A Raisin in the Sun
by Lorraine Hansberry

“The most extraordinary human being has within him elements of profundity – of profound anguish ... Every human being is in enormous conflict about something.”

– Lorraine Hansberry
Background Notes on Lorraine Hansberry

Family
- Born in Chicago on May 19, 1930
- The youngest of four children
- Her parents were well-educated African Americans who fought against discrimination
- As a child, lived with her family on the South Side of Chicago
- Later, her family became one of the first black families to move into a white neighborhood
- When treated unfairly, the Hansberrys defended themselves

Literary Experiences
- Like Sandra Cisneros, Hansberry felt the inclination to record her own experiences, thus *A Raisin in the Sun* is often considered autobiographical.
- Hansberry was one of the first playwrights to create a realistic portrait of the African-American life.
- *A Raisin in the Sun* received the New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards for Best Play of the Year.
- She was the youngest playwright, the fifth woman, and the only African-American writer at that point to win the award.
- Her promising career was cut short when she died in 1965, at the age of thirty-four of cancer.

Harlem Renaissance
- 1920-1940, mainly in New York City; used to be called the “New Negro Movement” named after an anthology of notable African-American words entitled *The New Negro* and published by philosopher Alain LeRoy Locke in 1925.
- Instead of using direct political means, African American artists, writers, and musicians employed culture to work for goals of civil rights and equality. For the first time, African American paintings, writings, and jazz became absorbed into mainstream culture and cross racial lines, creating a lasting legacy.
- Writers include Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Claude McKay, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and many others; later writers who were inspired by this period include Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison.
- Musicians include Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, and Ella Fitzgerald.
Mother to Son

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

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?

Annotation Instructions “Mother to Son”:
1. Underline the line you feel is most important. Why did you choose this line?

2. Answer the following two questions:
   a. Which historical leader from the Harlem Renaissance does this allude to?

Annotation Instructions “Harlem”:
1. Underline the line you feel is most important. Why did you choose this line?

2. Answer the following two questions:
   a. What do you think this poem has to do with dreams?

   b. What do you think this poem has to do with A Raisin in the Sun?
A Raisin in the Sun ~ Anticipation Guide

The following statements will give you some insight into many of the themes present in the play. Answer true or false for each statement based on your own personal opinion and then explain your reasoning.

1. You should hold onto your dreams; if you work hard enough for them they will come true. ________
   Reasoning:

2. Once children are grown, their parents are no longer responsible to provide them with money and housing. ________
   Reasoning:

3. We should think of the United States as a “melting pot” in which people from many cultures leave their differences behind and only follow “American” customs and traditions. ____________
   Reasoning:

4. Neighbors have the right to decide what kind of community they want to have—including who lives in that neighborhood. ________
   Reasoning:

5. A parent and child often disagree about the way the child should live his/her life. ___________
   Reasoning:

6. Most people don’t try hard enough to see the other fellow’s problem. ____________
   Reasoning:

7. When someone insults you, it is best to “turn the other cheek.” ________
   Reasoning:

8. Based on the above statements, make 3 predictions about what you think will happen in the play, A Raisin in the Sun.
   1.
   2.
   3.
Act I

How much is $10,000 and what could it buy?

You will hear about how the Younger Family will soon receive a check for $10,000. Everyone has a different idea as to how the money would best help the family. Obviously $10,000 went a lot further in 1959 when the play was published than it would today, but how much further?

Your task is to compare prices of basic items of 1959 and 2017, and ultimately to see how much $10,000 would be in today’s money.

Some websites that might help, but feel free to look at others:

First, research the basic items and their cost, then choose three items of your own:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>NOW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
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<td>Bread</td>
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<td>Eggs</td>
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<td>Postage Stamp</td>
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<td>Newspaper</td>
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<td>House/Apartment</td>
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<td>Gas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Car</td>
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</table>

Finally, using the following website, determine how much $10,000 in 1959 would be worth in today’s dollars. http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppowerus/

$10,000 (1959) = ___________________ (today)
Act I, Scene I

The Younger Apartment

Time: sometime between 1945 and 1958
Place: Southside Chicago

A Raisin in the Sun takes place entirely in the Younger home. Although people come and go, the audience only sees what goes on inside of their apartment.

Directions:
- Read the introduction and draw a layout of the Younger apartment
- You must include: Living Room, Kitchen area (including the one small window), bedroom on left, bedroom on right, and the shared bathroom.
- Additional details (such as the furnishings and who is in what room, etc.) should also be included.
Directions:
Hansberry's dynamic characterization is one of the most striking elements in her play. Choose a character (Walter Lee, Ruth, Mama, or Beneatha), and write a 10-line Bio Poem that aptly captures his or her role in the play. Go beyond the obvious – what does your character dream about? Does he or she work for personal benefit or the good of the family? In 10 lines, try to describe clearly your character to someone who has not read the play.

