

Alice walker's everyday use essay



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Traditions and values sometimes change from generation to generation. "Everyday Use," by Alice Walker is about a girl named Dee who does not like her heritage at first, and does many things to get rid of it or get away from it. She leaves home to look for what she wants and then came back which is a mistake . Walker's " Everyday Use" illustrates how shame and embarrassment of your culture can lead to a total change of culture, and create differences within families. Mama's view of cultural heritage is to maintain traditions and the use of the tradition. Dee views of cultural heritage in a more liberal sense, she sees it in a classification mode and sometimes as a disadvantage to a human being in the materialistic world. Many young people in their youth are ashamed of their culture, and Dee is an example to this. She is ashamed of her culture because of her desire to succeed and overcome poverty, which is not an ideal of her culture at the time.

She comes from a southern black family. The story " Everyday Use" by Alice Walker states, " in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now," (636) showing how they come from a black background. Immediately before being black in a the south meant you weren't the wealthiest of people, their home was very simple and humble. Mama states, " It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make single roofs anymore. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture," said the story (636).

This house they are in now is new or considered new by Mama, their old house was burned down in a fire where Maggie, Dee's sister got injuries. When the house burnt down Dee just stood there looking at it maybe with joy as her mother struggles with her sister, " a look of concentration on her face as she watched the Galvez 2 last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney," her mother thought to say, " Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? " (636). This is one of the ways you can see how she is embarrassed of her background. At one point in the text Mama, claims, " 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," (636) this is another way she shows she is self-conscious about her background, by claiming she will never show her friends where she comes from. One time Mama, offered Dee some quilts when she was going to college and Dee had rejected them. Mama thinks, " I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee a quilt when she went away to college. The she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style," (639). Dee looked down on her culture at one point, now she wants to take some back; materialistically.

The values from Mama and Maggie differ from those that Dee adopts. Mama thinks, " She thinks her sister had held life always in the palm of her hand, that " no" is a word the world never learned to say to her," (365) this portrays the stubbornness for progression that Dee has, which is her most noticeable value. Dee is very confident about herself but her natural culture embarrasses her. Mama says at one point, " Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye.

Hesitation was not part of her nature," (635) showing she is determined to overcome her humble beginnings and succeed. When she returns, she comes back with a different name. She named herself "Wangero" (637). Her name change shows how her traditions and culture really mean nothing to her. Mama asks her, "what happened to Dee?" (637) because deep inside she wanted to know what she had done to the family tradition, showing that Dee (Wangero) left behind her traditional values.

When Dee comes home she asks for many things one controversial thing is that she asks for some old quilts. Mama responds by saying, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas." and Dee, "gasp[ed] like a bee had stung Galvez. 3 her," (639). This shows how the quilts mean tradition to Mama and it is something that Dee does not understand.

She claims, "but they're priceless!" (640) expressing how the quilts mean money value to her, whereas Maggie says, "She can have them, Mama," she followed "I can't remember Grandma Dee without the quilts," (640) expressing how the quilts actually mean something of value but internal value. It implies culture and tradition to her. Values are given a place and acceptance by every person in their own way, Maggie will follow her tradition, whereas Dee decided to drop those values and adopt new ones. Dee (Wangero) came back and showed the divisions between them. When Dee come back, she comes off as a tourist. When she arrives, "she stoops down quickly and lines up a picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me.

She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie and the house," (637). This portrays Dee as a tourist and her ignorance of her true culture. Another way she comes off as a tourist is when she starts admiring things she used to look down on. She says, " Oh, Mama! I never knew how lovely these branches are.

You can feel the rump prints," (638) like when tourist come and they admire things of that certain culture. She asks Mama for a churn top that her uncle had made from a tree, asks for the dasher too (638). They use it for cooking meaning culture and tradition. Dee looks at it and says, " I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," showing her tourist sense again by wanting cultural things for show.

Dee's return aroused some tensions within her old home by pointing out her materialistic customs and values when it come to objects that dhe yearned for her home. The cultural, physical, and manors are very notable between Mama and Dee. Mama dreams her life to be as in a television show. " Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I Galvez. 4 are suddenly brought together an a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft -seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people.

There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have," (635) this explains that Mama sometimes does feel looked down by Dee that she dreams these dreams. In one of her dreams you can easily see their differences: " She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks

orchids are tacky flowers," (635) this shows how she and her mom differ she likes orchids and Dee hates them. This dream shows Mama's hope of Dee and her getting along despite of their background. Another way you can see their difference is the way they are.

Mama is "large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day, I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather," (635). Mama describes Dee, stating, "her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with certain style.

.. A dress long down to the ground, in this hot weather... There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light from the sun.

.. Earrings too, gold, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits," (637). This shows their difference in cultural values.

At dinner differences also arose. Dee and her guest eat different things and probably have finishing and etiquette, in the table. Mama says, "we sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins and corn bread, the greens and everything else.

She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes," (638) this demonstrates their difference in eating and how Wangero went on and changed eating habits as well. These differences show how Dee's embarrassment led her to change into a more social and materialistic. Galvez. 5The return and actions

of Wangero really make Mama tense. It started with Wangero and her stubborn desire for the quilts, whereas Mama had them for Maggie's wedding, to continue tradition with Maggie, whereas Wangero wanted them as an artistic artifact for show. The tension led Mama to do something she had never done before and confront Wangero.

"Hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open," (640) states the story. This establishes Mama as saying goodbye to Wangero, almost like disowning her. This really made Wangero angry since she is used to getting anything she wants.

Before leaving Wangero says to Maggie, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it," (640) this demonstrates how Wangero still looks down on her culture, traditions, and background. Her return aroused conflicts but also gave a sense of freedom to Mama and Maggie from Wangero.

Differences and changes in values and culture between generations causes divisions and conflicts. From their values to physical appearances show the differences between Mama and Wangero. Mama is more cultural and traditional, whereas Wangero has moved on and left those things behind. Her return shows her as a fake, because she returns admiring what she once looked down on, and at the end emphasizes how she really hasn't changed. I

think the argument of this text is valid because changes in values and traditions between generations can cause divisions within the family.