that every American girl I have known has said that to me. White—black—in this you are all the same.”
 - (E) “The sense of a thing can be so different when it changes languages.”

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 11–15

Read the passage from Act 2, Scene 1, beginning with “GEORGE (*to Beneatha*): Look honey, we’re going *to* the theatre—we’re not going to be *in* it” and ending with “GEORGE: Good night, Prometheus!”

11. What is the significance of George’s calling Walter Prometheus?
 - (A) George has recognized a fire in Walter that could lead to greatness.
 - (B) George sees Walter as futilely challenging the will of the gods.
 - (C) George is simply mocking Walter with an allusion Walter won’t understand.
 - (D) George is trying to impress Beneatha with his intellectualism.
 - (E) George is trying to apologize to Walter by flattering him.
12. What theme does Walter’s angered speech (“Oh, Walter!”) about bitterness represent?
 - (A) The importance of family
 - (B) The importance of dreams
 - (C) The importance of heritage and culture
 - (D) Becoming a man
 - (E) The need to fight against oppression
13. Why is Walter so upset at George?
 - (A) George is having relations with his daughter.
 - (B) George represents exactly what Walter wants.
 - (C) Walter is merely drunk and bitter.
 - (D) George has rudely dismissed Walter’s business proposal.
 - (E) Walter is simply lashing out at the closest person to him.
14. What does Walter’s reaction to George’s dismissal suggest about Walter’s and Beneatha’s characters?
 - (A) Beneatha is more refined, better mannered than Walter.
 - (B) Walter and Beneatha both have strong business sense.
 - (C) Beneatha and Walter are similar in their dislike of assimilationists.
 - (D) Walter is willing to sacrifice Beneatha’s happiness for a business deal.
 - (E) They are both rivals for George’s attention.
15. To the Youngers, George represents someone who
 - (A) has achieved greatness.
 - (B) lives his life to the fullest.
 - (C) does not care about others.
 - (D) has fulfilled all his dreams.
 - (E) has no dreams or aspirations.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 16–20

Carefully read the passage from Act 2, Scene 2, beginning with “JOHNSON: (*This is a woman who decided long ago*)...” and ending with “MAMA: He wasn’t meant to wait on nobody” before answering the questions below.

16. What literary device does Hansberry use in Mrs. Johnson’s speech about the bombings?
- (A) Suspense
 - (B) Foreshadowing
 - (C) Irony
 - (D) Allusion
 - (E) Symbolism
17. The stage directions in this scene serve primarily to
- (A) reinforce Mrs. Johnson’s warning.
 - (B) show the bustle of preparing to move.
 - (C) indicate the Youngers’ true feelings about Mrs. Johnson.
 - (D) show that the Youngers are hospitable despite being busy.
 - (E) specify the props that are needed for the scene.
18. Which of the following best suggests Mrs. Johnson’s attitude toward the Youngers’ moving?
- (A) “Oh honey, I can’t stay hardly a minute—I just dropped in to see if there was anything I could do.”
 - (B) “You sure got lovely children, Younger.”
 - (C) “Oh ain’t we getting ready ’round here, though! Yessir! Lookathere!”
 - (D) “But you have to think of life like it is—and these here Chicago peckerwoods is some baaaad peckerwoods.”
 - (E) “You hear some of these Negroes ‘round here talking ‘bout how they don’t go where they ain’t wanted and all that—but not me, honey!”
19. This scene, cut from the original production and early print editions of the play and then later restored, contributes all of the following to the play EXCEPT
- (A) exposition about the social climate of the time of the play.
 - (B) complication to the plotline involving the Youngers’ move.
 - (C) emphasis on the theme of Black Pride.
 - (D) emphasis on the strength of Mama’s character.
 - (E) introduction of a foil for Beneatha.
20. What literary device is Hansberry using when Mrs. Johnson says, “Oh—I ain’t criticizing her none.”
- (A) allusion
 - (B) verbal irony
 - (C) dramatic irony
 - (D) foreshadowing
 - (E) humor

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 21–24

Read the passage from Act 2, Scene 3, starting at the beginning of the scene and ending with the arrival of Mr. Lindner.

21. Each of the following helps Hansberry to establish that Walter's jibing of Beneatha in this scene is playful and not argumentative EXCEPT
- (A) Walter's choice of words and jibes.
 - (B) stage directions that explain line delivery.
 - (C) stage directions to have Walter and Ruth dancing.
 - (D) the context of this scene's being moving day.
 - (E) Beneatha's reaction to the jibing.
22. In terms of plot structure, the white man's arrival is most likely
- (A) the beginning of the climax.
 - (B) the introduction of a new conflict.
 - (C) a significant complication.
 - (D) an anti-climactic reversal.
 - (E) a turning point in the action.
23. The way Ruth and Beneatha behave toward one another in this scene can best be described as
- (A) mother-to-daughter.
 - (B) sister-to-sister.
 - (C) mentor-to-protégé.
 - (D) friend-to-friend.
 - (E) employer-to-employee.
24. What literary device does Hansberry use in Walter's speech about Beneatha?
- (A) Allusion
 - (B) Simile
 - (C) Metaphor
 - (D) Hyperbole
 - (E) Allegory

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 25–28

Read the passage in Act 2, Scene 3 beginning with “LINDNER: Oh—yes. Thank you” and ending with “LINDNER: You just can’t force people to change their hearts, son.”

25. What does Beneatha mean by her allusion to Judas Iscariot’s reward for selling Jesus into the hands of the Pharisees (“Thirty pieces and not a coin less”)?
- (A) Lindner earned and then betrayed their trust.
 - (B) Lindner is betraying his neighborhood by offering so much money.
 - (C) Walter has betrayed his family by even talking to Lindner.
 - (D) There is a price at which everyone will compromise her values.
 - (E) Accepting Lindner’s offer would be a betrayal of their race.
26. Lindner’s offer to buy the house from the Youngers’ constitutes what phase of the plot?
- (A) exposition
 - (B) complication
 - (C) climax
 - (D) resolution
 - (E) plot point
27. What do we learn about Lindner’s character when he says “Well—I don’t understand why you people are reacting this way?”
- (A) Lindner sees himself as better than they.
 - (B) Lindner is naïve.
 - (C) Lindner is a racist.
 - (D) Lindner is indifferent to the feelings of the Youngers.
 - (E) Lindner values money over interpersonal relationships.
28. From reading the stage directions regarding Lindner, what type of response is Hansberry hoping to elicit from the audience to his offer?
- (A) Anger
 - (B) Sorrow
 - (C) Sympathy
 - (D) Hatred
 - (E) Jealousy

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 29–30

Read the passage from Act 3, beginning with “WALTER: Talking ‘bout life, Mama” and ending with “MAMA: You—you mourning your brother?”

29. This scene constitutes what aspect of the central plot?
- (A) Plot Point 3.
 - (B) the final complication
 - (C) the inciting incident
 - (D) the climax
 - (E) the denouement
30. All of the following could be indicated by this scene EXCEPT
- (A) the triumph of cynicism over idealism.
 - (B) the triumph of materialism over spiritualism.
 - (C) the triumph of greed over philanthropy.
 - (D) the triumph of women over men.
 - (E) the triumph of despair over hope.

Multiple Choice Answers with Explanations

1. What literary device is Hansberry using in Beneatha's statement "And then there are all those prophets who would lead us out of the wilderness...into the swamps!"
- (A) verbal irony
 - (B) dramatic irony
 - (C) **allusion**
 - (D) symbolism
 - (E) humor

Hansberry is alluding to Moses, whose mission was to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land of Canaan.

2. All of the following are bits of exposition we learn about the characters EXCEPT
- (A) Beneatha and Walter are brother and sister.
 - (B) Beneatha and Walter's father has recently passed away.
 - (C) **Walter is a chauffeur.**
 - (D) Walter aspires to buy a liquor store.
 - (E) Beneatha aspires to be a doctor.

Several lines establish (A), especially, "WALTER: He was my father, too! BENEATHA: So what? He was mine, too—" (B) is established by the use of the past tense when referring to their father, and the fact that Beneatha refers to the expected money as "insurance money" that belongs to Mama. (D) is established when Beneatha says, "Picking on me is not going to make her give it to you to invest in any liquor stores." (E) is established when Walter asks Beneatha, "Who...told you to be a doctor?" Only (C) is established in an earlier scene, when Walter enters from the bathroom in his uniform. Thus, (C) is the correct answer.

3. All of the following are conflicts introduced in this scene EXCEPT
- (A) gender conflict.
 - (B) **racial inequality.**
 - (C) generational conflict.
 - (D) sibling rivalry.
 - (E) marital disharmony.

(A) is clearly established by the strife between Walter and Ruth and Walter and Beneatha. It is made especially clear when Walter dismisses Beneatha's desire to be a doctor, telling her she should be a nurse or simply get married. (C) is strongly suggested by the mention of what Mama will or will not allow, and the fact that it is clearly up to her to decide what will be done with the insurance money. (D) is obvious from Walter and Beneatha's every exchange, and (E) is clearly established by Ruth's insistence in not participating in the siblings' fight and Walter's using her to strengthen his side. (B) is tempting, given Walter's criticism of the Negro race as "backward," but, as this is a black man criticizing his own race, and it is in the context of his family's not understanding his aspirations, it does not introduce an interracial conflict. Thus (B) is the correct answer.

4. Beneatha's angry responses to Walter suggest that she
- (A) is a cruel person and likes to torment others.
 - (B) cares deeply for her family.
 - (C) **is a passionate person given to following her emotions.**
 - (D) is constantly angry.
 - (E) greatly dislikes her brother.

We see Beneatha quickly respond to her brother's provocations through her passionate responses, such as her kneeling on the floor and begging forgiveness. She is not doing it out of a desire to be cruel or a dislike of her brother, but rather because she cannot help but follow her feelings.

5. Walter's emotional state in this scene can best be described as
- (A) angry.
 - (B) melancholy.
 - (C) violent.
 - (D) **frustrated.**
 - (E) inebriated.

While Walter, indeed, wants the money, he does not want it only for himself. He wants it to start his business so that he can help out the family. He thinks that none of the other family members understand this feeling, and, thus, he is furious at them.

6. What does Mama's first remark seem to suggest about Mama and the family?
- (A) **Mama values family peace and propriety.**
 - (B) The family is prone to violence.
 - (C) Mama does not care about her family.
 - (D) Mama cannot stand anger in her household.
 - (E) The family is slowly drifting apart.

Clearly, the type of argument we have witnessed in this scene does not happen often, or it would not be the occasion for Mama to comment on it. She is also concerned, not only that the door was slammed, but also that it happened "at this hour," which suggests her concern for how her family will appear to others, and that she does not want to be inconsiderate to her neighbors..

7. The simile, "*Her bearing is most like the noble bearing of the women of the Heroes of Southwest Africa*" serves to show that Mama is
- (A) elderly.
 - (B) tired.
 - (C) hardworking.
 - (D) **dignified.**
 - (E) longsuffering.

The phrase "noble bearing" is a clue that leads to (D). While they may be accurate, none of the other choices are indicated in this quotation.

8. Beneatha's attitude toward Asagai can best be described as

- (A) argumentative.
- (B) passionate.**
- (C) stand-offish.
- (D) playful.
- (E) childish.

Beneatha's reaction to the gift is described as playful (D) and childish (E), but this is not her demeanor throughout their meeting. (A) might be tempting, but she is speaking sincerely, not merely picking topics to argue about, and Asagai surely does not seem to feel drawn into an argument. Several times, Asagai comments on her seriousness, and any tone of anger or frustration on Beneatha's part is certainly motivated by the passion of her beliefs. Thus, (B) is the correct answer.

