ON STAGE AT PARK SQUARE THEATRE

November 1—December 22, 2016

A RAISIN in the SUN

Study Guide

Written by LORRAINE HANSBERRY
Directed by WARREN C. BOWLES
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Contents

The Play and the Playwright

4. Plot Summary
5. Meet the Characters
6. A Conversation with the Actors
9. Lorraine Hansberry: Playwright, Author, and Activist

Historical Context

11. Historical Context of A Raisin in the Sun
14. What Could You Buy with $10,000?

Activities and Resources

21. Tossing Lines: A Pre-Play Class Activity
23. Text Analysis: Scene to Read Aloud #1
26. Text Analysis: Scene to Read Aloud #2
29. The Origin of the Title
30. Evoking Empathy: Examining Walter Lee’s Complexity
32. Afrocentrism and Beneatha
33. White Privilege: A Post-Play Activity
35. Post-Play Discussion Questions
The Youngers are a poor African American family living in a rundown but well cared for apartment on the segregated South Side of Chicago in the 1950s. The possibility of economic independence is given to the family when Mama (Lena Younger) receives a $10,000 life insurance check upon the death of her husband. Each member of the family dreams of the possibilities the money could provide. Mama dreams of moving her family to a new home in an affluent Chicago neighborhood. Her son, Walter Lee, a chauffeur, dreams of buying a liquor store, providing him the financial resources to take care of his family including his pregnant wife, Ruth, and young son, Travis. His sister, Beneatha, dreams of paying for and finishing medical school.

Tensions and sibling rivalry within the family build as each member contemplates how to use the money to further their own dreams. Walter Lee feels he is entitled to the money as the head of the family. Ruth and Beneatha disagree and feel that the money belongs to Lena, and she alone should decide how to spend it. Mama deeply feels that the family’s survival depends on their escape from the apartment and the neighborhood. She decides to make a down payment on a house in Clybourne Park, an all-white Chicago neighborhood. Her decision to make the down payment is done without consulting any of her family members. The family’s reactions range from disbelief and disappointment to happiness and delight.

After making the down payment on the house, Mama realizes the significance of Walter Lee’s plan to buy a liquor store. Walter Lee dreams of giving his family all that is imaginable even in the face of racism and discrimination. Mama gives Walter Lee the rest of the insurance money with the stipulation that a considerable portion be put away for his sister’s medical school education. Walter Lee, being the man of the family, decides to invest all of the remaining money in the liquor store business with two men. The plan falls through when one of the "investors" runs away with all the money.

The family is deeply dependent on the money and is devastated to learn of Walter Lee’s reckless investment. Seeing no way out from his poor choice, Walter Lee seriously considers taking an offer from Mr. Lindner, a representative from the Clybourne Park neighborhood. Mr. Lindner’s offer would pay the Youngers a substantial amount of money not to move into the neighborhood. The option of a payoff is immoral in the family’s eyes. Walter Lee is determined to make the deal despite his misgivings, but at the last moment while in the presence of his son, he does not take the bribe. In the end, the family decides to move to Clybourne Park even though the road ahead will be difficult; they hope that they have made the right choice for the family and the generations to follow.
Meet the Characters

A Raisin in the Sun

**Lena Younger:** Known throughout the play as “Mama,” Lena, who recently lost her husband, Walter Sr., is the matriarch of the Younger family. Mama’s actions show her strength, spirituality, and selflessness.

**Walter Lee Younger:** As Lena’s oldest child, Walter Lee feels the pressure to be the provider for his mother as well as his wife Ruth and son Travis. A man in his mid-thirties, Walter Lee works as a chauffeur for a wealthy white family, but he has aspirations for bigger and better things.

**Beneatha Younger:** Also known as “Bennie,” Beneatha is Lena’s second child and Walter Lee’s sister. She is in college and is eagerly looking forward to attending medical school. She currently has two suitors: George Murchison and Joseph Asagai.

**Ruth Younger:** Even though Ruth married into the Younger family, she is the peace-maker, helping to extinguish conflict between her husband, Walter Lee, and sister-in-law, Beneatha. She helps her mother-in-law care for their home.

**Travis Younger:** As the youngest member of the Younger family living in a three-generation household, Travis is playful and clever, knowing how to play the adults in the family to get what he wants. He’s the ten-year-old son of Walter Lee and Ruth.

**Joseph Asagai:** An immigrant from Nigeria, Joseph Asagai is one of Beneatha’s suitors. He opens her eyes to Nigerian customs.

**George Murchison:** In contrast to the Younger’s poverty, George Murchison is a very wealthy college student. He is the other of Beneatha’s suitors.

**Karl Lindner:** As a member of the Clybourne Park Welcoming Committee, Karl Lindner meets with the Younger family to discuss the neighborhood’s policies.

**Bobo:** One of Walter Lee’s business partners. Bobo, too, hopes for bigger and better things.

The Younger Family as depicted in the 1961 film, *A Raisin in the Sun.*

*By Tanya Sponholz, River Falls High School & Craig Zimanske, Forest Lake Area High School*
A Conversation with the Actors

A Raisin in the Sun

The following questions were asked of some of the cast of Park Square Theatre’s 2016 production of A Raisin in the Sun:

**Greta Oglesby (Lena Younger)**

*When did you become an actor, and what were some of your first roles?*

I served as an accountant for the city of Chicago for 15 years and fell into acting in 1992. Some of my first roles were in *God’s Trombones* and *Do Lord Remember Me*.

*As an actor, what inspires you?*

I am inspired by the everyday: relationships of all types, happy ones, complicated ones, also by literature, music, dance, poetry, the bus, subway, or a city street.

*What is your relationship with the character that you will be playing in A Raisin in the Sun? What do you feel is important, beautiful, frustrating, etc. about her?*

I first understudied Phylicia Rashad in the role of Lena on Broadway in 2004. I have loved this play and this role for many years. I love Lena's faith, strength, and dignity. What frustrates me is, as her name suggests, Lena's family "leans" on her and draws from her strength in order to replenish their own.

*What advice do you have for young people who want to become theater artists?*

Believe in your goals, study, study, study, and make sure you LOVE what you do.

