

# Symbolism and character development in everyday use



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In summary, everyday use is a short story told from Mamar's point of view, she is described as a "big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands" (Walker, P. 1126). At the very start of the story, Mama awaits for the return visit of Dee, her eldest daughter.

Mama and her younger daughter, Maggie, stands next to each other as they both hesitantly awaits the arrival of Dee. As they are waiting, the audience receives a taste of Mama's life and her relationship with Dee. Apart from Mama and Maggie, we learn that Dee have always desired more than her family history or Mama could offer her. Dee is educated and is clearly intelligent and driven, we get the sense that her achievements have come at the cost of her mother and her younger sibling.

When Dee finally showed up at the scene, she was accompanied by a young man named Hakim-a-barber, whom Mama refers to as "Asalamalakim". As soon as Dee showed up, it was clear that she was not the same person she is now then when she left, starting with the fact that she insisted on being called, Wangero rather than her original name, Dee. Both Dee and her boyfriend are more focused on getting artifacts than truly connecting and engaging with Mama and Maggie. They searched through Mamar's belongings in hope of finding original pieces of old rural black life (history), a life and history that Dee has long ago divorced herself from. Dee continuously shoots insults at Mama and Maggie, indirect as casual chit-chat, directed at Mama and her sister. Dee demands on obtaining old quilts that are put away for Maggie. After Mamar's endurance of Deer's inappropriate insults, mama informs "Wangero" to take two other quilts not intended for Maggie and depart. Dee advices Maggie to make something of herself and <https://assignbuster.com/symbolism-and-character-development-in-everyday-use/>

mockingly direct at her Mama that she contains no understanding of her own heritage. Next, Dee and Hakim-a-barber got into their car and depart.

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In *Everyday Use*, Walker uses the possessions found in Mamar's home that represent culture, heritage and tradition. Dee arrives to visit her mother and at her arrival, she saw her mother's house as a symbol of her childhood and background. Dee begins to notice her surroundings. The first thing she paid attention to was the benches. As she takes time to the admiration of the benches, Dee says, You can feel the rump prints (Walker 112). This scene from the story clearly conveys to the audience that the author intentionally put that sentence to tell the readers that the benches hold a history. In other words, the benches have been in home for many years. Therefore, the benches stand as a representation of the characters past and experiences. There are many symbols to consider, but another symbol that the author utilize is the butter churn and dash. When talking about these items, the author tells, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood (Walker, P. 112).

The author is trying to sending a message the audience that there is history behind the butter dash. Some of the characters good and bad past experiences are contained within the butter dash. The butter dash may be an everyday use item; however, some good and bad experiences that have taken place in our everyday life around the table took place in the present of the butter dash (if the household possesses one). With all this being said, it means that every time you would trough a stare at the butter dash, the

remembrance of these experience are in a way, relieved. The author proceeds on describing the butter dash by saying that it was made of beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived (Walker, P. 112).

The description of the butter dash represent the history. The fact that the author included the remembering of the history tells the audience that the author puts values heritage. With these items, the author tells the audience of their history. This shows the author's gratitude of knowing the history behind things. The author is clearly concerned about the sensitive artifacts of the African American past. By writing the story everyday use, the author clearly demonstrate that she recognizes the need to preserve the fragile artifacts of the African American past. In other words, the appreciation of the benches and the butter churn are items that represent African American traditions. Walker strongly believe that there is a need to explain the significance of concerning the African American culture and heritage and the author used these everyday items to symbolize that importance.