9. When Asagai criticizes Beneatha for "mutilating" her hair, he most likely means that she

- (A) has her hair straightened.**
- (B) colors her hair.
- (C) cuts her hair in a severe style.
- (D) fashions her hair into braids or dread locks.
- (E) teases and sprays her hair excessively.

As there is no stage direction that explicitly describes Beneatha's hair, all the above are possible. However, Beneatha retorts that whatever she does to her hair she does to make it more manageable, and if she did not do it, it would be "as crinkly as" Asagai's. Therefore, the context clues lead one to conclude that Beneatha has her hair straightened (A).

10. Which of the following quotes best shows Asagai's ability to move beyond American issues of race and discuss human behavior?

- (A) "Assimilationism is so popular in your country."
- (B) "It is true that this is not so much a profile of a Hollywood queen as perhaps a queen of the Nile."
- (C) "Between a man and a woman there need be only one kind of feeling."
- (D) "It's just that every American girl I have known has said that to me. White—black—in this you are all the same."**
- (E) "The sense of a thing can be so different when it changes languages."

Answer (A) may seem like a good choice, but he is not moving beyond race, merely describing a part of the racial problem. (B) is ultimately a statement about race, perhaps suggesting that even characters who were historically persons of color were played by white actors. (C) does transcend race, but is not really a statement about human behavior. (D) is a simple observation that, in some ways, racial difference are not as pronounced as gender differences. All women react to romantic overtures in the same way, regardless of the woman's race. (E) has no relationship to moral issues or behavior.

11. What is the significance of George's calling Walter "Prometheus"?
- (A) George has recognized a fire in Walter that could lead to greatness.
 - (B) George sees Walter as futilely challenging the will of the gods.
 - (C) **George is simply mocking Walter with an allusion Walter won't understand.**
 - (D) George is trying to impress Beneatha with his intellect.
 - (E) George is trying to apologize to Walter by flattering him.
- (A) and (E) can be eliminated by the fact that the statement is clearly an insult. The scene shows that George is not an intellectual, so (D) can be eliminated. (B) might be tempting, given George's observation that Walter is "wacked up with bitterness," but George, clearly, does not see Walter as either tragic or epic. Given his own lack of intellectualism and the air of superiority with which he speaks to Walter, (C) is the most likely choice.
12. What theme does Walter's angered speech ("Oh, Walter!") about bitterness represent?
- (A) the importance of family
 - (B) **the importance of dreams**
 - (C) the importance of heritage and culture
 - (D) becoming a man
 - (E) the need to fight against oppression
- "Family" is alluded to, but in a way that suggests its importance, eliminating (A). No references to culture or heritage are present, so (C) is incorrect. (D) and (E) also are not part of the speech. The speech is primarily about what Walter wants and hopes to achieve, leaving (B) as the logical choice.
13. Why is Walter upset at George?
- (A) George is having relations with his daughter.
 - (B) George represents exactly what Walter wants.
 - (C) Walter is merely drunk and bitter.
 - (D) **George has rudely dismissed Walter's business proposal.**
 - (E) Walter is simply lashing out at the closest person to him.
- When Walter first enters, he is very friendly to George, since he suggests that he has some "big ideas" for George's father's business. It is not until George meets Walter's overtures with obvious disinterest that Walter turns hostile. Thus, (D) is the correct answer.

14. What does Walter's reaction to George's dismissal suggest about Walter's and Beneatha's characters?

- (A) Beneatha is more refined, better mannered than Walter.
- (B) Walter and Beneatha both have strong business sense.
- (C) Beneatha and Walter are similar in their dislike of assimilationists.**
- (D) Walter is willing to sacrifice Beneatha's happiness for a business deal.
- (E) They are both rivals for George's attention.

(A) is tempting, but, now that Beneatha is embracing her African heritage, she is appearing less "refined" in George's eyes. Likewise, (E) is excluded by the fact that Beneatha has grown disinterested in George. (B) is clearly incorrect. Walter has no business sense at all—as this exchange shows. (D) is a possibility generally in the play, but is not suggested in this scene. (C) is, therefore, the only plausible choice. Walter's bitterness stems from the fact that he does not believe that George knows what it is to struggle and does not realize that, even by adopting white culture, George will still not be fully accepted into white society.

15. To the Youngers, George represents someone who

- (A) has achieved greatness.
- (B) lives his life to the fullest.
- (C) does not care about others.
- (D) has fulfilled all his dreams.
- (E) has no dreams or aspirations.**

While (A) may seem a tempting answer, it is wrong because the Youngers do not see George as a great man by the end of the scene. They see him as a spoiled child who has been given everything he ever wanted and, thus, has no dreams, desires, or wishes of his own. He is the complete opposite of everyone in the Younger family, all of whom are striving to complete their own dreams.

16. What literary device does Hansberry use in Mrs. Johnson's speech about the bombings?

- (A) suspense
- (B) foreshadowing**
- (C) irony
- (D) allusion
- (E) symbolism

Suspense (A) is, in this case, a product of the foreshadowing (B). While one might want to make a case that reference to the bombings is a historical allusion (D) or symbolic of anger or violence or hatred, there is not enough in this particular scene to support these assertions. Certainly Mrs. Johnson is hypocritical and sarcastic, but Hansberry's intent is not ironic. Clearly she wants to foreshadow (B) that the Youngers' move will not be an easy one.

17. The stage directions in this scene serve primarily to
- (A) reinforce Mrs. Johnson's warning.
 - (B) show the bustle of preparing to move.
 - (C) **indicate the Youngers' true feelings about Mrs. Johnson.**
 - (D) show that the Youngers are hospitable despite being busy.
 - (E) specify the props that are needed for the scene.

On the surface, the Youngers are very polite to Mrs. Johnson. Were it not for the stage directions indicating tone of voice and the business with the covert eye contact between Mama and Ruth, the audience would not know that the Youngers can barely tolerate their nosy neighbor.

18. Which of the following best suggests Mrs. Johnson's attitude toward the Youngers' moving?
- (A) "Oh honey, I can't stay hardly a minute—I just dropped in to see if there was anything I could do."
 - (B) "You sure got lovely children, Younger."
 - (C) "Oh ain't we getting ready 'round here, though! Yessir! Lookathere!"
 - (D) "But you have to think of life like it is—and these here Chicago peckerwoods is some baaaad peckerwoods."
 - (E) **"You hear some of these Negroes 'round here talking 'bout how they don't go where they ain't wanted and all that—but not me, honey!"**

This last quote is a lie, as the stage direction that follows acknowledges. Mrs. Johnson, then, is saying here that she is one who is perfectly willing to stay "in her place," and feels that the Youngers are being "uppity."

19. This scene, cut from the original production and early print editions of the play and then later restored, contributes all of the following to the play EXCEPT
- (A) exposition about the social climate of the time of the play.
 - (B) complication to the plotline involving the Youngers' move.
 - (C) emphasis on the theme of Black Pride.
 - (D) emphasis on the strength of Mama's character.
 - (E) **introduction of a foil for Beneatha.**

This is the first we learn that African-American families who have moved into the white suburbs are having their homes bombed, so (A) is eliminated. Certainly, the knowledge that the Youngers' move might place them in actual, physical danger is a complication to the plot (B). As Beneatha comments that the only thing worse than Mrs. Johnson's attitude of keeping in "one's place" is the KKK, we see (C). Mama's calm patience, her hospitality to her "neighbor," and her quiet defense of her choices clearly show (D). Beneatha, however, already has ample foils in Walter and George. Thus, (E) is the correct answer.

20. What literary device is Hansberry using when Mrs. Johnson says, “Oh—I ain’t criticizing her none.”

- (A) Allusion
- (B) Verbal Irony**
- (C) Dramatic Irony
- (D) Foreshadowing
- (E) Humor

This is a fairly easy question that gets at the entire tenor of this scene. Neither the Youngers nor Mrs. Johnson have been speaking frankly and openly. With the exception of Beneatha, no one means what he or she says in this scene.

21. Each of the following helps Hansberry to establish that Walter’s jibing of Beneatha in this scene is playful and not argumentative EXCEPT

- (A) Walter’s choice of words and jibes.**
- (B) stage directions that explain line delivery.
- (C) stage directions to have Walter and Ruth dancing.
- (D) the context of this scene’s being moving day.
- (E) Beneatha’s reaction to the jibing.

Walter’s choice of words (A) would remain essentially unchanged if he were arguing with his sister. That is why Hansberry must include stage directions (B and C) and build a playful context (D and E) to make the intent of this scene clear to the audience.

22. In terms of plot structure, the white man’s arrival is most likely

- (A) the beginning of the climax.
- (B) the introduction of a new conflict.
- (C) a significant complication.**
- (D) an anti-climactic reversal.
- (E) a turning point in the action.

(A) can be fairly easily eliminated by the fact that none of the conflicts has risen to a crisis, and, therefore, it is far too early for the climax. Likewise, it is too late to introduce a new conflict (B). Since the issue of the Youngers’ new house being in a white neighborhood has already arisen and been developed, it follows that the arrival of the white man is most likely a complication (C) of that plot line. While his arrival might signal a reversal (D) from the family’s current happiness, there is no such thing as an “anti-climactic reversal. And “turning point” (E) has the same meaning as climax (A).

23. The way Ruth and Beneatha behave toward one another in this scene can best be described as

- (A) mother-to-daughter.
- (B) sister-to-sister.**
- (C) mentor-to-protégé.
- (D) friend-to-friend.
- (E) employer-to-employee.

All of the exchanges between the two are cordial, and, while Ruth does ask for help with the packing, there is no sense of Ruth's being "superior" to Beneatha. Thus, (C) and (E) are eliminated. (D) and (A) are eliminated by the intimacies that Ruth shares and by Walter and Ruth's suggestive dancing. Given that they are, in fact, sisters-in-law, and they are friendly with one another suggests (B).

24. What literary device does Hansberry use in Walter's speech about Beneatha?

- (A) Allusion
- (B) Simile
- (C) Metaphor
- (D) Hyperbole**
- (E) Allegory

Walter jibing is in the form of exaggeration of Beneatha's newly developed radical views.

25. What does Beneatha mean by her allusion to Judas Iscariot's reward for selling Jesus into the hands of the Pharisees ("Thirty pieces and not a coin less")?

- (A) Lindner earned and then betrayed their trust.
- (B) Lindner is betraying his neighborhood by offering so much money.
- (C) Walter has betrayed his family by even talking to Lindner.
- (D) There is a price at which everyone will compromise his or her values.
- (E) Accepting Lindner's offer would be a betrayal of their race.**

Clearly, Beneatha never fully trusts Lindner, nor is he in a position to betray the Youngers (A). Because he is offering what the neighborhood association has instructed him, he is not betraying them (B). (C) is tempting, but, at the beginning of the conversation, we do not know what Lindner's intentions are. In fact, he seems to actually be welcoming the integration of his neighborhood. (D) might also be tempting, but Beneatha cites a symbolic sum of money, not an actual amount for which she might be willing to deal. Given the theme of assimilationism and African-Americans not knowing "their place," (E) is the only plausible answer.

26. Lindner's offer to buy the house from the Youngers constitutes what phase of the plot?

- (A) exposition
- (B) complication**
- (C) climax
- (D) resolution
- (E) plot point

We are too far into the play for there to be any more new or important information to be revealed (A). Yet, his offer is not the climax, as suggested by (C). The Youngers' decision has not yet been determined, so it cannot be the resolution (D), as so much is left unresolved. Nor is it a large enough event to thrust the action in a new direction in Act II (E). It is, therefore, merely a complication (B), another issue to be overcome as we approach the climax.

27. What do we learn about Lindner's character when he says "Well—I don't understand why you people are reacting this way"?