**Darius Dotch (Walter Lee Younger)**

*When did you become an actor, and what were some of your first roles?*

I’ve been doing theater ever since high school and throughout college, but I would say that I first officially felt like an actor after I graduated college with my theater degree and got my very first gig. Some of my first (memorable roles) were in *Broke-ology* and *A Civil War Christmas*.

*As an actor, what inspires you?*

I'm inspired by the challenges with each new role. Acting is a very vulnerable craft. To truly dive into a character and put your feelings out
for the audience to see can be a daunting task. It all pays off when it's time to take a bow.

**What is your relationship with the character that you will be playing in A Raisin in the Sun? What do you feel is important, beautiful, frustrating, etc. about him?**

I love Walter's drive and motivation to be successful. He is a dreamer and truly wants the best for his family. What frustrates me about him is that he struggles to actually hear his family's wants and needs. When he finally does, it's almost too late.

**What advice do you have for young people who want to become theater artists?**

Do it from the heart. Don't do it because you want to be famous or rich. Do it because you love it. Be passionate. Be honest with it. Most importantly, be a “work-aholic.” Constantly work on your craft.

**Theo Langason (George Murchison or Joseph Asagai)**

**When did you become an actor, and what were some of your first roles?**

I did my first play when I was 12 or 13. It was a play about Brown v. the Board of Education. I don't remember what role I played. Maybe a lawyer? Someone's dad? That's probably a safe bet. I played someone's dad a lot early in my career.

**As an actor, what inspires you?**

I am inspired by passion in all fields. If I see a person who is passionate about what they are doing, it really gets my juices flowing. I'm a director and musician as well and other arts are a constant source of inspiration. Especially live music.

**What is your relationship with the character that you will be playing in A Raisin in the Sun? What do you feel is important, beautiful, frustrating, etc. about him?**

My role is still in flux, Warren Bowles (our Director) is deciding if he wants me to play George Murchison or Joseph Asagai. This is a really fascinating pair to be considered for because they are two sides of the same coin. Both are educated, young black men seeking Beneatha's heart. George is fully assimilated into white American culture and has a deep loathing for his own blackness that he takes out on other black people. He's the kind of black person that white culture finds most palatable: well-spoken, well-mannered, and content with the status quo. Asagai on the other hand is a Nigerian expatriate, so very connected to the roots of his blackness. Asagai is particularly interesting to me because my father is from Cameroon which borders Nigeria. My father was not too different from Asagai when he came here over 30 years ago for school. So we'll see what Warren decides! Either way, I'm very excited to be in this production.

**What advice do you have for young people who want to become theater artists?**

The same advice I would give to anyone: failure is your friend. For every success you have, there will be dozens of failures, so the more you fail, the more you will succeed.
Neal Hazard (Bobo)

When did you become an actor, and what were some of your first roles?

I started to really dive into acting in ’92 after graduating from the University of Rhode Island. Some of my first roles were in Langston Hughes’ Jesse B. Simple, The Zoo Story, Stop Kiss, and Othello.

As an actor, what inspires you?

I’m inspired by watching amazing performances, especially when they’re done by friends of mine. I also maintain inspiration by sharing great moments with someone on stage/film, and when those moments are found unintentionally, it’s what they call “magic.”

What is your relationship with the character that you will be playing in A Raisin in the Sun? What do you feel is important, beautiful, frustrating, etc. about him?

In the short amount of time that we get to know Bobo, we know that he’s a loyal friend to Walter Lee. He could also stand to use some of Walter Lee’s drive for a better life.

What advice do you have for young people who want to become theater artists?

Be prepared! Understand there is business in show business, and have a skill/talent/trade that you can easily fall back on during those "slow" times. Be great!

Robert Gardner (Karl Lindner)

When did you become an actor, and what were some of your first roles?

I became an actor when I was in junior high. My mother forced me to try out for the play (I don’t remember the title), and I was cast. Until the moment I stepped on stage before an audience, I was terrified. After that, well, it was fun!

As an actor, what inspires you?

I’m inspired by playwrights who mix moods—funny/sad—and by actors who create and reveal the rich humanity—good and bad—of a character. Many years ago I did a close study of the language of an Irish play, Juno and the Paycock. Lines from the Abbey Theatre recording of that play have been echoing in my head and my heart ever since.
What is your relationship with the character that you will be playing in A Raisin in the Sun? What do you feel is important, beautiful, frustrating, etc. about him?

I play Lindner, the only white character in the play, and he’s not exactly a positive role model. He’s obviously a racist and he is representing an obviously racist white community association. I like to think I’m not like him. Although born in Biloxi, Mississippi, and raised in an all-white suburb of Washington, D.C., I’m a “good” white liberal who went to Oberlin College, the first college in the country to admit black people (and women). But Oberlin, the epitome of progressive social values, was strongly challenged this year by its black students for racism, a fact that makes me look more closely at myself and to worry that perhaps I’m not so different from Lindner. The challenge of the role will be to find how I can connect with this man—and present him in a way that audiences will connect with him, positively and negatively.

What advice do you have for young people who want to become theater artists?

Seek out good teachers. Seize the opportunities that present themselves. Stay positive as you experience the ups and downs of a life in theater.

By Theodore Fabel, South High School
“Quite simply and quietly as I know how to say it: I am sick of poverty, lynching, stupid wars, and the universal mal-treatment of my people and obsessed with a rather desperate desire for a new world for me and my brothers.”

--Lorraine Hansberry

Early Life

Lorraine Hansberry was born at Provident Hospital on the South Side of Chicago on May 19, 1930. She was the youngest of Nannie Perry Hansberry and Carl Augustus Hansberry’s four children. Her father founded Lake Street Bank, one of the first banks for blacks in Chicago, and ran a successful real estate business. Her uncle was William Leo Hansberry, a scholar of African studies at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Many prominent African American social and political leaders visited the Hansberry household during Lorraine’s childhood including sociology professor W.E.B. DuBois, poet Langston Hughes, actor and political activist Paul Robeson, musician Duke Ellington and Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens.

