

Alice walker's
description of the
idea of the household
as illustrated in her
boo...



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In "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker, Dee's negative attitude towards the Johnson's household reflects her ashamed views of her family and their interpretation of heritage.

The descriptions of the house portrayed by Mama, Maggie, and Dee distinguish how different their lifestyles are, and how they affect Dee's perception of her family. Initially, the yard of the house is described as "more comfortable than most people know...like an extended living room" by Mama, the narrator (1226). Its homeliness is brought upon by the extensive care of the yard taken by Maggie and Mama, who had "made [it] so clean and wavy" (1226). They look at the yard as a place of solace and protection from the outside world. However, the narrator comes to the sudden realization, before Dee's arrival, that, "No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we "choose" to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends" (1228). The distinction between the narrator's care for the home and Dee's disdain reveal Dee's feelings of shame and disappointment. Whereas Maggie and Mama take great pride in keeping the house clean, Dee looks down upon the house's condition, just as she does the family, when she says, "It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama live, you'd never know it" (1232). The contrast between Dee's modern thinking, with her polaroid and new name, and Maggie and Mama's traditional views make it harder for Dee to accept the household she has grown up in, and causes further distance within the family.

Set after the Black Power movement in the 1970s, "Everyday Use" captures the misguided value of heritage Dee places on the house. For instance, when <https://assignbuster.com/alice-walkers-description-of-the-idea-of-the-household-as-illustrated-in-her-book-everyday-use/>

she first arrives at the house and starts taking picture with her Polaroid, Dee " never takes a shot without making sure the house is included" (1229).

From the beginning, Walker makes it clear that this home is a very essential part of Dee's memories of her family, despite her embarrassment of their living conditions. However, Dee's interest in the house's history and antiquity turns solely materialistic, when she exclaims, " I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table" and, in reference to her Grandma's quilts, says she will " Hang them...As if that was the only thing you could do with quilts" (1231, 1232). The house is used as a device to fulfill Dee's false sense of heritage, where she feels the need to connect with her roots as a black woman. Again, Dee's modern Black Power views clash with her mother's traditional views, when Mama refuses to give Dee the quilts and she declares, " Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!...She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use" (1231). The conflict furthers between the family when Mama asks, "' What don't I understand?' I wanted to know. ' Your heritage.' [Dee] said" (1232). Dee's misinterpretation of culture represents the time period the Johnsons live in, where black people would take pride in their ancestors and their inheritance.

The Johnson's household is a device used by Walker to explain the obvious difference between Dee and the rest of her family. Their different perceptions of the house make Dee's role in the family clear and explain why she is so distant. Dee tries to maintain her culture through various means, such as changing her name or using family heirlooms to re-establish her connection with the black culture, however Maggie and Mama do not feel inclined to re-evaluate what it means to be a black individual. The distinction

between their values illustrate the different values experienced by the generation gap in the confusing time after the Civil Rights movement.