- (A) Lindner sees himself as better than they.
- (B) Lindner is naïve.**
- (C) Lindner is a racist.
- (D) Lindner is indifferent to the feelings of the Youngers.
- (E) Lindner values money over interpersonal relationships.

Lindner's words and the stage directions that guide the actor's delivery all suggest that Lindner is a good and gentle man and is embarrassed about the errand he is on. There is nothing to suggest that he is a racist (C) or feels superior to them (A), nor that he is indifferent to their feelings (D). In fact, his very demeanor, and the fact that the community is offering more money than the Youngers paid for the house might suggest that the white community does, on some level, sympathize with the family. The fact that Lindner does not understand the Youngers' indignation at his offer is strong evidence for either (B) or (E). Ultimately, (B) is the more satisfying choice because Lindner does seem to be sensitive to the need for open communications and for people to get along.

28. From reading the stage directions regarding Lindner, what type of response is Hansberry hoping to elicit from the audience to his offer?

- (A) anger
- (B) sorrow
- (C) sympathy**
- (D) hatred
- (E) jealousy

The audience is supposed to be sympathetic toward Lindner. This is evident by the many stage directions that place Lindner as uncomfortable, gentle, and compassionate. Compared to the stage directions describing Mrs. Johnson's lines, it is clear that Lindner is a different sort of man.

29. This scene constitutes what aspect of the central plot?

- (A) Plot Point 3
- (B) the final complication
- (C) the inciting incident
- (D) the climax**
- (E) the denouement

(A) The existence of a Plot Point 3 would imply a fourth act. We have reached the point where a decision has been made, and action, one way or the other, is about to be taken. Thus, we are beyond any further complications (B). The inciting incident (C) occurs in Act I, and, while the resolution of the conflict and the return to normality (E) seem imminent, we certainly have not reached that state in this scene. What happens in this scene—the confrontation and Walter’s decision, which will be played out in the next scene—is the climax (D) of the story. This is an important and often misunderstood aspect of plot, especially for those who rely solely on Freytag’s Pyramid to explain plot structure. The climax is the highest point in the action, the turning point, the moment when the outcome of the action is finally determined. That is where we are at present. There can no more complications about the use of the money. The money is gone. Walter’s self-esteem is “no longer an issue.” It is gone with the money. There need be no more dissention between Walter and Ruth, Walter and Mama, or Walter and Beneatha. Walter has made himself a persona non grata. In addition, there is no more mention of the Youngers’ being “uppity blacks” and “not knowing their place.” Walter is going to sell their sense of equality for the price of his house. At this point, there is nothing to do but either take the money or not, and either action will determine the outcome of the play. This is the climax.

30. All of the following could be indicated by this scene EXCEPT

- (A) the triumph of cynicism over idealism.
- (B) the triumph of materialism over spiritualism.
- (C) the triumph of greed over philanthropy.**
- (D) the triumph of women over men.
- (E) the triumph of despair over hope.

In this scene, Walter is disillusioned by Willy’s betrayal, and feels foolish for not paying attention to the others’ protests. Beneatha, too, is lamenting the deaths of all their dreams, and Mama is lamenting the death of their collective self-respect. Beneatha condemns Walter as “no man.” The issue of the money, however, does not involve greed (C). The money is a symbol of independence, and the freedom to realize a dream. Thus, (C) is the most appropriate answer.

A Raisin in the Sun

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Act 1, Scene 1

1. What is the setting of the story? What characteristics of the Youngers are reflected by their surroundings?

The setting is a small apartment in Chicago's Southside, sometime between 1945 and 1959. Everything in the apartment is worn down, from the curtains to the rug and the furniture. It is clear that the Youngers have lived in this apartment for a long time.

The nature of the room is parallel to that of the Youngers; they are worn down in this apartment, and they have been there quite a long time and are tired of it. However, it is also clear that they are dignified; the attempts at repairs and the attempts to cover up holes show that they try to hide any signs of their lower class.

2. What is the significance of Travis's sleeping place?

The fact that Travis sleeps on the couch in the living room emphasizes the small size of the apartment. It also suggests that, at some point in the past, this apartment was chosen as merely a temporary home, but the growing family has never been able to leave.

3. What signs of poverty do we see in the setting and in the family's early-morning routine?

The small size of the apartment with the single tiny window and the child sleeping on a foldaway couch in the living room suggest the Youngers' inability to afford a larger place. The description of how tired everything is, used for too long by too many people, also emphasizes that this is not a family of means.

4. What signs of stasis do we see in the stage directions and in the family's early-morning routine?

Again, the age and tired condition of the furnishings suggest that this apartment has been exactly the same for a long time—not even the carpeting and furniture have been changed. Still, the fact that so many people (three generations) live in such a small place suggests that this apartment was Mama and her husband's "first home" as a married couple, and that they expected to move to a larger home as their family grew.

The almost wordless routine of waking, dressing, making breakfast, and the near-comic routine of rushing to get to the bathroom—which they share with at least one neighbor on their floor—all indicate that this is exactly how this family has lived for a very long time.

5. What does the first exchange between Ruth and Walter seem to foreshadow?

This exchange is the first time we see any interaction between the married couple. They seem somewhat at odds with each other, especially on Ruth's part. Ruth does not seem to be affectionate toward Walter at all, and when confronted by some possible affection by Walter, Ruth simply gets angrier. This is indicative of the troubles to come between the two in the upcoming scenes.

Note to the Teacher: You might ask the students what exactly this might foreshadow, i.e., the fact that Ruth is pregnant.

6. Why does Walter get so angry with Ruth when she dismisses his scheme with Willy Harris? What theme does this start to develop?

Walter wishes to invest with Willy Harris so that he can become rich. Walter believes that this will allow him to build a great future for his son and for his family. He thinks that the money he would gain from this investment will enable him to accomplish his dream of becoming independent.

This is the first major point in the story where Hansberry introduces the idea of dreams. At this point, it seems like some harebrained scheme of Walter's—and it is suggested that Willy might be a questionable choice for a business partner. However, it is clear that Walter's purpose in investing would be to accomplish his dreams, not simply to accrue wealth. This idea is further developed throughout the rest of the play.

7. What does Walter want to do with the money and why? How do the other characters react thus far?

Walter wants to invest with a few other men and buy a liquor store. He sees this as a means of getting rich and achieving independence. The other members of the family have a variety of reactions, but no one supports Walter. The two main conflicts with Walter's idea seem to be moral—Mama does not want to be involved in the sale of liquor, and practical—Willy Harris does not seem to be a wise choice of business partner.

8. What are the jobs of Walter and Ruth, and why are they significant?

Walter is a chauffeur and Ruth does domestic chores (i.e., taking in laundry, cleaning the house, etc.), both of them in some form of domestic service. The fact that they wish to get out of these jobs shows their desire for financial independence—their share of the American Dream. These jobs stand in contrast with Beneatha's goal of becoming a doctor. She does not want to perform menial labor in order to get ahead in life.

9. Other than developing themes and plot, why would Hansberry include the opening scene between Walter and Ruth?

There are two reasons for this to be included. The first is exposition. In this first exchange, the audience is presented with the problems the Younger family is facing and the means by which they think they are going to solve them. The second reason is character development. With this exchange, we begin to see the characters of Ruth and Walter come alive. This development continues throughout the story, and every exchange helps to develop the characters involved.

10. Why is Walter so angry at Beneatha in their first exchange? How does it reflect on the theme of the story?

Beneatha is an intelligent young woman with the dream of becoming a doctor. Obviously, to do this she must attend medical college. Even in the 1950s, medical college was extremely expensive. Walter's mother, Lena, supports Beneatha's dream, and, therefore, is more likely to give money to Beneatha than to Walter. This makes Walter bitter and envious of Beneatha, because she is more likely to achieve her dream than he is. Beneatha's cool demeanor toward him does not help.

11. What does the following allusion mean? How does Beneatha use this allusion in the context of the play?

BENEATHA: (Turning slowly in her chair) And then there are all those prophets who would lead us out of the wilderness—(WALTER slams out of the house)—into the swamps!

This is a reference to Moses in the book of Exodus. Moses was commanded by God to lead His people (the Hebrews) out of the wilderness to the land of promise, i.e., to Israel. The allusion likens Walter to Moses. Beneatha adds "into the swamps," implying that Walter is not leading them in the right direction, particularly if he associates with Willy Harris.

12. What is the significance of the following statement of Ruth's? How does it relate to one of the themes of the play?

No. Mama, something is happening between Walter and me. I don't know what it is—but he needs something—something I can't give him anymore. He needs this chance, Lena.

This is the first point in the play where Ruth seems sensitive to Walter's needs. She knows that she cannot provide the sense of independence and self-worth for which he is longing. He must find that within himself, and if owning his own business can help him, Ruth would like to see Mama give him the chance to try.

13. What "chance" does Walter need?

Ruth is not talking about only the liquor store. Rather, Walter has a need to become an independent business owner—to be his "own man"—as well as to provide for his family, especially his son, a better living environment than the one in which they are currently living. Hansberry makes this even more evident later when Walter talks with Travis in the bedroom.

14. What is the significance of Ruth's suggestion that Mama go on a trip to a foreign land? How does it relate to the themes of the play?

If Lena were to go on a trip, Ruth would be able to vicariously experience life as an upper-class white woman. This introduces one of Ruth's dreams—to live as an upper-class white woman would live. Also, Mama going on a trip would signify that she is able to live, in the fullest meaning of the word. That is, Mama will be an example to the rest of the family of what it means to have a life in which it is possible to take trips and have fun, rather than just to work constantly and barely scrape by.

Once again, the theme of dreams appears. Ruth has this dream, and she sees the opportunity to live it, not personally, but through Mama. This is why Ruth gets so excited at the idea of Mama going on a trip: even if Ruth cannot fulfill her dream herself, she would like to see someone in her family fulfill it. This also touches on the importance of family, in that Ruth wishes the best not just for herself, but for the family as well.

15. What is the source of the money they are expecting, and how is that significant?

The \$10,000 comes from the life insurance of Mama's husband, Walter and Beneatha's father. This is particularly significant because this money, which came from the death of a family member, will eventually be used to create a new life for the family. Walter Younger, Sr., can achieve his dream of a better life for his family only through his father's death.

16. What purpose does Mama's reflection on her past life serve? What is learned about her from this? How does it relate to the themes of the play?

In this reflection, Mama describes how she and her husband were unable to achieve their own dreams, that of living with their family in a house that they owned. This reflects the classic American Dream of home ownership, financial independence, etc. It also shows how shattered dreams can change people. As the reader, we never see how it affected Big Walter, but it is very clear how it affected Mama. She was unable to achieve ownership of a house, and thus she has taken it upon herself to attempt to fulfill her children's dreams instead. However, the reader is lead to believe that by helping her children, Mama will eventually be able to see her own dream come to fruition.

17. What allusion is Beneatha making in the following passage? What do we learn about Beneatha's character from this?

BENEATHA: Well—if the salt loses its savor—

This alludes to the passage in Matthew 5:13 in which Jesus makes an analogy using salt: if salt loses its flavor, there is no need to keep it around. Beneatha is taunting her mother and Ruth, responding sarcastically to Ruth's insult that Beneatha is "fresh as salt." She knows that this Biblical reference – immediately following her swearing—will annoy her mother. It is clear that Beneatha, when angered, does not hesitate to anger or hurt other people. She is quick-tempered and something of a loose cannon.