Despite their middle-class status, the Hansberrys were subject to segregation. When she was eight years old, Hansberry’s family deliberately attempted to move into a restricted neighborhood. Restrictive covenants, in which white property owners agreed not to sell to blacks, created a ghetto known as the “Black Belt” on Chicago’s South Side. Carl Hansberry, with the help of Harry H. Pace, president of the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company, and several white realtors secretly bought property at 413 E. 60th Street and 6140 S. Rhodes Avenue. The Hansberrys moved into the house on Rhodes Avenue in May 1937. The family was threatened by a white mob which threw a brick through a window, narrowly missing Lorraine. The Supreme Court of Illinois upheld the legality of the restrictive covenant and forced the family to leave the house. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed the decision on a legal technicality. The result was the opening of 30 blocks of South Side Chicago to African-Americans. Although the case did not argue that racially restrictive covenants were unlawful, it marked the beginning of their end.

Lorraine graduated from Englewood High School in Chicago, where she first became interested in theater. She enrolled in the University of Wisconsin but left before completing her degree. After studying painting in Chicago and Mexico, Hansberry moved to New York in 1950 to begin her career as a writer. She wrote for Paul Robeson’s Freedom, a progressive publication, which put her in contact with other literary and political mentors such as W.E.B. DuBois and Freedom editor Louis Burnham. During a protest against racial discrimination at New York University, she met Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish writer who shared her political views. They married on June 20, 1953 at the Hansberrys’ home in Chicago.

Commercial Success

In 1956, her husband and Burt D’Lugoff wrote the hit song, “Cindy, Oh Cindy.” Its profits allowed Hansberry to quit working and devote herself to writing. She then began a play she called The Crystal Stair, from Langston Hughes’ poem “Mother to Son.” She later retitled it A Raisin in the Sun from Hughes’ poem, “Harlem: A Dream Deferred.”

In A Raisin in the Sun, the first play written by an African-American to be produced on Broadway, she drew
upon the lives of the working-class black people who rented from her father and who went to school with her on Chicago’s South Side. She also used members of her family as inspiration for her characters.

Hansberry noted similarities between Nannie Hansberry and Mama Younger and between Carl Hansberry and Big Walter. Walter Lee, Jr. and Ruth are composites of Hansberry’s brothers, their wives and her sister, Mamie. In an interview, Hansberry laughingly said, “Beneatha is me, eight years ago.”

Her second play, The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window, about a Jewish intellectual, ran on Broadway for 101 performances. It received mixed reviews. Her friends rallied to keep the play running. It closed on January 12, 1965, the day Hansberry died of cancer at age 35.

Legacy
Although Hansberry and Nemiroff divorced before her death, he remained dedicated to her work. As literary executor, he edited and published her three unfinished plays: Les Blancs, The Drinking Gourd and What Use Are Flowers? He also collected Hansberry’s unpublished writings, speeches and journal entries and presented them in the autobiographical montage To Be Young, Gifted and Black. The title is taken from a speech given by Hansberry in May 1964 to winners of a United Negro Fund writing competition: “...though it be a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic, to be young, gifted and black!”

Article extracted in its entirety from:
**The Historical Context for *A Raisin in the Sun***

*A Raisin in the Sun* is set in the early 1950s in Chicago, Illinois. Listed here is the chronology of Hansberry’s life and work as well as historical events that took place in the United States during that time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hansberry’s life</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>US Historical Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine Vivian Hansberry, the daughter of a prominent real estate broker and the niece of a Howard University professor of African history, is born in Chicago on May 19.</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Richard Wright publishes <em>Native Sun</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hansberry family lives at 5330 S. Calumet Avenue on the South Side of Chicago.</td>
<td>1930-36</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Hansberry family moves to 6140 Rhodes Avenue, in an all-white neighborhood near the University of Chicago. Hostile residents attack their home. A state judge rules that the Hansberrys have to move. They appeal to the Supreme Court.</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>The United States enters World War II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hansberrys and the NAACP win the U.S. Supreme Court Case Hansberry v. Lee.</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hansberry enters Englewood High School and wins a writing award for a short story about football.</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hansberry’s father dies of a cerebral hemorrhage in Mexico, where he had planned to relocate his family to escape U.S. racism.</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Jackie Robinson joins the Brooklyn Dodgers and becomes the first African American to play major league baseball.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hansberry’s life</strong></th>
<th><strong>Year</strong></th>
<th><strong>US Historical Context</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry graduates from Englewood High School and enters the University of Wisconsin in Madison.</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>President Truman ends racial segregation in the U.S. armed forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Gwendolyn Brooks is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for <em>Annie Allen</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry becomes the youngest staff member of <em>Freedom</em> newspaper, founded by Paul Robeson and Louis E. Burnham.</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry attends the International Peace Congress in Montevideo, Uruguay, on behalf of Paul Robeson who was forbidden to leave the U.S. by the State Department.</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>The U.S. Supreme Court finds segregated schools unconstitutional in Brown v. Board of Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry takes courses in African history from Dr. W.E.B. DuBois at the Jefferson School of Social Science in New York.</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Rosa Parks is arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger, sparking a bus boycott.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry finishes <em>A Raisin in the Sun</em>.</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Raisin in the Sun</em>, directed by Lloyd Richards and starring Sidney Poitier, opens on Broadway, wins the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and runs for 530 performances.</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry writes two screenplays of <em>A Raisin in the Sun</em>, both of which are rejected by Columbia Pictures; her third, the least controversial version, is accepted.</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Students hold “sit-ins” in Greensboro, N.C.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Hansberry’s life</strong></th>
<th><strong>Year</strong></th>
<th><strong>US Historical Context</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The movie version of <em>A Raisin in the Sun</em> premieres in Chicago. The film wins a special Cannes Film Festival Award.</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry becomes involved in the civil rights movement and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and confronts Attorney General Robert Kennedy on the administration’s efforts against racism. She is diagnosed with cancer.</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Medgar Evers is killed in Jackson, Mississippi. Martin Luther King, Jr. gives his “I Have a Dream” speech. President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansberry dies on January 12, the same day that her second Broadway play, <em>The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window</em>, closes.</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The two-year anniversary of Hansberry’s death is commemorated with a seven-hour radio documentary called <em>Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words</em> featuring recorded performances by 61 of America’s greatest actors.</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>To Be Young, Gifted and Black</em> opens off-Broadway, runs for 380 performances, and is published as a book.</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Raisin</em>, a musical adaptation of <em>A Raisin in the Sun</em>, opens on Broadway, wins the Tony Award as best musical, and runs for 874 performances.</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Raisin in the Sun</em>, starring Danny Glover and Esther Rolle, is directed by Bill Duke for American Playhouse/PBS television.</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Raisin in the Sun</em> comes back to Broadway, winning two Tony Awards for actresses Phylicia Rashad and Audra McDonald.</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Raisin in the Sun</em> wins three Tony awards, including Best Revival of a play.</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
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Compiled by Theodore Fabel, South High School
What Would You Do with $10,000?
A Classroom Activity

