

# "a raisin in a sun" by lorraine hansberry

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



I have a dream...

" A dream deeply rooted in the American Dream."

" I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live without the true meaning of its creed: " we hold these truths to be self- evident: that all me are created equal." " I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judge by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

" " I have a dream that one day little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with white boys and white girls are walk together as sisters and brothers." Martin Luther King Jr.

In the play " A Raisin In A Sun" by Lorraine Hansberry is essentially about dreams, including the American Dream. The play takes place around the 1950's in Chicago's south side, when segregation was still around. In this play you meet a cast of people with dreams of a better life that compares the novel " A Raisin in the Sun" with Martin Luther King's speech " I Have a Dream.

" It Analyzes the similar themes found in play like racial injustice, socio-economic discrimination, dream fulfillment and the fact that it takes place during the same time. There are many aspects that are discussed in both " A Raisin in the Sun" and " I have a dream" speech. Perhaps the most important of those are racial injustice, socio-economic discrimination, unity, and the struggles for the American dream.

In this play there are many different dreams, Mama's dream is to create a better life for her family. The American dream, which is the idea of success

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that involves owning a house, being able to provide a better life for your family and to attain certain material objects. Mama's dream is the American dream of moving her family out the small cramped house and into a bigger house, that is perfect for a family of five with a yard children can play and where she can tend a garden. For many African Americans during the 1950's "The American dream" was to be treated equally and before that their dream was freedom, an end to slavery. Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream Speech" and the play "A Raisin in the Sun" have many similarities. They both have the desire for black and white equality. They also want to make a change and live the way they feel is right for them to live. They both willing to take chances in doing so and begin to achieve by trying. A Raisin in the Sun and "I Have a Dream" speech both deal with many issues but none more important than injustice.

Racism was the root cause of all the discrimination and injustice African Americans faced. Martin Luther King Jr. speech and Lorraine Hansberry both are examples of the starving freedom of black American and both speak the truth of the realities of life and dreams for the future of all Americans. Even after many years of African Americans being released from slavery and became free Americans, they were still treated the same and that they are not actually free until the people are all equal regardless to skin color. Walter Lee and Martin Luther King Jr. both make the same points because they both have their big dreams and are willing to do anything to make their dreams come true. A dream is to envision another life or characteristic that could be better or worse than what the person already has. In the case of most people it is a dream that is positive.

People mainly are selfish dreamers who dream only about themselves but there are some who dream about the world or others such as friends and family. Two examples of these types of dreamers are Mama and Martin Luther King Jr. In Dr. King's speech he brings up that his dream is not only for him but also for others with the same problem. He is a caring dreamer, one who believes others come first then him. Mama is this type of dreamer because her dreams are for her family and the well being of them. Even though Mama's dream is not as deep or motivational as Dr. King, it is still a non-selfish dream. Mama's dream was to get a house that was more suitable to live in than the current house that the Youngers live in. Which was dirty and small. They were cramped up and highly uncomfortable, it was defiantly not a proper house for five people and a baby on the way.

Therefore Mama's dream of having better living qualities was a smart investment. "Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. She found a nice house for a good price in a White neighborhood; white neighborhoods had bigger and cheaper homes than black neighborhoods. She found the best deal as she said her self: I did the best I could" (Act 2. Scene 1. 93) Mama thinks she chose the best option for the family and she did. This can be related to Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream as well. He dreamed of a world where black and whites and all races would live in peace. He envisioned that there would be no hate because of skin tone or place of origin. He dreamt that " We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one" (" I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King Jr.)

By this line he meant that they should not stop fighting for equal rights until they move out of little suburban areas classified as ghettos. Once again that speech can relate to Walter Lee, when he finally takes a stand in his "manly hood" and shows his pride in his family. The story ended as him being the head of the family because he took control and became a family man by rejected an offer from a white businessman to stay out of a white neighborhood and to stay with all blacks. When Travis smiles up at his father; this is when Walter Lee has a sudden change of heart. He explains to Mr. Lindner that his family members are plain proud people and how his father worked for decades as a laborer, which his father basically earned the right for his family to move into their new home in Clybourne Park.