18. Why does Beneatha feel such antipathy toward George? What themes does this start to bring up?

George represents two things. The first is the wealthy upper-class status that Beneatha and her family will most likely never attain. Beneatha is slightly jealous of this. George also represents the male who neither believes a woman should dream of becoming a doctor, nor understands what it means to have this kind of dream. He has never needed to work for anything; everything in his life has been given to him. This infuriates Beneatha, whose family has always struggled financially and who is struggling to become a doctor. To have George so casually dismiss her life-long goal makes her dislike him greatly, particularly since he wants her to accept her role as the woman in his life rather than have a life of her own. This dialogue brings about two things: it broaches the issue of feminism, and it also brings about the idea of assimilationism. George represents the man who wants his future wife to simply stay at home and care for the house, tend the children, etc.; he does not want Beneatha to have her own career. George also represents the African American who has completely bought into the white middle class American Dream, which has most likely contributed significantly to his family's financial success.

19. Why does Mama seem happy when Beneatha discusses her various activities, despite the fact that they never last and are constantly changing? Does Ruth feel the same way as Mama? How does this relate to one of the themes of the play?

The fact that Beneatha even has these various opportunities makes Mama happy. She is glad that her child is able to try different activities, regardless of whether or not she continues with them. Beneatha does things that Mama never had a chance to do. It seems that Ruth, if not feeling entirely the same as Mama, is not angry or upset with Beneatha. Rather, she seems to find it somewhat amusing that Beneatha keeps trying different activities.

20. How does the lack of stage directions in the written dialogue create a sense of ambiguity regarding Ruth's reaction to Mama and Beneatha's argument? What does this show about the importance of stage directions? How would the audience's experience differ if the play was being seen rather than read?

Since there are no stage directions regarding Ruth in this scene, there is no clear idea of how Ruth is meant to react. This shows the importance of stage directions when reading and interpreting a play, in that without them, the reader must delve into the character's mind to interpret reactions and feelings. If this play were being seen, it would be obvious how Ruth reacts—she would be visibly reacting to the events on stage, and the audience would be able to see those reactions.

21. How is conflict introduced in the play? How is this different from the way it is introduced in novels? What types of conflict have been shown thus far in *A Raisin in the Sun*?

*In plays, conflict is introduced largely through characters and what they represent. For example, in *A Raisin in the Sun*, three generations are living under one roof. This allows for generational conflict, especially between Mama and her children. A married couple, a brother-sister pair, and a young woman with her beaux allow for gender conflict. Characters with conflicting ideals and goals allow Beneatha to represent a feminist view as well as an anti-assimilationist view. Each of these conflicts will affect – and is affected by – the arrival of the insurance money.*

22. Having been introduced to the Younger family, the status quo of their daily lives, and the various relationships and conflicts in which they move and work and live, what is likely to be the “inciting incident”: that event which will begin to move the plot (and the development of the characters) toward crisis?

The inciting incident will more than likely be the arrival of the insurance check.

Act 1, Scene 2

1. Why does Mama look at Beneatha when she speaks to Travis about his mother? Why does she lie to Travis?

Mama's look is a warning to Beneatha; Mama does not want Travis to know that Ruth is pregnant and is at the doctor's office because this would only worry the boy. Thus, she tells Travis that Ruth is out on an errand and will be back eventually.

2. Why would Hansberry include this small exchange in the play when it does not seem to develop any of the themes?

This little scene may seem insignificant, but it develops Mama's character. Once again, we see how protective Mama is of her family. Hansberry uses similar minor interactions to develop the characters throughout the play. As a playwright, Hansberry must develop characters through dialogue because there is no narration that can do it for her.

3. What is the significance of the fact that Walter does not know where Ruth is?

This issue helps to emphasize the growing marital problems between Ruth and Walter. They clearly do not communicate, and Ruth's pregnancy is an important issue for them to talk about.

4. What is the significance of the discussion between Mama and Beneatha about Africa? What might Beneatha represent?

In this conversation, Mama represents a colonial/imperialist view of Africans as savages who need to be "saved" and "civilized." Beneatha represents the beginning of the postcolonial view of Africans as people who are only in need of the freedom to be themselves. Mama apparently donates money to missionary causes, while Beneatha believes that American and European missionaries do more harm than good in Africa.

5. Why does Hansberry give Beneatha two boyfriends?

Hansberry uses these two men to show the issues with which Beneatha is struggling. George, on the one hand, represents total assimilation into white culture. Asagai, on the other hand, represents Black Pride and African heritage. The fact that Beneatha is placed between these two men shows that, as an African American, she is ambivalently stuck between being an assimilationist and being proud of her African heritage. Eventually, Beneatha chooses Asagai, and, thus, her African heritage, over the assimilationist viewpoint embodied by George.

6. What does the following statement by Beneatha reveal about her character?

BENEATHA It is my business—where is he going to live, on the roof?

This is another point that reveals Beneatha's explosive and apparently selfish character. Beneatha easily gets worked up into a fury, and when angry, says things she does not actually mean, just as she did in Scene 1 with the comment about salt losing its savor. Through these reactions, it can be gathered that Beneatha is spoiled: she has no qualms about hurting her family's feelings when she is angry.

7. What is Mama suggesting when she says to Beneatha: "I guess I see why we done commence to get so interested in Africa 'round here"?

Mama is clearly suggesting that Beneatha is not really interested in Africa, but is pretending to be so in order to make Asagai like her.

8. Why is Ruth upset by Travis's talk of the rat?

The fact that Travis is so intrigued by a rat, rather than being afraid, seems to emphasize his life of poverty. Normally, kids would be disgusted and frightened by rats, especially one that is bleeding and dying; the fact that it intrigues Travis shows that he is inured to the effects of poverty: what Beneatha will refer to later on as "acute ghetto-itis." This upsets Ruth because it serves as yet another reminder of her own poverty, and her inability to give her son a better life.

9. What do the Nigerian robes symbolize?

The Nigerian robes symbolize African heritage. Later, Beneatha will put these robes on and become a "Nigerian Princess," symbolizing her acceptance of her heritage.

10. What is significant about the exchange between Beneatha and Asagai about Beneatha's hair? What does it reveal about each of the characters?

Asagai sees Beneatha's haircut as an example of assimilationism—an acceptance of white oppression and a rejection of her African heritage. To Asagai, this is the worst thing an African American can do.

The fact that he explains the issue softly and gently shows his gentle, yet strong nature.

Beneatha, of course, reacts angrily to Asagai's criticism and judgment. She sees herself as a non-conformist, but Asagai makes her face the fact that she is not living up to her own ideal.

11. Might Beneatha's anger hide another emotion, and if so, how is this significant?

Beneatha's anger is definitely covering a feeling of sadness toward even this small assimilation into white American life. The fact that she later gets her hair cut shows that she recognizes that she had indeed been conforming to the ideas around her. When she gets her hair cut, she also cuts herself loose from her former assimilationist ideas, and begins to accept her African heritage.

12. What is the significance of the meaning of the word "Alaiyo"? What subtle glimpse into Beneatha's soul does this conversation provide?

Asagai roughly translates "Alaiyo" to mean "One for Whom Bread Is Not Enough." What this means is that Asagai sees Beneatha as someone who has a longing that will not be filled by material possessions alone. She is experiencing a spiritual longing. Beneatha's soft acceptance of this assessment of herself shows that she does indeed see herself in this light. She is very pleased that Asagai sees her as she sees herself. Finally we see a side of Beneatha that is not just spoiled and demanding.

13. Why do you think Hansberry selected the name "Beneatha" for this character? What does Asagai's use of a different name imply and foreshadow? How then might the character's name be ambiguous?

Hansberry may have selected the name Beneatha to represent the oppression of African-American women, drawing on the word 'beneath.' Beneatha struggles against any reference to being subservient, which is often the cause of her conflict with the rest of the family. When Asagai calls her Alaiyo, he is supporting her notion of her independence and her desire to do more with her life than remain beneath the rest of the world. After Asagai gives her this nickname, however, the name Beneatha could also point to the character's spiritual, "Alaiyo" nature, which dwells beneath the physical exterior.

14. What does the allusion "this here can is empty as Jacob's kettle" mean? How does Hansberry use it in this scene?

This is a biblical allusion to John 4:6, in which Jesus is sitting at Jacob's well and talks with a Samaritan woman who has come to fill her water bucket (kettle). Jesus tells her that a water bucket is constantly empty, but if she believes, then her kettle will never be empty because it will be filled with the living water of God. Hansberry uses this allusion to emphasize Mama's need to keep the appearance of a nice home. Mama's can of kitchen cleanser is always empty because she must at least keep her home very clean, since she cannot keep it looking new.

15. What does the following statement by Beneatha's foreshadow? What does Mama's confusion show? What is Hansberry saying by including the subsequent stage direction?

BENEATHA (*Halting at the door*) To become a queen of the Nile!
(*She exits in a breathless blaze of glory...*)

This statement is the turning point for Beneatha, showing that she has fully accepted her African heritage. It foreshadows two things: first, that she will allow her hair to return to its natural state, and second, that Beneatha will get together with Asagai and possibly go to Africa with him.

Mama is confused because she does not understand the reference to the queen of the Nile. This shows Mama's ignorance of their African heritage and its significance to Beneatha.

Hansberry's stage direction may also reflect something of her own beliefs. The fact that Beneatha leaves in a "blaze of glory" may suggest Hansberry's approval of Beneatha's new mindset.

16. Why is there so much apprehension about the check? What does the check symbolize, from both a plot standpoint and a dramatic standpoint?

Everyone is worried about the check arriving safely because the check is the physical symbol of their freedom from their current life. The check represents an outside force that enters into their lives and changes everything, for better or for worse. From a dramatic standpoint, the check's arrival instigates the point of crisis in the play.

17. What, if any of the family's current conflicts has the issue of the insurance money caused?

The issue of the money has caused none of the family's conflicts. With or without the arrival of the insurance check, Walter would still long for independence and a sense of self worth. Ruth's pregnancy would still add a burden to the family. Walter's power struggles with Ruth and Mama would still simmer and Beneatha would still be willful and spoiled. The issue of the check serves only to exacerbate the conflicts that already exist.

18. How does the mood of the play change when the postman rings the doorbell?

The ringing of the doorbell signifies that the check has finally arrived. This is the beginning of the "inciting incident," and now the action and emotional mood will begin to rise to its crisis or climax.

19. Why does Walter get so upset with Ruth and Mama?

Walter exclaims at one point, “Will somebody please listen to me today?” Later, he is upset that Mama has decided about the liquor store without even seeing it; from his perspective, she does not have enough information, has not “listened” enough, to have made a decision. When she rebukes him—as if he were still a child—he responds, “I’m a grown man.” But neither Ruth nor Mama treats him like a grown man. There is an issue that needs to be discussed—Ruth’s pregnancy—but Walter does not know that there is an issue. From his perspective, he enters the apartment excited about the money, and is dismissed and treated like a child.

20. What is the significance of the exchange between Mama and Walter? What do we learn about each from this incident?

Mama wants what is best for the family, but she clearly does not understand her son. She knows something is wrong, but does not know what, and essentially accuses Walter of having an affair when he is not. Walter admits that he does not think he is able to make her understand his feelings and motives.

We also learn that Walter is “restless,” dissatisfied with his current life, and feeling as if the people he loves, and who are supposed to love him, do not understand him, rarely even giving him the chance to speak.

21. How is Mama and Walter’s conflict generational, as well as a clash of ideals?

Mama explains to Walter that for her generation, freedom from lynching, the end of segregation, and the ability to find work were all considerable social advancements. Walter and Beneatha have never known the problems Mama and her husband faced, but they are aware of the social and financial inequalities that still exist, and which that they would like to eradicate. Mama, however, seems to feel as though Walter and Beneatha’s generation takes the civil rights advancements of her generation for granted, and possibly that the life they fought for should be enough for her children.

Walter, however, wants more for himself and his family.

22. What is the significance of the last exchange between Ruth, Walter, and Mama about the abortion?

In most cultures, the arrival of a child is a blessed, wonderful thing, the continuation of the culture into the next generation. Ruth, however, has reached a point of despair. In her eyes, the present is so intolerable and the future so bleak that she would rather destroy the next generation than bring a child into a life of poverty and hopelessness.