When the Youngers receive the $10,000 check, each family member has a different plan for how the money would best be spent. Conflicts arise, since even in 1950, $10,000 would only go so far. Your task is to compare prices of basic items in 1950 and 2016 and ultimately discover how much $10,000 would be in today’s money.

First, look up the typical price of basic items in 1950 and 2016. Choose two of your own, too!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallon of Milk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loaf of Bread</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallon of Gasoline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postage Stamp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Newspaper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Home Value in MN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford <em>Fordor</em> Sedan (1950)/Ford <em>Fusion</em> Sedan (2016)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Year at UW-Madison (Tuition Only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Next, using the CPI Inflation Calculator website, determine how much $10,000 in 1950 would be worth in today’s dollars. [http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl](http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl)

$10,000 (in 1950) = ____________________ (in 2016)

CONTINUED...
Finally, consider the following questions:

1. Inflation means that the prices of goods will generally increase over time, which in turn causes the purchasing power of money to fall. You found out that $10,000 in 1950 would be $___________ today. Based on the prices you charted above, in which time would that money go farther?

2. The minimum wage in 1950 was $0.75/hour. In 2016, in Minnesota, the minimum wage is $9.50. Using the prices you charted on the previous page, how many hours would a person earning the minimum wage in 1950 have to work to buy the following items?

   1 Gallon of Milk
   1 Loaf of Bread
   15 Gallons of Gasoline
   20 Postage Stamps

   How many hours would a person earning minimum wage in 2016 have to work to buy those same items? From this data, has the minimum wage kept up with inflation?

3. Using the same numbers for minimum wage in question 2, how many hours would a person earning minimum wage have to work to completely self-fund a year of college in 1950? In 2016? From this data, has the minimum wage kept up with college tuition inflation? What steps could be taken by the federal or state governments to alleviate this burden?

4. Based on the research you conducted above, do you think a person working full-time and earning minimum wage could afford to live comfortably in 1950? In 2016? Explain your reasoning.

By Craig Zimanske, Forest Lake Area High School

**CHICAGO THEN & NOW**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIAN INCOME</th>
<th>UNEMPLOYMENT RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1960</strong></td>
<td><strong>2010</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4,800</td>
<td>$29,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for African-American families</td>
<td>for African-American households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$7,700</td>
<td>$58,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for white families</td>
<td>for white households</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **1968**      | **2012**          |
| 7.6 %         | 19.5 %            |
| for African-Americans | for African-Americans |
| 2.3 %         | 8.1 %             |
| for whites    | for whites         |

Picture from The Chicago Reader, 2013.

By Craig Zimanske, Forest Lake Area High School
Map Analysis: Segregation and Poverty in the Twin Cities

One of the major conflicts in *A Raisin in the Sun* is the debate between the family members about whether they should move into an all-white neighborhood. While this play takes place in the 1950s, racial segregation in housing still exists right here in the Twin Cities. Use the maps from the University of Minnesota to explore issues of poverty and race in the Twin Cities over the last 30 years.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Compare maps 1 and 3. What are some differences that you see between the two maps? Do the same comparison for maps 2 and 4.

2. The federal census is taken every ten years. In the 1980 census what areas of the Twin Cities saw the largest minority populations? What areas were mostly white? How did that change by 2010?

3. Based on the maps, is there a relationship between poverty and racially segregated neighborhoods?

4. Has the number of people living in poverty in the Twin Cities increased or decreased in the last 30 years?

5. What factors could have led to a change in the poverty rate over the last 30 years?

6. Thinking about the Younger family in the play, identify a neighborhood the Youngers might have lived in at the start of the play. Identify a neighborhood they may have moved to.

7. Find your neighborhood. How it has changed over the years?

8. Which is healthier for our society: to live in a segregated neighborhood or an integrated neighborhood? Why?
Map 1: Percentage Below Poverty Line, 1979

Map 1: MINNEAPOLIS-SAINT PAUL (Central Area)
Percentage Below Poverty Line
by Census Tract, 1979

Legend
Regional Value: 6.8%
- 0.0 to 4.9% (273)
- 5.0 to 9.9% (159)
- 10.0 to 19.9% (63)
- 20.0 to 29.9% (31)
- 30.0 to 39.9% (14)
- 40.0 to 100.0% (11)
- No data (16)

Note: Census Tracts with “No data” did not have sufficient data available.


CONTINUED...
Map 3: Percentage Below Poverty Line, 2008-2012

Map 3: MINNEAPOLIS-SAINT PAUL (Central Area) Percentage Below Poverty Line by Census Tract, 2008-2012 (5-year avg.)

Legend
Regional Value: 10.3%
- 0.0 to 4.5% (231)
- 5.0 to 9.5% (181)
- 10.0 to 19.9% (167)
- 20.0 to 29.5% (57)
- 30.0 to 39.5% (37)
- 40.0 to 100.0% (27)
- No data (4)

Note: Census Tracts with "No data" did not have sufficient data available.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey.

