

Two sisters in "everyday use"

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In the short story *Everyday Use*, by Alice Walker, is narration by an African American woman in the South who is faced with the ultimate decision to whom she should give away the two quilts. Dee, her oldest daughter who is visiting from college, perceives the quilts as popular fashion and believes they should undoubtedly be given to her. Maggie, her youngest daughter, who still lives at home and understands the family heritage, has been promised the quilts. The two daughters each have opposing views on the value and worth of the different items in their lives. Walker uses this conflict to make the point that the significance of heritage is more important than style; so Mama she decides based upon the appearance, personalities and the idea about the family artifacts. Maggie is not as attractive as Dee. She is thin and an awkward girl. Her mother says "good looks pass her by." Furthermore, she carries herself like someone who has low self-esteem, which her mother describes as "chin on chest, eyes on ground." Maggie has characteristics like her mother, she is an example that heritage in both knowledge and form passes from one generation to another. Mama is a full-bodied woman who does the needed upkeep of their home and wears overalls daily because she does not care about her appearance compared to her eldest daughter. Dee, on the other hand, is an attractive woman in college. Mama describes Dee as having, "nice hair and a full figure." Dee takes lots of pride in her appearance, she dresses in fashionable clothes. Besides their appearances, Maggie and Dee have unique personalities. When Maggie is first introduced in the story, she is nervous about her sister's visit. Dee's arrival makes Maggie so uncomfortable, that she tries to leave the house. Maggie was also intimidated by her sister Dee, when she was afraid

to confront her sister about the quilts. Maggie gives in and says that Dee may have the quilts because she is not use to "winning." But unlike Maggie, Dee is bold. When she was a young girl, she was never afraid to express herself. When her mother named her Dee, she hated the objects around her for the lack of beauty and style; but when she became a member of the Nation of Islam and changed her name to Wangero, she sees the quilts as a part of her heritage. The family artifacts are very important to Maggie and Dee, but for completely different reasons. Maggie values the family quilts for their sentiment and usefulness. She learned how to quilt from her grandmother and aunt who made the quilts. Her mother had been saving the quilts for Maggie to use after she wed. Maggie hints that she sees the quilts as a reminder of her grandmother and aunt. Dee also values the family quilts. After going off to college brought Dee to a new awareness of her heritage. She returned home wearing ethnic clothes and, explaining to her mother that her changed name and clothes was a way to disassociate herself "from the people who oppress [her]." Without a doubt Maggie and Dee are two sisters who have turned out very different. Dee believes that she can appreciate the value of the quilts more than Maggie, who will "be backward enough to put them to everyday use." But at no time in the story did Dee ever reveal her mother and sister her use of the family objects. And Maggie has a connection of heritage with the quilt that Mama knows. Mama knows that "It was Grandma Dee and Big Bee who taught [Maggie] how to quilt." Because of Maggie's connection, Mama takes the quilts from Dee who "held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them closely to her bosom," and gave them to Maggie. In the end, the objects described in the story, by

Mama, were used to boost the idea of the story. Which is an everyday item may have different meanings to different types of people. At which Walker used common items to symbolize the story's focus on the beauty, value of plain objects and average people, over that which is stylish and useless. So Mama she decides who receives the quilts, based upon the appearance, personalities and the knowledge of the family artifacts.