Walter is either more optimistic, or in greater denial. He does not appreciate the depth of Ruth's despair, and cannot imagine her choosing not to have their baby. Mama, however, can see into Ruth's mind and heart and knows what she intends.

Mama sees an abortion as inconceivable for a number of reasons: first there are her religious beliefs. Second, she lost a child herself and knows the never-ending pain that can accompany the experience. Finally, while she seems to understand Ruth's despair, she does not condone her action. For Mama, the next generation their hope.

Another issue that arises is that of Walter's manhood: how he defines it and how his mother defines it.

23. Having seen several conflicts unfold in the play at this point, which of these would have arisen regardless of the arrival of the check? Why would Hansberry include these? Which issues might have simply festered under the surface?

The conflicts of Ruth's pregnancy and Beneatha's assimilation would have arisen without the introduction of the check. Hansberry includes these in order to give the characters a sense of roundness. If everything simply revolved around the money, the play would seem somewhat coincidental and shallow. However, with these other conflicts involved, the Youngers seem like a real family facing real problems. The other conflicts, such as the special treatment that Beneatha receives from Mama, Walter's resentment at not being head of the house, etc., might not have come to the foreground without the arrival of the check. The reader may wonder how these situations might have festered in the minds of the characters if these conflicts had not been brought to the forefront.

Act 2, Scene 1

1. What do Beneatha's new attire and haircut symbolize?

Beneatha's hair and African attire are symbolic of her break with assimilationism and the emergence of what would come to be called "Black Pride." It also symbolizes her acceptance of Asagai and his beliefs, and her decision to risk George's disapproval.

Note to Teacher: Pearl Bailey, mentioned in the stage directions, was a successful African-American singer/dancer and comedian. Her career started in vaudeville, and she later became a popular Broadway performer. She had no formal musical training and gave credit for her musical talent to having grown up a "Holy Roller." Given the "bluesy" type of music she was known to sing, and the characters she created in vaudeville, the stage direction suggests that Ruth is mocking Beneatha, egging her on with questions asked in a comical voice.

2. What is the importance of the scene between Beneatha and Walter? What theme does it relate to?

This mystical scene symbolizes a connection between African heritage and modern day. Even though Beneatha and Walter have never been to Africa and have never studied African history, they suddenly are able to connect to the past in a very mystical way. This is representative of the Afrocentrism that Hansberry portrays at various points throughout the play. Hansberry is able to make this scene believable, and at the same time make it mysterious enough that her underlying message comes through: all African Americans are able to connect to their roots, even if they have never previously done so.

3. Why does George react so negatively to Beneatha's dress and hair? What does he represent? How does his attitude contrast with Beneatha's attitude?

George is a symbol of the assimilated African American, who has been dominated by white influence. He represents the ultimate assimilation into white society, and is a foil to Beneatha in that he is everything she does not want to be. He dislikes her dress because he sees the African influence in it, and in his position of wealth and power in the white world he sees such Afrocentrism as degrading, and possibly even dangerous. In contrast to George, Beneatha wants to embrace her heritage and not assimilate. In this scene we see the possibility for future conflict between Beneatha and George that arises due to their difference in social class and ideology.

4. Why is Walter rude to George? What does this foreshadow?

For the first time in the play, we see in this scene Walter accepting his African heritage. At first, Walter is jealous of George's wealth and power; this is what Walter would like his own son to have. However, at the same time, George is more or less a white man to Walter, as emphasized by George's white shoes. The fact that there is conflict between them foreshadows conflict between the Youngers and the white community in which they will be living.

5. Why does Walter attempt to talk business with George? How does this relate to the theme of dreams?

This shows how Walter obsessed is with his dream of becoming a successful businessman. He wants this opportunity so badly that he will even conspire with someone he would normally assume to be his enemy; he will stop at nothing to fulfill his desire for a better life. This is the first time we really comprehend just how obsessed Walter is. Until Act 2, Scene 3, this is the driving motivation for practically everything Walter does.

6. What is the significance of the following speech by Walter, and George's reaction to it?

WALTER: And you—ain't you bitter, man? Ain't you just about had it yet? Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? You happy?...You got it made?...Here I am a giant—surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what it is the giant is talking about.

The audience learns two things from this speech. First, regarding the "giant surrounded by ants," we see Walter's frustration at the lack of understanding from his family regarding his plan to buy the liquor store. None of them support him, and he is frustrated that they don't understand him. This is further demonstrated when he says, "No! 'Cause ain't nobody with me! Not even my own mother!" Second, Walter is pointing out George's lack of true empathy for his "own people," and how George has always been given anything he wants. This unsettles George, and he does not know how to react. This is possibly the first time in his life that George is confronted with his own superficiality, and he is completely taken aback.

7. What does George's allusion to Prometheus mean? How does it relate to the play?

Prometheus was a Greek god who stole fire from the other gods and gave it to humans, disobeying a direct order from Zeus. For punishment, Prometheus was chained to a rock and had his liver eaten by a vulture (or an eagle) every day. This allusion serves two purposes: first, Walter is attempting to "steal the fire" from the powerful whites by becoming a successful businessman rather than a servant; and second, Walter is suffering on behalf of all African Americans, just as Prometheus suffered for mankind. Through their unfamiliarity with the story of Prometheus, Hansberry reminds the reader of Walter and Ruth's lack of education and their life of poverty.

8. What is the significance of the exchange between Ruth and Walter? What happens between them? Is anything resolved? What does this foreshadow?

This is the first time in the play where we see calm dialogue between the couple. In this exchange, they lay their problems on the table for each other to see. While nothing is really resolved, they at least forgive each other and attempt to repair their marriage. The scene culminates with a kiss immediately after Ruth speaks about the death of their dreams. This harkens back to the title of the play, which comes from the Langston Hughes poem, "A Dream Deferred." This scene foreshadows the fact that things may improve between the couple, as indeed they do in Act 2, Scene 3, when Ruth and Walter have go on a date for the first time in a long while.

9. Since this exchange between Ruth and Walter does not seem to develop any themes in the play, why would Hansberry have put this scene into the play?

This is another example of how Hansberry develops characters. The characters need to be realistic, and this discussion between Ruth and Walter adds depth to their characters. Hansberry also needs to maintain audience sympathy for both characters.

10. Why does Mama wait until Travis is there to tell where she went? What does this show about Mama's motivation?

The fact that Travis is there is likely to prevent Walter from exploding in rage when Mama shares her news. Also, her waiting for Travis indicates that Travis, although only a child, is still an important member of the family in Mama's eyes. She wants her grandson to have a better life than she was able to give her own children. This shows the importance of family unity, once again expressed by Mama.

11. Why does Mama look for acceptance from Walter?

Mama bought the house because she thought it was best for her family. She wants to provide a nice home and a better life for her family, especially Walter, as Mama has seen him slipping away from her and the family. We also see that, despite Mama's tough exterior, she really wants people to see her as caring and compassionate. This underlying motivation is a key part of Mama's character.

12. What does the reaction of Mama's children to the location of their new house foreshadow?

The fact that they all are afraid of living in an all-white neighborhood foreshadows trouble. This comes in the form of Lindner in Act 2, Scene 3. However, the fact that they recover, are in good spirits in the upcoming scenes, and are excited about the move shows that the Youngers remain hopeful. They want to get out of their apartment even if it means moving into a white neighborhood.

13. What complications or obstacles arise in this scene?

There are two complications in this scene. The first is for Walter. So far, everything in this scene has only pushed Walter farther away from his dreams of financial independence and a better life for his family. Second, just when it seems as if their dreams are coming to fruition with the new house that Mama buys, the complication of being in a white neighborhood arises. These two complications will play out through the rest of the act.

Act 2, Scene 2

1. Why is George so frustrated with Beneatha? How does this reinforce what we learned about George in Act 2, Scene 1? Why did Hansberry introduce a character such as George?

As previously noted, George represents the status quo of the affluent African-American man assimilated into white culture. In this scene, George also represents the status quo in terms of gender relations, and his actions actually bring about within Beneatha the beginning of a personal “Women’s Liberation” movement. He is frustrated by Beneatha’s desire to change the world and to have a better place in the world. He sees it as unnecessary for her to worry about these issues, because he already has everything they would need as a married couple. This is emphasized by the conversation about learning—George sees education simply as a means to make money. Once married to him, Beneatha will not need to work for money, so she will have no need to go to school. Beneatha, on the other hand, is concerned about actually learning the material in order to make a difference in the world. This relates to Beneatha’s name given to her by Asagai—one for whom bread is not enough. This difference is essential to understanding Beneatha’s dislike of George: she cannot abide someone who does not understand the value of spiritual strength and knowledge versus the value of material wealth.

Hansberry uses George as a foil to allow Beneatha to examine her personal beliefs about life. George represents material success, which is important to her mother and Ruth. However, Beneatha is astute enough to realize that she will have to sacrifice her own beliefs for this material comfort.

2. Why does Beneatha thank Mama? Why do you think Mama changes her opinion? What does this represent for Mama’s character?

Having decided that she will give up the position of head of the family to Walter, Mama no longer has a real say in what her kids do. Also, Mama finally understands, from her discussion with Walter, that she might not know exactly what is best for her children. She has learned to accept their own judgment about their own lives. This is the precursor to Mama’s giving Walter the money.

It also shows that Mama does have faith in her children’s judgment. This is a turning point in Mama’s character. Before this, Mama seemed to be the sole decision-maker in the house. This is the first point in the story where we see Mama accepting her child’s decision and thinking that perhaps she does not know exactly what is best for her children. This culminates later on when Mama gives Walter the money.

3. Why do the Youngers dislike Mrs. Johnson? How does Hansberry use Mrs. Johnson to illustrate the Youngers' attitude?

Mrs. Johnson is two things. First, she is simply a nosy gossip. More important, she also represents an African American who has accepted the white oppression of the day. This is the opposite of the stance held by the Youngers, who believe in struggling to fight oppression, even if only in a mild fashion. Mrs. Johnson, by contrast, sees the struggle as futile and has given up. She even quotes Booker T. Washington to support her ideas, but Mama quickly responds, calling Washington a fool.

4. How do the stage directions in this scene help the reader? What is different for an audience seeing the play?

Mrs. Johnson represents what Hansberry thinks is the wrong attitude for African Americans, as is evident in her use of such stage directions as "this is a lie," "insincere sense of melodrama," etc. An audience seeing the play performed never gets to read these stage directions, and it is up to the actors to be able to convey these directions through their acting.

5. What does Mrs. Johnson's visit foreshadow? How does this scene further develop the complications that arose in the previous scene?

Mrs. Johnson speaks of the bombings in Chicago. This foreshadows the type of trouble the Youngers might expect if they persist in their plan to move into a white neighborhood.

6. What does Beneatha mean by the following statement?

BENEATHA: (At her door) Mama, if there are two things we, as a people, have got to overcome, one is the Ku Klux Klan—and the other is Mrs. Johnson.

Beneatha is commenting on Mrs. Johnson's acceptance of white oppression. The fact that she equates it to the KKK shows Beneatha's strong belief that not only must they fight against white oppression, but they also must refuse to accept complacency among the African-American population. African Americans must band together as a group to fight, rather than being divided.

7. What is the significance of Ruth's reaction to Walter's absence at work? What conflict is demonstrated here?

Ruth is upset that Walter would skip work to pursue his purchase of the liquor store. The fact that she does not know he has skipped work is another sign of their lack of communication. Just as Walter did not know about Ruth's pregnancy earlier in the play, Ruth is unaware of important events in Walter's life. This lack of communication is evidence of trouble within their marriage. This quarrel is also an instance of the gender conflict, an issue that appears throughout the play.