CONTINUED...
Map 2: Percentage Minority Population, 1980

Map 2: MINNEAPOLIS-SAINT PAUL (Central Area)
Percentage Minority Population by Census Tract, 1980

Legend
Regional Value: 5.9%
- 0.0 to 4.9% (408)
- 5.0 to 14.9% (101)
- 15.0 to 29.9% (30)
- 30.0 to 49.9% (14)
- 50.0 to 74.9% (12)
- 75.0 to 100.0% (6)
- No data (3)

Note: Census Tracts with "No data" did not have sufficient data available.


CONTINUED...
Map 4: Percentage Minority Population, 2008-2012

Map 4: MINNEAPOLIS-SAINT PAUL (Central Area)
Percentage Minority Population by Census Tract, 2010

Legend
Regional Value: 23.7%

- 0.0 to 4.9% (28)
- 5.0 to 14.9% (241)
- 15.0 to 29.9% (247)
- 30.0 to 49.9% (90)
- 50.0 to 74.9% (65)
- 75.0 to 100.0% (32)
- No data (1)

Note: Census Tracts with "no data" did not have sufficient data available.

By Jennifer Parker, Falcon Ridge Middle School
Objective:
The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with *A Raisin in the Sun* by exposing them to lines spoken in the play. Based on these lines, students are to make predictions about the play’s characters and central conflicts and discuss these predictions. This activity helps students form questions, gain insight, and build excitement for seeing and hearing these lines acted out on stage. “Tossing Lines” serves the students best if completed before they attend the play.

**Time Allotted:**
20-30 minutes

**Materials:**
- Tennis ball or hackey-sack
- Slips of paper cut from Tossing Lines on the following page

**Procedure:**
Cut out the slips of paper printed on the following page and distribute them to volunteers. Give students a few minutes (or overnight, if appropriate) to practice or memorize their lines. When they’re ready, have these students form a circle and give one student the ball. After she speaks her line, the student tosses the ball to another student who speaks his assigned line. Students toss the ball across the circle until all lines have been heard a few times. Encourage students to speak lines with varying emotions, seeking out a variety of ways to perform the lines. If there is time, reassign lines within the group or to other students in the class for another round.

**Optional:**
Reassign lines within the group (or to other students in the classroom) and continue for another round.

**Discussion:**
1. What do you notice about these lines?
2. What do these lines tell us about the plot of the play? The characters? The conflict?
3. Which lines might be clues to what happens at the end of the play? Why do you think so?
# Tossing Lines

**A Pre-Play Class Activity: Quotes from the Play**

**To the Teacher:**
Cut these apart and distribute to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ain’t nothin’ can tear at you like losin’ your baby.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is it that’s changing, Ruth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That was my biggest mistake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the world gets ugly enough...a woman will do anything for her family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We was going backwards ‘stead of forwards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll hand you the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You just can’t force people to change their hearts, son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the matter with Grandma—don’t she want to be rich?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my mother’s house there is still God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobody in this house is ever going to understand me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have never asked anyone around here to do anything for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean it! I’m just tired of hearing about God all the time...Does he pay tuition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well, I ain’t got no fifty cents this morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now don’t you start child, it’s too early in the morning to be talking about money. Besides it ain’t Christian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He needs something—something I can’t give him any more. He needs a chance, Lena.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child, we got a big old check coming tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man needs a woman to back him up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled by Jennifer Parker, Falcon Ridge Middle School
Act I, Scene i

WALTER. You know what I was thinking ’bout in the bathroom this morning – ?

RUTH. No.

WALTER. How come you always try to be so pleasant!

RUTH. What is there to be pleasant ‘bout! (She serves eggs at the table.)

WALTER. You want to know what I was thinking ’bout in the bathroom or not!

RUTH. I know what you was thinking ’bout.

WALTER. (ignoring her) ‘Bout what me and Willy Harris was talking about last night.

RUTH. (pours two cups of coffee; immediately – a refrain) Willy Harris is a good for nothing loud mouth.

WALTER. (crosses center in front of sofa) Anybody who talks to me has got to be a good for nothing loud mouth, ain’t he? And what you know about who’s a good for nothing loud mouth? Charlie Atkins was just a “good for nothing loud mouth” too, wasn’t he! When he wanted me to go in the dry-cleaning business with him. And now – he’s grossing $100,000 a year. $100,000 a year! You still call him a loud mouth?!

RUTH. (sits left of table, bitterly) Oh, Walter Lee – (She folds her head over on her arms).

WALTER. (coming to her and massaging her neck sympathetically) You tired, ain’t you? Tired of everything. Me, the boy, the way we live – this beat up hole – everything. Ain’t you?

(She doesn’t look up, doesn’t answer and resentment rises in him again.)

So tired – moaning and groaning all the time but you wouldn’t do nothing to help, would you? You couldn’t be on my side that long for nothing, could you?

RUTH. Walter, please leave me alone.

WALTER. A man needs a woman to back him up –

RUTH. Walter –

CONTINUED...
ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

SCENE TO READ ALOUD #1

WALTER. Mama would listen to you. You know she listen to you more than she do me and Bennie. She think more of you. All you have to do is just sit down with her when you drinking your coffee and talking 'bout things like you do and – (He sits and demonstrates graphically what he thinks her methods and tone should be.) You just sip your coffee, see, and say easy like that you been thinking 'bout that deal Walter Lee is so interested in, 'bout the store and all, and sip some more coffee, like what you saying ain’t that important to you. And the next thing you know she listening good and asking you questions and when I come home – I can tell her the details. This ain’t no fly-by-night proposition, Baby. I mean we figured it out, me Willy and Bobo.

RUTH. (with a frown) Bobo – ?

WALTER. (sits at chair above table) Yeah. You see, this little liquor store cost $75,000 and we figured the initial investment on the place be ‘bout $30,000, see. Ten thousand each. Course, there’s a couple of hundred you got to pay so’s you don’t spend your life waiting for them clowns to get your license approved –

RUTH. You mean graft?

WALTER. (frowning impatiently) Don’t call it that. See there, that just goes to show you what women understand about the world. Baby, don’t nothing happen for you in this world ‘less you pay somebody off!

