

The characters of dee and maggie in "everyday use" examined argumentative essay e...

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Which character truly understands the concept of ‘heritage’?

In Alice Walker's classic short story "Everyday Use", the central conflict revolves around two sisters who are very different from one another in life opportunities, choices, and values. While the story is told by their elderly mother, the focal point of the story is on their two differing viewpoints and the way that each of them perceives the concept of heritage. While Dee has an intellectual understanding of the concept, for Maggie, it is a concrete experience that she lives day-to-day, making her concept of heritage more valid despite her limited opportunities.

Dee is glamorous, well-educated, lives in the city, is a part of the civil rights movement. She believes that by changing her name to Wangero, a name to which she has no direct connection, she is shaking off the shackles that her slave ancestors bore and getting in touch with her heritage. It does not phase her when her mother points out that she was named Dee after an aunt, who in turn was named after her mother, and that the name goes back four generations. Upon Dee's arrival, she does not immediately kiss her mother, and instead takes a polaroid of her mother, Maggie, and the house, as though trying to preserve a piece of living history.

The problem, of course, is that Dee cannot see that that history has not yet died. She is no doubt brilliant, on the cutting edge of her time, but in her heart, her heritage is already dead, even though her mother and Maggie continue to live it day-to-day. What she does during this visit is try to preserve the past as artifacts, despite the fact that, if left alone, it would continue to live. She acts as though the house is a museum and that

everything it contains is hers to take, because she will care for it better. It does not matter to her when she demands she be allowed to turn the dasher into an alcove table that her mother and Maggie use this in everyday life and that it makes their lives easier. Indeed, the fact that they use these items make it ever-more important to her that she turn them into museum pieces of some sort. By taking them out of use, she believes that she is somehow preserving them.

In contrast, Maggie has little interest in letting things of value to someone sit by, neglected. She knows exactly which relative made each of the pieces, while her sister appears to have little interest in family history after they left Africa (indeed, she is only interested in history which can no longer actually be traced). Maggie feels a real connection to each of the items; her sister simply recognizes that they are of monetary value and feels they should be protected from “ everyday use”. Indeed, as seen with the quilts, she would prefer to have them on display in her home, serving no actual value to anything other than her ego, than have them provide an actual benefit to her sister, who it would appear appreciates them for the care that was put into making them rather than any monetary value they might hold.

At the end of the day, both sisters represent different viewpoints on heritage. Dee looks at things on a very large scale, and is out of touch with her immediate roots. Maggie, on the other hand, lives them day-to-day and places great value on personal attachment. While Dee’s ideals and fighting spirit, juxtaposed with Maggie’s passive one, are self-evident, on the whole, Maggie seems to have a personal connection with her heritage, which in many ways is of more value than Dee’s extreme distance from it.

Works Used:

Walker, Alice. "Everyday Use". In *Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*.

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