They have come so far and worked so hard why turned it down, they have earned it, its only fare. Walter realizes and rediscovers his self-worth, Self-respect and self-esteem and he proves this when he said to Mr. Lindner that "the sixth generation of our family in this country." He finally reclaims his personal pride, defends his family's historical right to be treated fairly in their country, and to protect his family's dignity. They both reflect the conditions that African Americans had to go through to get equality from discrimination and segregation. It was clear that in both accounts of dreams that there was a time to strike and in both accounts that time was now. Both the Youngers and black people of the Civil Rights Movement had one common dream hidden by many materialistic desires: dignity, equality, and progress. Dr. King said, "I have a dream today!" Walter Younger wants to make a business deal that could help him obtain dignity, equality, and

progress for his family, and the insurance money that Mama will get is a once-in-a-lifetime deal.

A rare opportunity, that opens the door to propositions that could help his family acquire those qualities. Both Walter and Dr. King are telling their families and followers that the time for change is now and that change is a now or never deal. While one was real and one was not, the desire, dreams, and struggles mentioned in the speech matched those of the novel perfectly. Martin Luther King and the characters of "A Raisin In A Sun" had the same ambitions, which included a better life for future generations, liberation from the unfair living conditions of African-American citizens, and the importance on the urgency necessary for making these dreams happen. Both pieces represented a fight, one for a family, and one for a group of millions. As well as wars against inequality, injustice, and unfairness were won. Mama historically represents Rosa Parks because she acts as a leader through out the story.

They both spoke up for what they believed in. Mama speaking up gave her courage and wisdom. The courage Rosa Parks had was when she got arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus because of what she believe and in the human rights. Just like Mama when she stood up for her husband, when Walter Lee was not setting an example for his rights. She didn't not want him to take Mr. Lindner offer of money in exchange of his family not to moving in to its dream house in a white neighborhood because she believed in her and her family's rights. Therefore she also stood up for what she believes in and the human rights. The Great Migration was a period in American history where blacks moved north to escape the Jim Crow

laws and prejudice of the South. The civil rights movement brought enlightenment towards the abolishment of segregation laws. Although the laws are gone, one might ask, " does segregation still exist? "

Yes it does but our segregation problems now aren't just about race. They're about income too, and the web of connections between what it means to be poor and a person of color in the city. Not only are people segregated by race and by income, meaning that people of color are likely to live with other people of color and poor people are likely to live with poor people. For example in East Harlem there isn't really any healthy places to eat just fast food and the supermarkets are pricy. If you were to go downtown where wealthy people live thru have a variety of healthy places to eat that is affordable as well as their supermarkets like Trader Joes. In today's society one can agree with Walter Lee that life now is about money, it is now the rich vs. the poor. In the beginning of the play it mentions their dreams being deferred, which means their hope of full equality is postponed." What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Langston Hughes wrote the poem, and Lorraine Hansberry was inspired by both by the poem and by her own real-life experience to write *A Raisin in the Sun*. This play was the first play on Broadway that was written by an African-American woman as well as the first African American to direct a play on Broadway. The play was inspired by Hansberry's own experience with racism and housing discrimination. Her father was tried to buy a house in a white neighborhood much like the one in the play but he was blocked because in the 1950's African American could not get housing in good neighborhoods because of the color of their skin.

They were still segregated, and many times they were treated violently. They were unable to find good paying jobs as they were overlooked in favor of white people. Often times, they received inadequate medical care, and were made to wait for treatment in hospitals while white folks got treatment first. As a child, Hansberry's family became one of the first to move into a white neighborhood.

When their neighbors rebelled, both with threats of violence and legal action, the Hansberry's defended themselves; Hansberry's father successfully brought his case all the way to the Supreme Court. Her father sued and won a partial victory in the US Supreme Court. Lorraine Hansberry used her play *A Raisin In A Sun* to tell people about her own life struggle with racism and female discrimination. Her play shows us her problems were handled with determination and a will to keep striving for her goal of becoming a writer. Langston Hughes anticipated such an uprising in his poem, just as Hansberry illustrated the effects of a dream deferred by the Youngers. *Raisin* answers the last line of Hughes' poem: " Or does it explode?" Indeed it did, and *Raisin* became a beacon for a changing nation.