RUTH. Walter, leave me alone! (She raises her head on the line, and stares at him vigorously – then says more quietly:) Eat your eggs, they gonna be cold.

WALTER. (straightening up from her and looking off) You see that? Man says to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. (sadly, but gaining in power) Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, Baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. Man say – (passionately now) I got to change my life, I’m choking to death, Baby! And his woman say – (in utter anguish as he bring his fists down on his thighs) Your eggs is getting cold!

RUTH. (softly) Walter, that ain’t none of our money.

WALTER. (not listening at all or even looking at her) This morning, I was lookin’ in the mirror and thinking about it – I’m thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room – and all I got to give him is nothing. Nothing but stories about how rich white people live –

RUTH. Eat your eggs, Walter.

WALTER. (rises, slamming the table) DAMN MY EGGS – DAMN ALL THE EGGS THAT EVER WAS!

CONTINUED...
Questions for Discussion

1. Describe Walter Lee and Ruth’s relationship in a few words, making sure every word you use is the best one. Look for causes or effects: why is their relationship this way and how does it affect them as individuals?

2. Walter Lee misdirects his anger at “all the eggs that ever was.” Cite multiple examples from the scene that show where his frustrations really stem from. Rank them from most frustrating to least.

3. More than anything, it seems that Walter Lee wants Ruth to support him in his endeavor to invest in the liquor store. As his wife, should Ruth be backing him up? Or is she right to brush off his ideas? Explain.

4. What do you think it would be like to be 35 years old, married with a child, and still living with your mother? How would that affect you?

5. Write down at least ten words that Hansberry uses in the scene that evoke strong emotions or images. Now, look for patterns in those words, highlighting ones that seem to go together. Based on these words, what do you believe is the purpose of the scene, and how do Hansberry’s carefully selected words support this purpose?
Act I, Scene i

BENEATHA. I am going to start timing those people. *(sits in armchair)*

WALTER. You should get up earlier.

BENEATHA. *(Her face is in her hands – she is still fighting the urge to go back to bed.)* Really—would you suggest dawn? Where’s the paper?

*(Still preoccupied with RUTH and his failed effort to win her over, he brings it, but as she reaches for it, drops it past her hand to floor. With a look, she picks it up.)*

WALTER. *(surveying her)* You are one horrible-looking chick at this hour.

BENEATHA. *(drily)* Good morning, everybody!

WALTER. *(senselessly)* How is school coming?

BENEATHA. *(in the same spirit)* Lovely. Lovely. And you know, Biology is the greatest. Yesterday I dissected something that – *(looking up at him as the sarcasm builds to a final sharp thrust) looked just like you!

WALTER. I just wondered if you’ve made up your mind and everything.

BENEATHA. *(gaining in sharpness and impatience prematurely)* And what did I answer yesterday morning – and the day before that – ?

RUTH. *(crossing back to ironing board right, like someone disinterested and old)* Don’t be so nasty, Bennie.

BENEATHA. *(still to her brother)* And the day before that and the day before that!

WALTER. *(defensively)* I’m interested in you. Something wrong with that? Ain’t many girls who decide –

WALTER and BENEATHA. *(in unison)* – “to be a doctor.”

*(Silence. She withdraws into newspaper.)*

WALTER. Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?

BENEATHA. *(flings down the paper, exits to bathroom, knocks)* COME ON OUT OF THERE, PLEASE! *(re-enters)*

CONTINUED...
ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

Text Analysis
SCENE TO READ ALOUD #2

RUTH. Walter Lee, why don’t you leave that girl alone and get out of here to work?

WALTER. *(looking at his sister intently)* You know the check is coming tomorrow.

BENEATHA. *(turning on him with maddening restraint. She crosses downstage right and sprawls on sofa.)* That money belongs to Mama, Walter, and it’s for her to decide how to use it. I don’t care if she wants to buy a house or a rocket ship or just nail it up and look at it – it’s hers. Not ours – hers.

WALTER. *(bitterly)* Now ain’t that fine! You just got your mother’s interests at heart, ain’t you, girl? You such a nice girl – but Mama can always take a few thousand and help you through school – can’t she?

BENEATHA. I have never asked anyone around here to do anything for me.

WALTER. No! But the line between asking and just accepting when the time comes is big and wide – ain’t it!

BENEATHA. *(with fury)* What do you want from me, Brother – that I quit school or just drop dead, which!

WALTER. I don’t want nothing but for you to stop acting holy around here – me and Ruth done made some sacrifices for you – why can’t you do something for the family?

RUTH. Walter, don’t be dragging me in it.

WALTER. You are in it – Don’t you get up and go work in somebody’s kitchen to help put clothes on her back – ?

*(BENEATHA rises, crosses, sits armchair downstage right)*

RUTH. Oh, Walter – that’s not fair –

WALTER. It ain’t that nobody expects you to get on your knees and say thank you, Brother! *(Waving his arms and bowing up and down)* Thank you, Ruth; thank you, Mama – and thank you, Travis, for wearing the same pair of shoes for two semesters –

BENEATHA. *(jumping up)* WELL – I DO – ALRIGHT – THANK EVERYBODY! *(falls on her knees)* AND FORGIVE ME FOR EVER WANTING TO BE ANYTHING AT ALL! *(pursuing him on her knees across the floor)* FORGIVE ME, FORGIVE ME, FORGIVE ME!

CONTINUED...
Questions for Discussion

1. Beneatha wants to be a doctor. Why does her brother say, “Ain’t many girls who decide to be a doctor”? What does this show us about the time period, Beneatha’s aspirations, and Walter Lee’s attitude?

2. How do Walter Lee and Beneatha act around each other? Why do they interact the way they do? What factors contribute to this unique relationship?

3. Compare Beneatha’s words and phrasing to Walter Lee and Ruth’s. How is her language different? What do you think accounts for these differences in speech?

4. What does this scene reveal about how Walter Lee’s and Beneatha’s dreams are in conflict?

5. Consider the fact that Walter Lee is 15 years older than Beneatha. At this point, does Walter Lee or Beneatha seem to be making greater progress toward accomplishing their dream? How does their birth order and age difference contribute to the tension between them?
The Origin of the Title

The title of Lorraine Hansberry’s play is an allusion to the poem “Harlem” by Langston Hughes. Use the poem to discuss potential issues that students might discover while seeing the play.