Bio Poem Outline:

- Line 1: First Name
- Line 2: Four descriptive traits (adjectives)
- Line 3: Sibling, Husband, Wife, Mother, etc of...
  - Line 4: Lover of ... 3 things
  - Line 5: Who feels ... 3 things
  - Line 6: Who needs ... 3 things
  - Line 7: Who fears ... 3 things
  - Line 8: Who would like to ... 3 things
  - Line 9: Resident of ... City, State
  - Line 10: Last name

Example:

Abigail  
Destructive, Rebellious, Seductive, Master of manipulation  
Mistress of John Proctor  
Lover or gossip, riots, chaos  
Who feels alone, powerful, betrayed  
Who needs guidance, a positive role model, some consequences for her actions  
Who fears the truth, embarrassment, rejection  
Who would someday like to be with John Proctor, control every situation, leave Salem  
Resident of Salem, Massachusetts  
Williams

Your Poem:
ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

In order to better understand a play, such as *A Raisin in the Sun*, you will need to know the terms most commonly used to discuss drama.
Directions: Define each element of drama.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>act</td>
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<tr>
<td>scenes</td>
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<td>cast of characters</td>
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<td>chorus</td>
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<td>dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>dramatic devices</td>
<td>Tools a dramatist may use to add interest to plays</td>
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<td>monologue/soliloquy</td>
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<td>plot</td>
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<td>subplot</td>
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<td>stage directions</td>
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<td>structure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>theme</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Directions: After each reading of the play, add information about each character's traits and actions. (Be specific.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Physical Traits</th>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Younger</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Walter Lee Younger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travis Younger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beneatha Younger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lena Younger (Mama)</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Asagai</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Murchison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Johnson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karl Linder</td>
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<td>Bobo</td>
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</table>
# Cast of Characters

**Act I - Scene I and II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Lee Younger</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth Younger</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Travis Younger</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Beneatha Younger</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mama (Lena Younger)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Asagai</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Act II - Scene I, II, and III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Younger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneatha Younger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mama</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis Younger</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Johnson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karl Linder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bobo</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Act III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Asagai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneatha</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mama</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karl Linder</td>
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STUDY QUESTIONS

Directions: Answer each question in a complete sentence(s).

STUDY QUESTIONS #1 - Act I - Scene One

1. Why did Walter ask Ruth what was wrong with her?

2. Why was Ruth upset when Walter gave Travis the money?

3. Who are Willy and Bobo?

4. Walter said, "Damn my eggs . . . damn all the eggs that ever was!" Why?

5. Who is Beneatha?

6. Why was Mama getting a check for $10,000?

7. Why did Beneatha say she wouldn’t marry George?

8. What was Beneatha's attitude towards God?

9. What happened to Ruth at the end of Act I Scene One?
STUDY QUESTIONS #2 - Act I - Scene Two

1. Who is Joseph Asagai? Where did Beneatha meet him?

2. What did Ruth find out at the doctor's office?

3. Why is Asagai's present to Beneatha appropriate?

4. Why is Asagai's nickname for Beneatha appropriate?

5. What does Mama say is "dangerous"?

6. Where did Ruth actually go instead of the doctor's office?

7. Why did Mama call Walter a disgrace to his father's memory?
### STUDY QUESTIONS #3 - Act II - Scene One

1. What was Beneatha's family doing when George came in?

2. What are "assimilationist Negroes"?

3. What did Mama do with her money?

4. What was Walter’s reaction to Mama’s purchase? Ruth’s reaction?

### STUDY QUESTIONS #4 - Act II - Scene Two

1. How did Ruth find out Walter hadn’t been going to work?

2. Where had Walter been going instead of to work?

3. What did Mama do for Walter?
### STUDY QUESTIONS #5 - Act II - Scene Three

1. Who was Karl Lindner, and why did he visit the Youngers’ house?

2. What was Walter’s reaction to Lindner?

3. What presents did Mama receive/get?

4. What news did Bobo bring to Walter? *(This is the climax of the play)*

### STUDY QUESTIONS #6 - Act III

1. Why didn’t Beneatha want to be a doctor anymore?

2. How did Asagai define "idealists" and "realists"?

3. What does Asagai ask Beneatha to do?
4. What fault does Mama find with herself?

5. What solution does Walter have?

6. Why didn’t Walter take the money Lindner offered?

7. What did the Younger family decided to do in the end of the play? What does this say about Walter as a person?
SYMBOLISM FOUND IN MAMA’S PLANT

**Directions:**

1. What words are used to describe Mama throughout the play?

2. What does Mama’s plant symbolize? Why?

3. How does Mama’s plant relate to the idea of the American Dream?

4. Read Alice Walker’s short poem above. What does she mean by “hunger”? How might this poem explain Mama’s love for her plant?

---

*Despite the hunger we cannot possess more than this: Peace in a garden of our own.*

- Alice Walker
Choose one of the following prompts and write for persuasion; circle the prompt you wish to answer.

**Prompt #1:** Is assimilation seen as a strength or a weakness in the today’s American society?

**Prompt #2:** Is it acceptable to give up on a dream as some point and accept what life has given?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Advanced</th>
<th>2 Proficient</th>
<th>1 Emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Has a unique claim that responds to the question</td>
<td>- Has a claim that responds to the question</td>
<td>- Has a claim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explains and analyzes how the textual evidence supports the original claim.</td>
<td>- Explains and analyzes the textual evidence.</td>
<td>- Explains the textual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concludes the response with a thoughtful sentence.</td>
<td>- Concludes the response.</td>
<td>- Concludes the response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Uses confident and academic persuasive language.</td>
<td>- Uses academic persuasive language.</td>
<td>- Uses persuasive language and first person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The reader is left with a feeling of persuasion.</td>
<td>- The reader is left with a feeling of persuasion.</td>
<td>- Reader does not leave with a sense of persuasion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>