The items such as the benches, the butter dash and the quilts obviously signify African American culture and heritage. Among the other everyday items, the quilts are the most important symbol that the author utilize in the story Everyday Use. When Dee carried the quilts out, the author digs into thorough details about the meaning behind these quilts. The author says, in both of [the quilts] were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezrar's uniform that he wore in the Civil War (Walker, P. 113).  
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The quilts symbolizes the complete past of the family that dates back to the time of the Civil War. The quilts hold great importance to the culture, and not only representation of the past. They also symbolize the hard work of the family members. The African American quilts are clear symbols representing the African American tradition. According to African American history of the quilts, the purpose of the quilts was a productive way for the African American slave women to pass time, and finally, the quilts were used and needed as a necessity to keep slaves warm during the winter time. Even though some people, for instance Dee, view the quilts as something that should be used as a mean of beautification. On the other hand, the author does view the quilts the same way. Walker believes that The quilts represents history and tradition. In other words, the author uses these quilts to symbolize the appreciation and respect of African American culture. According to Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Charlotte Pierce-Baker, the quilts, in their patched and many-colored glory offer not a counter to tradition, but, in fact, an instance of the only legitimate tradition of ? the people that exists (311). In other words, the quilts in *Everyday Use* are one of the only symbols that represent traditions during that time era. In *Everyday Use*, the quilts are the most significant part making up the story, and the author uses the quilts to show the traditions of African-American heritage.

The author portray the appreciation she contain towards preserving and respecting the African American culture and heritage through the development of the characters. The she story contains three main characters. Mama is one of the main characters that shows the most transformation in character. In the story, Mama starts off by discussing her

daughters. She clearly see Dee as the lovelier and more intelligent daughter. She seems to think highly of Dee. She says, [Maggie] thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that ? no is a word the world never learned to say to her (Walker, P. 109). Mama says this because she recognizes that Dee always gets everything she desires, and no one ever denies her anything, including Mama. Mama knows that Dee has unusual ways that does not resemble the ways of Mama or Maggies's, but in some ways Mama seems to look up to Dee and longs for Dee to accept her. Tuten agrees by saying, Mamar's distaste for Deer's egotism is tempered by her desire to be respected by her daughter (Walker, P. 125).

The character of Mama changes during the quilt scene as she come to realize that Maggie shares the appreciation of culture and heritage, and Deer's appreciation is entirely different from theirs. In the action of the quilt scene, Dee is basically demanding Mama to give her the quilts, and Mama says, when I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet (Walker, P. 113). In other words, the truth hits Mama quicker than lightning. The truth is that the Dee is the daughter that does not know or understands the true appreciation of African American culture. Tuten says the story is ultimately about Mamar's awakening to one daughterr's superficiality and to the otherr's deep-seated understanding of heritage (Walker, P. 125). In Everyday Use, the author uses Mamar's change in how she views her daughters to help defend her point, which is the importance of keeping the values and traditions in the African American culture.

Mama expresses herself as a big boned woman with rough, man-working hand. She references conditions that were useful and necessary to survive for her ancestors. She can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man and can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing (Walker, P. 115). So she is able to survive with the help of these methods that were passed on by her family from generation to generation. She has the ability to actually use these abilities and thus be independent.

Mama is a tough and relaxed individual. When Dee badly show that she wants the quilts her grandmother made, Mama team with her daughter Maggie: I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangeror's hands and dumped them into Maggies lap(Walker, P. 117). Mama does not want to surrender the quilts to Dee, she wants Maggie to have the quilts for everyday Mama portrays a mighty character who recognizes the value of her culture and fights for it.

It obviously clear how very different Dee is from her family. One of the things that makes it so obvious ifs the fact that she is an educated woman and her family holds no educational background. Dee went to Augusta school. While Dee is educated, it come at a cost for her family because she uses her knowledge to present her dominance to her family at her return. The author uses expressive oppositions: she washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge(Walker, P. 117), and the author goes on with words like pressed and shove to show Deer's not so attractive attitude. She is determined to gain knowledge and be different from her ancestors.

She uses her reading ability like a weapon to show her family how well educated she is and how small they are in their illiteracy.

In conclusion, Alice Walker utilizes symbolism and character development to express her personal emotions of culture and heritage, which is the extreme importance of maintaining and respecting the strong value of family and traditions. The symbols of the benches, the butter dash, and the quilts help represent the history of African American traditions. The character development of Mama, Dee, and Maggie help to show the different points of views that one may have about heritage, and Mamar's fundamental eye opener of discovering which daughter values the same things as her in the same way. The change in Mama permits her to stand up to a daughter in a way that she has not before. The setting of the yard aids in telling the story behind the culture and heritage. Walker defends her perception on the extreme importance of protecting and admiring the value of African American culture and heritage.