Harlem
By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

   Does it dry up
   like a raisin in the sun?
   Or fester like a sore—
   And then run?
   Does it stink like rotten meat?
   Or crust and sugar over—
   like a syrupy sweet?

   Maybe it just sags
   like a heavy load.

   *Or does it explode?*

Discussion Questions:

1. Define “deferred.” Use a dictionary if needed.
2. What kind of a dream do you think the poet might be referring to?
3. What five things does he compare “a dream deferred” to? How do those images shape your understanding of “a dream deferred”?
4. What is the tone of the poem? If you were to hear the poet read it, what emotion would you hear in his voice?
5. What similes does the poet use? What do they mean? How might the poem foreshadow what is likely to occur in the play *A Raisin in the Sun*?
6. Do you agree with Hughes? Give examples from personal experiences, books, television or film plots about what happens when dreams are lost.
7. Do you feel the poem is optimistic about the future? Why or why not?

By Jennifer Parker, Falcon Ridge Middle School
Often when reading *A Raisin In The Sun*, we want to view Walter Lee as a sort of villain. We might criticize him for his temper and decisions and struggle to have empathy with him. While different viewpoints and interpretations are acceptable when discussing literature, Walter Lee deserves some extra attention to, as Lena Younger puts it, “measure” him: “When you starts measuring somebody—measure him right, child. Measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got to wherever he is.”

**Directions:**
The following activity is intended to prompt discussion about Walter Lee and the particular “hills and valleys” that he has faced as a black male in the United States. After seeing the play, read the following commentary to help aid your understanding of Walter Lee. There are discussion questions that follow.

**Commentary:**
Walter Lee Younger is described by Lorraine Hansberry as “a lean, intense young man in his middle thirties, inclined to quick movements and erratic speech habits—and always in his voice, indictment.” He is a man with goals of success and providing financially for his family, which up to this point he has not been able to achieve:

**Walter:** What’s the matter with you all! I didn’t make this world! (Ruth crosses left front of table.) It was given to me this way! Hell yes, I want me some yachts some day! Yes, I want to hang some real pearls round my wife’s neck! Ain’t she supposed to wear no pearls? Somebody tell me—tell me who it is decides which woman is supposed to wear pearls in this world? I tell you I am a MAN—and I think my wife should wear some pearls in this world. (This last line hangs a good while and Walter crosses left front of sofa to center, the word “Man” has penetrated his own consciousness perhaps more than anyone else’s and he mumbles it to himself repeatedly with strange agitated pauses between as he moves about.)

Assistant professor of English at Cleveland State University Julie M. Burrell argues that “Walter’s feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness stem from his perceived lack of masculinity, which access to wealth, he believes, will resolve.” Throughout the play, Walter’s lines and actions show evidence of insecurity in his understanding of his masculinity in the wake of a racially oppressive history and in the midst of a racially oppressive present society:

Walter’s frustration underlines how in the capitalist, white supremacist system of the U.S., masculine pride and agency are yoked to the ability to be a breadwinner, a role consistently denied to African American men. (Burrell)

CONTINUED...
In her article "In Search of Manhood: The Black Male's Struggle for Identity and Power," Aza Nedhari argues:

Within the cultural framework of America, the systemic structure is characterized by White male patriarchy that allows for Black males to have the ability to negotiate the way in which they have been socialized and institutionalized to think, act, and behave because they are men. However, the reality of race and the lack of diversity in the purest sense, impedes upon this effort and cripples the black male's ability to truly transition into manhood. He is left to constantly struggle and fight for an identity, for power, for respect, and for understanding of who he is versus what he is projected as: a nigger.

The external expression and the internal emotions of anger, powerlessness, and frustration experienced by the Black male associated with a constant subjugation of a daily reminder of their unequal status, function as the precursor to Mental and Physical Health issues. (Nedhari)

Discussion Questions:

1. What aspects of Walter Lee’s personality have been influenced by his gender? His race? Both?
2. Do the realities of facing the obstacles of being a black male in America excuse Walter Lee’s quick temper and actions/decisions?
3. How might people of different races and genders view Walter Lee? People of different ages?
4. Do black men today face the same obstacles as Walter Lee? If so, where do we see these obstacles?

Sources:

Beneatha, like many youth in America, explores and questions the world around her. She meets Joseph Asagai, a Nigerian immigrant, and hopes to learn more about her identity and African roots through him. When her family questions her behaviors and the changes she’s made to her hair and clothing, she calls them “assimilationists.” She says this means “someone who is willing to give up his own culture—and submerge himself completely in the dominant and—in this this case—oppressive culture.” Using the definitions of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism below, have a discussion of the actions about the characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

**Eurocentrism** is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European (and, generally, Western) concerns, culture and values at the expense of those of other cultures.

**Afrocentrism** is simply an attempt to place Africa, instead of Europe, at the center of scholarly analysis of peoples of African descent. In his 1987 book, *The Afrocentric Idea*, Molefi Asante defines *Afrocentricity* as "the placing of African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior.” It should be emphasized that this perspective is not an explicit argument for African superiority in culture and history. Rather, it is a conceptual tool for seeing the history of African-descended peoples through their own lens, and not through the lens of Europe or the West.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. Where do we find examples of Eurocentrism in educational curriculums? What could be done to add other points of view to instruction and curriculum?
2. Which character in the play represents Eurocentrism and which character represents Afrocentrism? What do those characters do and say to show those representations?
3. How do Beneatha’s family members react to her new Afrocentric behaviors?
4. How does Beneatha show characteristics of both Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism? When do her life goals come into conflict with Afrocentrism?

**Sources:**


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By Tanya Sponholz, River Falls High School
White Privilege: A Post-Play Activity

Learning Goal:
Students will recognize how characters in the play are held back due to their race and consider how people of color are still at a disadvantage today.