8. Why does Mama give Walter the remaining money? How does this relate to the themes of the play?

This is the point where we see Mama's character completely turn around; she has finally and discovered what is driving Walter's business scheme, and she realizes exactly what he needs and how she can give it to him. Just as we saw earlier in Mama's exchange with Beneatha, Mama has begun to understand her children and trust them as adults. Mama's action illustrates two themes. The first is the importance of dreams. Mama has finally come to understand what she did to her son when she refused to give him the money. Thus, she changes her mind in the hope that her own dream will be fulfilled: seeing her children happy, and in a better place. It also illustrates the theme of the importance of family; Mama, who embodies this value, has given up the reins of power and all of her money to Walter so that his pride and sense of self-respect return. In this, the conflict between the material and the spiritual is seen once again.

9. What does the money symbolize for Walter?

Walter is finally able to articulate his dream in his speech to his son: a desire for a better place and a better lifestyle for his family, in addition to the ability to be financially independent and self-reliant. To Walter, this money provides the means of gaining equal footing with white America.

10. In the original production of the play, the scene between Walter and Travis was cut. How would this affect the play in terms of character development, impact on the audience, etc.?

The original production omitted this scene because the play was too long. They saw this scene as unnecessary to achieve the revelations concerning dreams, family, independence, etc., that Hansberry desired. The impact that this omission had, of course, is that the audience did not see the compassionate side of Walter. This scene further develops Walter's character, and without this scene, Walter would seem much less sympathetic and caring. Of course, there are other places where he is caring and loving, but this is the ultimate expression of his sincerity and love for his family.

Act 2, Scene 3

1. Why would Hansberry choose to have Ruth singing at the beginning of this scene?

Singing, especially in the manner in which Hansberry depicts Ruth to be singing, is usually representative of a happy mood. This is true of Ruth in this scene, as she is very happy to finally be moving out of the house. Later in the scene, Walter sings as well, representing his own happiness at leaving the apartment.

Note to Teacher: This is the first time during the play in which we see any of the characters appearing to be truly happy. Until this point, the characters have been at best feigning happiness, and at worst have been down in the depths. You may want to point this out to students, and ask what exactly is significant about this turn of events.

2. What is the significance of the following statement by Beneatha? How does the fact that this is a play amplify the importance of this statement?

BENEATHA: *(Laughing to herself)* I guess I always think things have more emphasis if they are big, somehow.

This serves to develop Beneatha's character. If the reader applies this statement to all of Beneatha's actions, both before and after this point, it is clear that her statement is true. Ruth's response shows that, while Walter and Beneatha may have different opinions on some things, they are alike and are definitely brother and sister. Since this is a play, there are only two ways to develop the characters: through actions and through dialogue. This is an example of where Hansberry uses dialogue to convey the qualities of her characters.

3. Why is Ruth happy about having gone to the movies and having held hands with Walter? How is this significant in relation to Walter?

This is the first instance where the audience sees actual affection between Ruth and Walter. The reader can infer that, now that Walter has what he thinks he needs (an opportunity to rise above his current station in life) he is able to behave once again as a loving father and husband. While the reader knows that Walter has been focused on attaining a better life for his family all along, not all of the other characters have understood this. The audience learns that Walter thinks he has accomplished his dream of gaining self-respect, financial independence, and a better life for his family.

4. What is the significance of the banter among Walter, Ruth, and Beneatha right before Lindner comes to the apartment? Thinking of the three-act plot structure, what does this seem to precede and perhaps foreshadow?

Again, this is the first time in the play in which the Youngers appear to be genuinely happy. This is a sign that they perceive themselves as moving up in the world. The fact that the tension has lessened gives the impression that there is no more conflict between them and they see their move to the new house as the way to solve all their problems. They believe that they have either accomplished their dreams or that their dreams are very close to being actualized. Of course, this precedes the second plot point, which will thrust the story in an unexpected direction: the appearance of Lindner.

5. What is the significance of Lindner talking with Walter rather than with Mama?

The reader learns that Mama has given up the reins of the family, for better or for worse. Walter is now the head of the family.

6. What is Lindner implying when he says the following line? What do we learn about Lindner?

We feel...we feel that most of the trouble in this world, when you come right down to it...most of the trouble exists because people just don't sit down and talk to each other.

There are two main conclusions to be drawn from this statement. The first is that Lindner is convinced that he is right and believes that after a good discussion, the Youngers will agree with him. Also, in terms of the bigger picture, Lindner is implying that African Americans, such as the Youngers, do not listen to white people enough to understand them.

7. Explain the following allusion.

BENEATHA: Thirty pieces and not a coin less!

This allusion refers to the thirty silver pieces that Judas received for betraying Jesus. Beneatha uses this allusion to compare Linder to the Jewish priests who brought about Jesus's betrayal and death. She is saying that if the Youngers take the money from Linder, they would be like Judas, betraying their heritage and the struggle that has taken place thus far.

8. Why does Walter ask Lindner the following question? What is its significance?

You got any more to say 'bout how people ought to sit down and talk to each other?

In this reversal of Lindner's earlier statement, Walter is revealing Lindner's hypocrisy. Walter feels that Lindner is neither listening to nor attempting to understand the Youngers; he is simply trying to make the Youngers listen to him. In this statement, we see Hansberry's opinions come to life in Walter.

9. What does Lindner mean when he makes the following statement?

LINDNER: (Almost sadly regarding WALTER) You just can't force people to change their hearts, son.

Lindner is saying that Walter can't change the neighborhood's opinion of African Americans through the use of force. He believes that it is through talk and peaceful discussion that such things will be resolved.

10. Based on the interactions between the Youngers and Lindner, do you think Hansberry agrees with Lindner's statement about the need for the different ethnic groups to talk? What ambiguities do you see?

Through Lindner's final statement, Hansberry expresses her opinion about race relations in the United States. It may seem that Hansberry does not think that force and violence solves anything, but she puts these words into the mouth of the only white character in the entire play. Thus, Hansberry's opinion is somewhat ambiguous. Although Lindner is not blatantly racist (e.g., he's not a member of the KKK), he does not want African Americans living in his neighborhood. Lindner's discussion with the Youngers does not go very well, and through Lindner's comments, Hansberry shows that people often do not listen to others despite their own pleas for reasonable discussion. This development leads the reader to conclude that Hansberry believes that white people need to start listening and attempting to understand African Americans if there is ever to be peace; otherwise, violence may result, as implied in the last line of Langston Hughes's poem: "...or does it explode?"

11. Why does Mama go to fix her plant? Comparing this to previous instances where the plant is mentioned, what do you think the plant symbolizes?

Perhaps the most blatant symbol in the play, the plant symbolizes the Youngers, and Mama's care for it symbolizes her care for her family. Thus, Mama going to fix the plant symbolizes her attempt to fix her family. As she says later, she's fixing the plant (and thus her family) "so it won't get hurt none on the way." Throughout the play, the fact that the plant is not thriving is representative of the fact that the Youngers are not doing well as a family.

12. Why do the other Youngers give Mama a present? What is its significance?

The Youngers give Mama a present because it is only with her help that they achieve their dreams. They finally realize that Mama has always done what she thinks best for them. They decide to help her achieve her dream of having a full and healthy family, as symbolized by a garden. Thus, giving her the garden tools is a symbol of their acceptance of Mama's dream, their willingness to be a part of it for her sake, and of their realization that they have an obligation to help her to be happy as well. This possibility of the new garden should be compared to the plant that Mama currently has. If Mama were to have a full garden, as opposed to a simple plant, it would be symbolic of the family's finally achieving their dreams.

13. How does Walter's loss of the money fit into the plot structure?

This is Plot Point II. This unexpected reversal sends the plot in an entirely new direction. Walter seems completely and utterly defeated. Also, this point brings up many questions, such as whether or not Mama is really surprised that Walter gives the money to Willie, whether the family will still move, and how Walter will redeem himself.

Act 3, Scene 1

1. Why would Hansberry choose to relate the setting of Act 3 to that of Act 1?

The fact that Hansberry draws this parallel in the stage directions shows that she doesn't want her readers to miss a key fact: that nothing seems to have changed. However, this is a red herring. Although the Youngers seems to have come full circle, there has been a change: they are finally going to move out to what they think is a better place.

2. What is the significance of Asagai's opening statement?

Asagai represents progress in this novel, so it is only natural that he would appreciate packing up and moving, as it is a sign of progress. The fact that it reminds him of Africa is representative of the fact that, at least in Africa, there is a sense of cultural pride. He contrasts Africa with the United States, saying that Africa is "full of the flow of life," while to him, the United States is stagnant.

3. Why doesn't Beneatha want to be a doctor any more?

Because Walter and her mother have spent all the money, Beneatha feels that she can no longer go to medical school, and that her future is ruined. Beneatha sees her dream of becoming a doctor as childish, and not suited to an adult. She does not think that curing physical illnesses is enough because these ailments are simple compared to the more complex societal problems she has experienced. Beneatha feels that her dream will not be beneficial enough to humanity, relating the loss of her dream of becoming a doctor to the lost dreams of humanity.

4. What does Asagai mean by the following statement?

ASAGAI: Then isn't there something wrong in a house—in a world—where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?

Asagai is questioning the justice of a society in which progress can be made only at the expense of a human life, in reference to the insurance check.

5. How does Hansberry use Asagai to reflect the themes of *A Raisin in the Sun* in his final exchange with Beneatha?

In addition to representing progress, Asagai represents the actualization of dreams. In Africa, he dreamed of coming to the United States and becoming a learned man. He achieved this goal by his own willpower and effort. Asagai also serves as Hansberry's means for Beneatha to resolve her own conflicts with her family and to choose her path in life.

6. Why does Asagai ask Beneatha to come to Africa?

The first and obvious answer is a romantic interest. The deeper reason is that Asagai wants Beneatha to understand progress and dream fulfillment the way he does. By taking her to the place of her roots, Asagai hopes that she will come to understand her own culture and how she can help herself.

7. Compare the progression of Beneatha's relationships to the progression of Walter's dreams in terms of plot structure. Are both sub-plots building to a climax? Is one winding down to a conclusion?

Beneatha's plot line is rapidly approaching a climax. Her relationship with George is going downhill, and her relationship with Asagai is more or less coming to fruition. However, her story has not fully reached its climax yet. In contrast, Walter's sub-plot already reached a climax with the loss of his money to Willy. His story is winding down to a conclusion, but has yet to be resolved. The final resolution will occur when he faces Lindner for the second time.

8. Why does Beneatha insult Walter?

First, true to her nature, Beneatha is incensed by Walter's actions and lashes out at him. This is an established part of her character, and Hansberry is consistent in this portrayal of Beneatha. Second, Walter was the person who destroyed Beneatha's dream by wasting the insurance money. Beneatha's negative reaction toward Walter is therefore partly a response to Walter's negativity about her dream.

9. What is the real reason Mama is so upset? What do we finally see as Mama's underlying dream and motivation?

The obvious answer is that Walter shattered the dreams of everyone in the house, and because she gave Walter the money, she is ultimately responsible for everyone's unhappiness. However, she also acknowledges another reason for her disappointment—she wanted to prove everyone wrong who told her that she aimed too high with her goal of giving her children a nice place to live. The traditional white view in this era was that the African Americans should “know their place” and not try to improve their socio-economic status; therefore, Mama is angry because she has tried to defy this view, but at this point, she feels she has failed.

Note to Teacher: You may want to ask students to go back and find instances of this dream in earlier passages.

10. What is the significance of Walter's calling Lindner "The Man"?

This shows that Walter has given up completely. He has succumbed to oppression, and his use of this phrase reinforces the point that Linder has all the power in this situation: the term "The Man" is commonly used to refer to "The Establishment," the government, or other persons wielding great power. However, underlying this apparent acceptance is a great bitterness that eventually forces Walter to change his mind, as seen later in this act.