Hansberry was also the first black playwright as well as the youngest to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Since then, the drama about a black family's dream to move into a white neighborhood in pre-civil-rights-era Chicago has been translated into 30 languages and has been continually produced in church basements, community halls, school auditoriums, and professional theaters. A dream deferred is a dream put off to another time, each character from *A Raisin in the Sun* had a deferred dream, and their dreams become dried up like a raisin in the sun. Not just dreams are dried up



though; Walter Lee and Ruth's marriage became dried up also. Their marriage was no longer of much importance, like a dream it was postponed and it became dry. Their struggle for happiness dried up because they had to concentrate all of their energies on surviving. Their needs seem no longer to be satisfied by each other. But they both saw a resolution in the insurance check arriving in the mail. The money would let Ruth fulfill her dream of owning her own house and leaving the apartment.

Money seemed to get in the way of all of their dreams. It was the force that controlled their lives. The money is like the sun that leaves no choice to the grape but to dry up until a raisin never the less it does not mean that the raisin is no longer good, it is still sweet. Dreams are good to shoot for, but don't let them ruin your life trying to fulfill them (Robinson). At the end Ruth and Walter Lee reconcile because they still loved each other, Walter took her out a date to the movies, where they finally had some quality time. Ruth sees hope in their marriage as she describes her date to Beneatha: Ruth: "we went to the movies. We went to the movies. You know the last time ma and Walter went to the movies together?" Beneatha: "No." Ruth: "Me either. That's how long it's been (smiling again) but we went last night. The picture wasn't much good, but that didn't seem to matter. We went and we held hands." (Act 1. Scene 2. 51) this shows that once Walter has control over money, he becomes much more affectionate with Ruth and that there is still love between them.

Many dream in raisin in the sun were deferred like Beneatha's dream of becoming a doctor and to save her race from ignorance. The first part of her dream may be deferred because of the money Walter loses. Her dream is

also one deferred for all women. Beneatha lives in a time when society expects women to build homes rather than careers. In other words play the role of a housewife. Women were also discriminated around this time, women weren't really admitted to medical school, same with law school, teachers and they were not even allow to sit in jury. Walter's dream of owning his own business has been so long deferred and left " festering" of his family. The " open sores" of his deferred dream blind him to the consequences of his actions and to the ache he causes Mama Younger.

After Willy Harris convinces Walter that investing in the liquor store is a great idea, Willy takes Walter's money and runs. It is because of the thieving Willy Harris that Walter's dream is deferred. The dream of owning your own business and having all the money you will ever need is a goal held by many in society, then and now. Walter Lee Younger becomes obsessed with his dream of a business venture that will give him financial and social independence, after getting and losing the money that will help this dream become reality he realizes that pride and dignity are more important for him and his family. There are also many symbols in " A Raisin In The Sun" but one important symbol that represented dreams was Mama's plant. It was weak but resilient; it represented her dream of living in a bigger house with a lawn. Whenever she tends to her plant, she symbolically shows her dedication to her dream.

The first thing that Mama does in the morning as mention in the beginning of the play in Act 1 towards the ending of Scene 1 is that is that she goes to the window, opens it, and brings in a feeble little plant growing doggedly in a small pot on the window. The plant is just as important as her dream. Mama

admits that the plant has never had enough sunshine but still survives. In other words, her dream has always been deferred but still remains strong. When Beneatha asks why Mama would want to keep that "raggedy-looking old thing," Mama Younger replies: "It expresses me." (Act 2, Scene 3) At the end of the play, Mama decides to bring the plant with her to their new home. While it initially stands for her deferred dream, now, as her dream comes true, it reminds her of her strength in working and waiting for so many years. Her plant will also have a new home and beginning for it may now get more sunlight in its bigger home. In conclusion for all these reasons, *A Raisin in the Sun* is an ideal work to discuss in terms of the American dream. It shows how the admirable idea that everyone can achieve their ambitions if they work doesn't always stand up in the face of real life, and how people can redeem them as Walter Lee does when he refuses the buyout offer through moral courage. Society in the 1950s was full of racial discrimination. Martin Luther King and Walter Lee both have the starvation to stop the desolation of discrimination. Hansberry, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. all have inspiring stories and if they were still alive today they can see how far their dreams have come that has inspired many. Hughes asks whether a dream is deferred is like "A Raisin In The Sun" and he specifically asks whether a dream will "dry up". Grapes in the South dry into raisins, but they never lose their sweetness, no matter how much they dry up.