

Thematic analysis of Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" analytical essay

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



A Raisin in the Sun depicts the life of an African-American family of Youngers living in Southern Chicago during 1950s. The play opens with Youngers preparing to receive \$ 10, 000 for insurance, from Mr. Younger's life insurance policy. As a result, all adult members of the family have budgeted for the money with each individual having varying opinions on how to spend the cash. Mama, the head of the family plans to buy a house and fulfill her lifetime dream which she shared with her late husband (Morrin and Hansberry 13).

Walter Lee, Mama's son is contemplating on investing his share in a liquor store in order to get finances that would salvage the family's financial status. On the other hand, Walter's wife shares her vision with Mama and hopes that their son Trivis will find the world a better place to live. Lastly, Beneatha gives her medical school tuition first priority as she tries to figure out her identity by reflecting on their history and Africa.

This competition leads to a clash of dreams as more challenges emerge as the family later moves to Clybourne Park, fulfilling their shared dream. They remain optimistic and united as they hope for a better life in future (Sparknotes 101 literature 703).

The play illustrates a number of themes which the writer illustrates using different events and reactions as portrayed by Mama and her family. All the family members have aspirations and dreams which are universal and shared among other people from different backgrounds (Hansberry 25).

Walter's understanding of this American dream marks the center of the conflict in the play. He gets addicted to the middle-class philosophy of materialism and believes in rising to become a better person through hard work and determination. Hansberry illustrates Walter's perception towards Charlie's business that earns him \$100,000 annually. He ignores everyone's opinion towards his intentions of running a liquor store which he adopts with desperation as means to realize his dream.

The same is demonstrated as Walter considers accepting an offer from Mr. Lindner without visualizing the implication of this business deal. He sees it as the only way to recover his lost money. Walter's wrong interpretation of the American dream is challenged as he carries illegal transactions before his son. He revises this understanding after finding it hard to deal with Mr. Lindner (Sparknotes 101 literature 703).

Additionally, Hansberry develops female gender identity throughout the play by representing three generations of women. Lena assumes the headship of the family in her early thirties after the death of her husband, Walter Senior. Having been brought up in the South during dangerous times of lynching, she relocates to the Northern part with the hope of finding peace and a better life. Despite the fact that Lena is ahead of time, her dreams remain anchored on the well-being of her family rather than selfish interests.

According to Scholar Claudia, Lena's disregard to herself is fashioned by gender conditioning which affirms that the needs of a woman ought to be connected to the family alone (Washington 113). She puts up with her

husband's immoral behavior under poor conditions and struggles to support him. This clearly portrays a conflict between men and women regarding their positions in the society. Women are not considered for material wealth as they are expected to better the life of their families.

Unlike Lena, Ruth engages her husband in arguments although she goes ahead to please him by commenting positively about the liquor business to Lena. She also pleads with her sister-in-law, Beneatha not to provoke her brother about the kind of businesses he is involved in.

She ends up doing all kinds of jobs to enable the family to move to a better house. On the other hand, Beneatha is a no-nonsense feminist college student who is against the unfair treatment and expectations of the society from women (Hansberry 27). She does not see the reason why women are considered less human yet they are expected to take care of their households.

She constantly rejects and criticizes the ideas of her brother who makes misinformed decisions based on mediocre interpretation of the American dream. She challenges Walter's male chauvinism and rejects men like George Murchison who have no recognition and single respect for women in the society (Washington 111). The writer clearly exemplifies how the perception of women towards their identity in the society has tremendously changed.

In addressing gender imbalance in the society, Hansberry defines a man using Walter whose course of action is mainly dictated by the fact that he is

a man (Washington 111). In his capacity as a son, husband and father, Walter demonstrates men's view over gender balance and discrimination. He pretends to love his son so much and wants to appear innocent and honorable in his eyes.

He understands the financial constraints of the family yet he manages to give a dollar to his son every time he requests for fifty cents (Morris and Hansberry 12).

Walter chooses the liquor business to make personal wealth and to provide for his family. He wants to make his wife happy and take his son to a prestigious college of his choice. He provides for his mother by stepping in his father's shoes during her old age. He decides to degrade in his futile efforts to achieve his goals.

The play generally describes several themes which revolve around the life of African-Americans in 1950s. Through gender issues, American Dream and poverty, Hansberry discusses family life in a contextual manner that permits imagination of the social set up of Youngers.

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