11. What is the significance of Walter's speeches to the family about "bad people" and "good people"? Where are we in terms of the dramatic structure of the plot, and what do these speeches foreshadow?

Walter shows his utter desolation in this speech. Any earlier naivety and idealism have been replaced by sheer cynicism. He now understands Willy Harris's principles, and believes that "he who takes most is smartest." Walter is definitely at his lowest point in the play. This is the point at which Walter seems to be completely destroyed. Thus, the speech foreshadows his eventual rise, as explained in the answer to question 17.

12. Why does Hansberry have Walter say, "I'm going to put on the show"? What theme does this statement touch on?

Although Walter has expressed extreme bitterness in the past, he seemed to believe in everything he was saying up to this point. With this statement, Hansberry is showing another side of Walter. This single phrase shows that he is just speaking out of anger and does not like any of Linder's offers. He does not like the fact that he is considering accepting money from Linder any more than the rest of the family does. However, he believes that by doing this he is doing what is best for the family, similar to the way in which Mama thought she was doing what was best for the family when she bought the house and gave Walter the money. In this way, we see a parallel drawn between these two characters.

13. Why does Mama react the way she does to Walter?

Mama is concerned about the family's dignity. If they give in here, they will be simply another African-American family who has given in to white oppression. In this case, they will then be part of the problem, like Mrs. Johnson, not part of the solution.

14. Why does Hansberry have Walter revert to dialect when talking about taking money from Mr. Linder?

This dialect shows Walter lowering himself to the level of stereotype or caricature, i.e., "putting on a show." Hansberry uses dialect as a means of reinforcing how demeaning Linder's offer of money is and how humiliating it is for Walter to consider accepting it.

15. Why does Mama react the way she does to Beneatha? What theme does this touch reflect?

Mama gets angry at Beneatha because Beneatha is disparaging the family. Although Mama may not understand Walter either, she refrains from judging him. She simply loves him because she knows how much Walter is suffering. Once again, Mama represents the theme of the importance of family. Despite the fact that Mama disagrees with most of what Walter says, he is important to her as a family member that she loves him regardless of his actions.

16. Why does Mama keep Travis in the room? What is Hansberry's intention in having Travis present for this scene?

Mama wants Travis to learn from this experience, whether right now or in the future. In addition, she is hoping to shame Walter into changing his opinion. While it may seem like this is what happens, it is actually something different that changes Walter's opinion (see next question).

Keeping Travis in the room raises the stakes for Walter. Not only will he have to show a total lack of self-respect, but he will also have to do it in front of his own son.

17. Why does Walter change his mind? How is this ironic?

As Walter explains his life, he comes to understand something. He realizes that, if he gives in here, he will continue to do so throughout the rest of his life. Therefore, he decides to take the opportunity to get his family a better life, even if the possibility of success is very small. In this sense, he actually does take to heart the lesson that he learned from Willy Harris. Through his total concern for his family and no one else, he is able to get what his family needs. The difference between Walter and Willy Harris, however, is that Walter is not motivated by selfishness. He makes this decision for his family, which shows that Walter has grown into a better person through his experience in the play. This is the point at which Walter fully achieves his dream of gaining self-respect and independence. It is ironic in that, through the seeming destruction of his dreams, he actually ends up gaining more of his dream than he would have otherwise.

18. What is the significance of Mama's asking about her plant in the midst of the chaos after Lindner's departure?

Because the plant symbolizes the family, this is the last instance, besides the stage directions at the end, where we see just how important the family is to Mama. Even though there is great disorder around her, her sole concern is for her plant, i.e., her family. This is the final expression of Hansberry's theme of the importance of family.

19. What does Mama mean when she says to Ruth, “He finally came into his manhood today, didn’t he?”

Mama is affirming the lesson Walter learned about himself: that self-respect is the true measure of a man. The kind of job one has does not matter nearly as much as being able to respect oneself.

20. What is the “great heaving thing” described in the last stage direction of the play?

Depending on the interpretation, this could be anything from pride and joy to despair and sadness. If interpreted as positive, it means that Mama is overjoyed at finally leaving the apartment and bad memories behind. In a negative interpretation, it could mean that Mama is worried about the possibility of failure and that she is upset about leaving a place so full of memories, even if there are many bad ones.

A Raisin in the Sun

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide Student Copy

Act 1, Scene 1

1. What is the setting of the story? What characteristics of the Youngers are reflected by their surroundings?
2. What is the significance of Travis's sleeping place?
3. What signs of poverty do we see in the setting and in the family's early-morning routine?
4. What signs of stasis do we see in the stage directions and in the family's early-morning routine?
5. What does the first exchange between Ruth and Walter seem to foreshadow?
6. Why does Walter get so angry with Ruth when she dismisses his scheme with Willy Harris? What theme does this start to develop?

7. What does Walter want to do with the money and why? How do the other characters react thus far?
8. What are the jobs of Walter and Ruth, and why are they significant?
9. Other than developing themes and plot, why would Hansberry include the opening scene between Walter and Ruth?
10. Why is Walter so angry at Beneatha in their first exchange? How does it reflect on the theme of the story?
11. What does the following allusion mean? How does Beneatha use this allusion in the context of the play?

BENEATHA: (*Turning slowly in her chair*) And then there are all those prophets who would lead us out of the wilderness—(*WALTER slams out of the house*)—into the swamps!

12. What is the significance of the following statement of Ruth's? How does it relate to one of the themes of the play?

No. Mama, something is happening between Walter and me. I don't know what it is—but he needs something—something I can't give him anymore. He needs this chance, Lena.

13. What “chance” does Walter need?
14. What is the significance of Ruth’s suggestion that Mama go on a trip to a foreign land? How does it relate to the themes of the play?
15. What is the source of the money they are expecting, and how is that significant?
16. What purpose does Mama’s reflection on her past life serve? What is learned about her from this? How does it relate to the themes of the play?
17. What allusion is Beneatha making in the following passage? What do we learn about Beneatha’s character from this?

BENEATHA: Well—if the salt loses its savor—
18. Why does Beneatha feel such antipathy toward George? What themes does this start to bring up?

19. Why does Mama seem happy when Beneatha discusses her various activities, despite the fact that they never last and are constantly changing? Does Ruth feel the same way as Mama? How does this relate to one of the themes of the play?
20. How does the lack of stage directions in the written dialogue create a sense of ambiguity regarding Ruth's reaction to Mama and Beneatha's argument? What does this show about the importance of stage directions? How would the audience's experience differ if the play was being seen rather than read?
21. How is conflict introduced in the play? How is this different from the way it is introduced in novels? What types of conflict have been shown thus far in *A Raisin in the Sun*?
22. Having been introduced to the Younger family, the status quo of their daily lives, and the various relationships and conflicts in which they move and work and live, what is likely to be the "inciting incident": that event which will begin to move the plot (and the development of the characters) toward crisis?

Act 1, Scene 2

1. Why does Mama look at Beneatha when she speaks to Travis about his mother? Why does she lie to Travis?
2. Why would Hansberry include this small exchange in the play when it does not seem to develop any of the themes?
3. What is the significance of the fact that Walter does not know where Ruth is?
4. What is the significance of the discussion between Mama and Beneatha about Africa? What might Beneatha represent?
5. Why does Hansberry give Beneatha two boyfriends?
6. What does the following statement by Beneatha reveal about her character?

BENEATHA It is my business—where is he going to live, on the *roof*?

7. What is Mama suggesting when she says to Beneatha: “I guess I see why we done commence to get so interested in Africa ’round here”?
8. Why is Ruth upset by Travis’s talk of the rat?
9. What do the Nigerian robes symbolize?
10. What is significant about the exchange between Beneatha and Asagai about Beneatha’s hair? What does it reveal about each of the characters?
11. Might Beneatha’s anger hide another emotion, and if so, how is this significant?
12. What is the significance of the meaning of the word “Alaiyo”? What subtle glimpse into Beneatha’s soul does this conversation provide?

13. Why do you think Hansberry selected the name “Beneatha” for this character? What does Asagai’s use of a different name imply and foreshadow? How then might the character’s name be ambiguous?
14. What does the allusion “this here can is empty as Jacob’s kettle” mean? How does Hansberry use it in this scene?
15. What does the following statement by Beneatha’s foreshadow? What does Mama’s confusion show? What is Hansberry saying by including the subsequent stage direction?

BENEATHA (*Halting at the door*) To become a queen of the Nile!
(*She exits in a breathless blaze of glory...*)
16. Why is there so much apprehension about the check? What does the check symbolize, from both a plot standpoint and a dramatic standpoint?
17. What, if any of the family’s current conflicts has the issue of the insurance money caused?
18. How does the mood of the play change when the postman rings the doorbell?

19. Why does Walter get so upset with Ruth and Mama?
20. What is the significance of the exchange between Mama and Walter? What do we learn about each from this incident?
21. How is Mama and Walter's conflict generational, as well as a clash of ideals?
22. What is the significance of the last exchange between Ruth, Walter, and Mama about the abortion?
23. Having seen several conflicts unfold in the play at this point, which of these would have arisen regardless of the arrival of the check? Why would Hansberry include these? Which issues might have simply festered under the surface?

Act 2, Scene 1

1. What do Beneatha's new attire and haircut symbolize?
2. What is the importance of the scene between Beneatha and Walter? What theme does it relate to?
3. Why does George react so negatively to Beneatha's dress and hair? What does he represent? How does his attitude contrast with Beneatha's attitude?
4. Why is Walter rude to George? What does this foreshadow?
5. Why does Walter attempt to talk business with George? How does this relate to the theme of dreams?
6. What is the significance of the following speech by Walter, and George's reaction to it?

WALTER: And you—ain't you bitter, man? Ain't you just about had it yet? Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? You happy?....You got it made?....Here I am a giant—surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what it is the giant is talking about.

7. What does George's allusion to Prometheus mean? How does it relate to the play?

8. What is the significance of the exchange between Ruth and Walter? What happens between them? Is anything resolved? What does this foreshadow?
9. Since this exchange between Ruth and Walter does not seem to develop any themes in the play, why would Hansberry have put this scene into the play?
10. Why does Mama wait until Travis is there to tell where she went? What does this show about Mama's motivation?
11. Why does Mama look for acceptance from Walter?
12. What does the reaction of Mama's children to the location of their new house foreshadow?
13. What complications or obstacles arise in this scene?

Act 2, Scene 2

1. Why is George so frustrated with Beneatha? How does this reinforce what we learned about George in Act 2, Scene 1? Why did Hansberry introduce a character such as George?
2. Why does Beneatha thank Mama? Why do you think Mama changes her opinion? What does this represent for Mama's character?
3. Why do the Youngers dislike Mrs. Johnson? How does Hansberry use Mrs. Johnson to illustrate the Youngers' attitude?
4. How do the stage directions in this scene help the reader? What is different for an audience seeing the play?
5. What does Mrs. Johnson's visit foreshadow? How does this scene further develop the complications that arose in the previous scene?

6. What does Beneatha mean by the following statement?

BENEATHA: (*At her door*) Mama, if there are two things we, as a people, have got to overcome, one is the Ku Klux Klan—and the other is Mrs. Johnson.

7. What is the significance of Ruth's reaction to Walter's absence at work? What conflict is demonstrated here?

8. Why does Mama give Walter the remaining money? How does this relate to the themes of the play?

9. What does the money symbolize for Walter?

10. In the original production of the play, the scene between Walter and Travis was cut. How would this affect the play in terms of character development, impact on the audience, etc.?