Special Instructions:
Do not hesitate to try this activity in a predominantly white classroom. Oftentimes, this is the population that will most benefit from an activity like this. It is important to note, however, that if you have students of color in your classroom, it is wise to have a short discussion about the purpose of the activity before beginning.

Directions to Teachers:
Distribute two different colored Post-it notes to each student. For these instructions, the Post-it notes will be blue and red, but the color does not matter. Have each student choose one member of the Younger family to focus on. Tell students that the blue Post-it will represent them and the red Post-it will represent the member of the Younger family. Have the students line up along a hallway and stick both their Post-it notes on the wall in front of them, at about chest height. As you read the statements below (excerpted from Peggy McIntosh’s article, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”), students will move their Post-it notes up (if the statement is true for them or the character they chose) or down (if the statement is false for them or their character). The trend will probably be for the blue Post-it notes to move up the wall (especially in a classroom of white students) and for the red Post-it notes to move down.

Modifications:
If you have space in your classroom or another area (cafeteria, gymnasium, commons), this activity could be completed on the floor rather than a wall, with Post-its moving forward if the statements are true and backward if the statements are false. If you are working with limited space or wish to keep students’ results more private, this could also be completed individually on student desks, with Post-its moving forward for true statements and backward for false statements. Another option would be for students to work in pairs. If time is limited, you may elect to reduce the number of statements.

Segregated drinking fountain in Montgomery Alabama, July 31, 1914
Statements:
1. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
2. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
3. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
4. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
5. I can arrange to protect myself most of the time from people who might not like me.
6. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the “person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
7. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
8. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me professionally and advise me about my next steps.
9. I can think over many options (social, political, imaginative or professional) without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
10. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.
11. I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.
12. I will feel welcomed and “normal” in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

Questions for Follow-Up Discussion:
1. What trends do you notice about where your Post-it notes ended up?
2. Assuming there is a gap between the Post-it notes, have students measure it using a ruler. What does the way the Post-it notes are now arranged tell us about white privilege and racial inequity?
3. Race clearly plays a big role in holding back the Younger family in the 1950s. Does their race still hold people of color at a disadvantage today? In what ways has racial prejudice changed, for better or worse, since 1950?
4. What other examples of privilege can you come up with?
5. Why do you think we did this activity? What was the purpose?

Source of Statements:
Post-Play Discussion Questions

Characters
1. Based on what you know about the father and the children, who is most like Big Walter? Explain your choice.
2. How do Mama and Ruth parallel each other? Why might Hansberry have chosen to make these characters similar?
3. A foil is a character who contrasts with the protagonist in order to emphasize particular qualities of the protagonist. Which characters are foils of each other? How?
4. Beneatha represents viewpoints of the women’s liberation movement (feminism) and the Afrocentrism movement. Where do we see evidence of both these movements in her actions and words?
5. In Act 1 Scene 2, what does Beneatha mean when she tells Asagai, “We’ve got acute ghetto-itus”? What is her purpose in telling him this?
6. Walter Lee is the only adult male family member in this play. How would the events of the play change if the genders were reversed?
7. Is Walter Lee behaving more like a son or a husband towards Mama? Is Mama emasculating (depriving a man of his male role) Walter Lee? Explain your answer. If she is, is she doing it consciously or unconsciously? What cultural traditions affect their relationship?
8. How does the generational conflict manifest itself in the play? What evidence of a generational conflict do you see between Mama and her children?
9. How would you describe the marriage between Walter and Ruth? Is it a loving marriage?
10. Despite Walter Lee and Beneatha’s outward antagonism towards each other, when do they unite? What does this show us about their relationship?

Themes
1. In Act 1 Scene 1, Mama quotes Big Walter as saying, “Seem like God didn’t seem fit to give the black man nothing but dreams—but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile.” How are the Youngers’ dreams worthwhile? Which dreams are worthwhile and which aren’t?
2. What does Mama mean when she says in Act 1 Scene 2, “Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it’s money”? Where do we see those ideas in the play? Do the Youngers have freedom?
3. In Act 2 Scene 1, what does Mama mean when she says, “We was going backwards ‘stead of forwards”? How was the family going backwards? How does buying the house make them go forward?
4. What is the “American Dream”? Does this dream come true for any of the Younger family members?
5. The title A Raisin in the Sun is from a line in the poem “Harlem” by Langston Hughes. The first line reads: “What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?” Is this an appropriate title for the play? Why or why not?

CONTINUED...
Symbolism
1. What does the plant symbolize? Explain your answer. What does the introduction of the plant early in the play foreshadow?
2. What do the characters of George Murchison and Joseph Asagai represent? Who do you think would make a better match for Beneatha? Why?
3. In the Park Square Theatre production, how was the symbolism reflected in the set design?

Production
1. Which actors’ ideas came closest to your ideas when you read the play? Which has ideas least like your own? Why?
2. How did the costumes, sound design, and set design depict the time period of the play?
3. How did the set designer create the feeling of being in the Chicago tenements (run-down, often overcrowded apartment buildings)?
4. The production notes for the play read that the furnishings are “tired” but that they were “selected with care and love and even hope.” How did the set show both of these ideas?
5. How were the characters’ personalities reflected by their costumes?
6. How were lighting and sound used to evoke the tone and mood of the play?
7. How did the thrust stage (audience being on three sides) affect how the story was told?
8. In a play, the characters are confined to one location, whereas in a movie the characters are able to interact in more than one location. Which rendering of A Raisin in the Sun would be more effective? Why?

Contemporary Connections
1. What evidence do you see in today’s society of discriminatory practices in housing? In education?
2. Walter Lee is deeply frustrated by the lack of opportunities he has to advance as a black man in America. What evidence do you see of this frustration today?
3. What generational conflicts about race relations do you see today?
4. According to the Pew Research Center, the wealth of white households was eight times the median wealth of black households in 1983, compared with 13 times the wealth in 2013. What social/political policies have contributed to that difference? What actions need to be done to equalize this?
Educational Programs at Park Square Theatre are Funded in Part by:


To Our Teachers,

Thank you for giving the gift of theatre to your students, and the gift of your students to our theatre.

Yours sincerely,
The Staff at Park Square Theatre

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