Act 2, Scene 3

1. Why would Hansberry choose to have Ruth singing at the beginning of this scene?
2. What is the significance of the following statement by Beneatha? How does the fact that this is a play amplify the importance of this statement?

BENEATHA: (*Laughing to herself*) I guess I always think things have more emphasis if they are big, somehow.

3. Why is Ruth happy about having gone to the movies and having held hands with Walter? How is this significant in relation to Walter?
4. What is the significance of the banter among Walter, Ruth, and Beneatha right before Lindner comes to the apartment? Thinking of the three-act plot structure, what does this seem to precede and perhaps foreshadow?
5. What is the significance of Lindner talking with Walter rather than with Mama?
6. What is Lindner implying when he says the following line? What do we learn about Lindner?

We feel...we feel that most of the trouble in this world, when you come right down to it...most of the trouble exists because people just don't sit down and talk to each other.

7. Explain the following allusion.

BENEATHA: Thirty pieces and not a coin less!

8. Why does Walter ask Lindner the following question? What is its significance?

You got any more to say 'bout how people ought to sit down and talk to each other?

9. What does Lindner mean when he makes the following statement?

LINDNER: (*Almost sadly regarding WALTER*) You just can't force people to change their hearts, son.

10. Based on the interactions between the Youngers and Lindner, do you think Hansberry agrees with Lindner's statement about the need for the different ethnic groups to talk? What ambiguities do you see?

11. Why does Mama go to fix her plant? Comparing this to previous instances where the plant is mentioned, what do you think the plant symbolizes?

12. Why do the other Youngers give Mama a present? What is its significance?

13. How does Walter's loss of the money fit into the plot structure?

Act 3, Scene 1

1. Why would Hansberry choose to relate the setting of Act 3 to that of Act 1?
2. What is the significance of Asagai's opening statement?
3. Why doesn't Beneatha want to be a doctor any more?
4. What does Asagai mean by the following statement?

ASAGAI: Then isn't there something wrong in a house—in a world—where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?
5. How does Hansberry use Asagai to reflect the themes of *A Raisin in the Sun* in his final exchange with Beneatha?
6. Why does Asagai ask Beneatha to come to Africa?
7. Compare the progression of Beneatha's relationships to the progression of Walter's dreams in terms of plot structure. Are both sub-plots building to a climax? Is one winding down to a conclusion?

8. Why does Beneatha insult Walter?
9. What is the *real* reason Mama is so upset? What do we finally see as Mama's underlying dream and motivation?
10. What is the significance of Walter's calling Lindner "The Man"?
11. What is the significance of Walter's speeches to the family about "bad people" and "good people"? Where are we in terms of the dramatic structure of the plot, and what do these speeches foreshadow?
12. Why does Hansberry have Walter say, "I'm going to put on the show"? What theme does this statement touch on?
13. Why does Mama react the way she does to Walter?
14. Why does Hansberry have Walter revert to dialect when talking about taking money from Mr. Linder?

15. Why does Mama react the way she does to Beneatha? What theme does this touch reflect?
16. Why does Mama keep Travis in the room? What is Hansberry's intention in having Travis present for this scene?
17. Why does Walter change his mind? How is this ironic?
18. What is the significance of Mama's asking about her plant in the midst of the chaos after Lindner's departure?
19. What does Mama mean when she says to Ruth, "He finally came into his manhood today, didn't he?"
20. What is the "great heaving thing" described in the last stage direction of the play?

The Perfect Balance Between Cost and Quality for Classic Paperbacks

WITH ALL OF THE DIFFERENT EDITIONS of classics available, what makes *Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics™* better?

Our editions were designed by former teachers with the needs of teachers and students in mind. Because we've struggled to stretch tight budgets and had to deal with the deficiencies of cheaply made paperbacks, we've produced high-quality trade editions at remarkably low prices. As a result, our editions have it all.

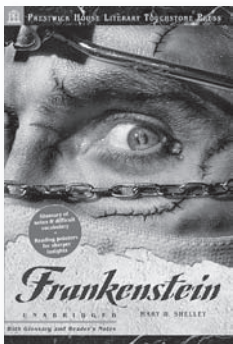
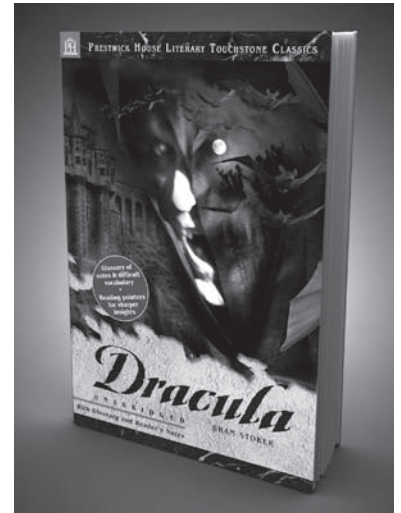
Value Pricing – With our extraordinary Educators' Discount, you get these books at **50% or more off the list price.**

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights – Concise notes that encourage students to question and consider points of plot, theme, characterization, and style, etc.

Glossary and Vocabulary – An A-to-Z glossary makes sure that your students won't get lost in difficult allusions or archaic vocabulary and concepts.

Sturdy Bindings and High-Quality Paper – High-quality construction ensures these editions hold up to heavy, repeated use.

Strategies for Understanding Shakespeare – Each *Shakespeare Literary Touchstone Classic™* contains line numbers, margin notes, and a guide to understanding Shakespeare's language, as well as key strategies for getting the most from the plays.



Special Introductory Discount for Educators only – At Least 50% Off!

New titles are constantly being added; call or visit our website for current listing.

		Retail Price	Intro.	Discount
200053	..... <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> - Twain TU RJ AT AP	\$4.99		\$2.49
200473	..... <i>Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The</i> - Twain TU RJ AT	\$4.99		\$2.49
202116	..... <i>Alice's Adventure in Wonderland</i> - Carroll TU RJ	\$3.99		\$1.99
202118	..... <i>Antigone</i> - Sophocles TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
200141	..... <i>Awakening, The</i> - Chopin TU RJ AT AP	\$3.99		\$1.99
202111	..... <i>Beowulf</i> - Roberts (ed.) TU	\$3.99		\$1.99
204866	..... <i>Best of Poe, The: The Tell-Tale Heart, The Raven, The Cask of Amontillado, and 30 Others</i> - Poe	\$4.99		\$2.49
200150	..... <i>Call of the Wild, The</i> - London TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
200348	..... <i>Canterbury Tales</i> - Chaucer TU	\$3.99		\$1.99
200179	..... <i>Christmas Carol, A</i> - Dickens TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
201198	..... <i>Crime and Punishment</i> - Dostoyevsky TU	\$6.99		\$3.49
200694	..... <i>Doll's House, A</i> - Ibsen TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
200190	..... <i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> - Stevenson TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99

202113	..... <i>Dracula</i> - Stoker TU RJ	\$5.99		\$2.99
200166	..... <i>Ethan Frome</i> - Wharton TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
200054	..... <i>Frankenstein</i> - Shelley TU RJ AT AP	\$4.99		\$1.99
202112	..... <i>Great Expectations</i> - Dickens TU RJ AT AP	\$5.99		\$2.99
202108	..... <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> - Swift TU	\$4.99		\$2.49
200091	..... <i>Hamlet</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT AP	\$3.99		\$1.99
200074	..... <i>Heart of Darkness</i> - Conrad TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
202117	..... <i>Hound of the Baskervilles, The</i> - Doyle TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
200147	..... <i>Importance of Being Earnest, The</i> - Wilde TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
301414	..... <i>Invisible Man, The</i> - Wells TU RJ	\$3.99		\$1.99
202115	..... <i>Jane Eyre</i> - Brontë TU RJ	\$6.99		\$3.49
200146	..... <i>Julius Caesar</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
201817	..... <i>Jungle, The</i> - Sinclair TU RJ AT	\$5.99		\$2.99
200125	..... <i>Macbeth</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT AP	\$3.99		\$1.99
204864	..... <i>Medea</i> - Euripides TU	\$3.99		\$1.99
200133	..... <i>Metamorphosis, The</i> - Kafka TU RJ	\$3.99		\$1.99
200081	..... <i>Midsummer Night's Dream, A</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
202123	..... <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
301391	..... <i>My Antonia</i> - Cather TU RJ	\$3.99		\$1.99
200079	..... <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> - Douglass TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
301269	..... <i>Odyssey, The</i> - Butler (trans.) TU RJ AT	\$4.99		\$2.49
200564	..... <i>Oedipus Rex</i> - Sophocles TU	\$3.99		\$1.99
200095	..... <i>Othello</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT AP	\$3.99		\$1.99
202121	..... <i>Picture of Dorian Gray, The</i> - Wilde TU RJ	\$4.99		\$2.49
200368	..... <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> - Austen TU RJ AT	\$4.99		\$2.49
202114	..... <i>Prince, The</i> - Machiavelli TU	\$3.99		\$1.99
200791	..... <i>Pygmalion</i> - Shaw TU	\$3.99		\$1.99
200102	..... <i>Red Badge of Courage, The</i> - Crane TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
200193	..... <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$0.99
200132	..... <i>Scarlet Letter, The</i> - Hawthorne TU AT AP	\$4.99		\$2.49
202119	..... <i>Siddhartha</i> - Hesse TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
204863	..... <i>Silas Marner</i> - Eliot TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
200251	..... <i>Tale of Two Cities, A</i> - Dickens AT AP	\$5.99		\$2.99
200231	..... <i>Taming of the Shrew, The</i> - Shakespeare TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
204865	..... <i>Time Machine, The</i> - Wells TU RJ AT	\$3.99		\$1.99
202120	..... <i>Treasure Island</i> - Stevenson TU RJ	\$4.99		\$2.49
301420	..... <i>War of the Worlds</i> - Wells TU RJ	\$3.99		\$1.99
202122	..... <i>Wuthering Heights</i> - Brontë TU AT	\$5.99		\$2.99

TU Teaching Units **RJ** Response Journals **AP** Activity Pack **AT** AP Teaching Units



PRESTWICK HOUSE, INC.

"Everything for the English Classroom!"

P.O. Box 658 • Clayton, DE 19938 • (800) 932-4593 • (888) 718-9333 • www.prestwickhouse.com



P R E S T W I C K H O U S E , I N C .

Order Form

Call 1-800-932-4593 Fax 1-888-718-9333

Prestwick House, Inc.
P.O. Box 658
Clayton, DE 19938

Bill To: ☐ Home ☐ School

School:
Name:
Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone: Email:

Ship To: ☐ Home ☐ School

School:
Name:
Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone: Email:

ITEM NO	TITLE	QUANTITY	X	PRICE	=	TOTAL

Method of Payment (Choose one)

☐ Check or Money Order Enclosed

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover Card ☐ American Express

☐ Purchase Order Enclosed

We accept purchase orders and authorized orders charged to institutions. Personal orders not on a credit card must be accompanied by a check.

Signature

Telephone #

Exp. Date

Credit Card #

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

Because charges for air delivery are based on weight and distance, heavy packages can be expensive to ship air freight. Typographic and photographic errors are subject to revision. Prestwick House is the sole source of all proprietary materials listed in this catalogue. Please be sure to include a street address. FedEx ground/UPS will not deliver to a P.O. Box.

Subtotal \$

Shipping \$
12% S&H (\$6.00 minimum)

Total \$

Shipping & Handling

For orders of \$50.00 or less, please add \$6.00 for shipping and handling charges. For orders from \$50.01 to \$799.99 add 12%. For orders of \$800.00 and more, add 10%.

Delivery Service

Most orders are shipped FedEx and you can expect delivery within 7-10 working days. Items in stock are usually shipped within one working day of receiving your order.

Expedited Delivery

for expedited delivery ask about the following options:

- Overnight Air
- 2nd day air
- 3 Day Select