

Essay: a raisin in the sun



Essay: A Raisin in the Sun It is a common notion that money doesn't buy happiness. Or does it? The classic play, "A Raisin in the Sun", by Lorraine Hansberry seeks to reflect on this idea.

The play recounts the story of the Youngers, a poor African American family, who are awaiting the arrival of a \$10,000 insurance check. This check arouses great tension and conflict within the family. Clearly, money is a central theme in the plot. Each character has a different idea of what to do with the insurance money as well as different views on the use and importance of money in general. Mama sees money as a way to help her family succeed, Walter believes money is life, Beneatha sees money as a way to achieve her dream of becoming a doctor, and Asagai views money as a method to help others. Although money seems to be so important to the characters, by the end of the play Lorraine Hansberry shows us that money isn't everything.

A central character and matriarch of the Younger family, Mama, is not as concerned about material wealth as the other characters. She views money to be a means of achieving her dream of buying a house and helping her family move up in the world. In Act II she and Walter converse about the importance of money: Mama: Son- how come you talk so much 'bout money? Walter: Because it is life, Mama! Mama: Oh. So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life— now it's money.

I guess the world really do change.... (55) Mama attempts to teach her family that money isn't everything and tries to instill in them strong values, such as taking pride in themselves and their dreams. However, Mama does

hold the insurance check very dear to her heart. She sees it as a lifetime of hard work that her husband endured. When Walter lost all of the money in his business venture, Mama is devastated and angry at Walter.

She says, “ I seen... him... night after night... come in... and look at that rug... and then look at me... the red showing in his eyes... the veins moving in his head.... I seen him grow thin and old before he was forty... working and working and working like somebody’s old horse... killing himself... and you—you gave it all away in a day. ”(102). Mama believes that the money was the last thing she had left of her husband. In contrast to Mama, her son Walter believes that money is the answer to everything.

He thinks that money defines a man by measuring his success and ability to provide for his family. Throughout the play, Walter becomes obsessed with the money and it begins to control him. In Act II, when Mama revealed that she put the money towards a down payment for a new house, Walter says, “ So you butchered up a dream of mine- you – who always talking ‘ bout your children’s dreams. ”(74). The prospect of losing the money actually demoralized Walter. In Act II Walter even teaches his son Travis about the benefits of being rich.

He tells Travis, “ Your daddy’s gonna make a transaction... a business transaction that’s going to change our lives. Just tell me where you want to go to school and you’ll go. Just tell me what it is you want to be, and you’ll be it.

You just name it son... and I hand you the world! ”(82). This conversation shows that Walter’s dream is not entirely materialistic and that he really

does care about his family. Walter's sister, Beneatha, is an independent and a new age woman. Her greatest ambition is to become a doctor, which was not typical for women during that time period. Therefore, Beneatha is greatly dependent on the insurance check, which would cover the cost of tuition to medical school. When Walter lost all of the money, Beneatha gives up all hope and begins to question her dream.

She reveals her uncertainty in a conversation with Asagai in Act III:

Beneatha: I wanted to cure. It used to be so important to me. .. I used to care. I mean about people and how their bodies hurt... Asagai: And you've stopped caring? Beneatha: Yes- I think so.

(105) Although Beneatha relied on money to achieve her dream, she also thought that it was not the most important thing in life. In the beginning of the play Beneatha talks to her mother about her relationship with George Murchison, her wealthy suitor. She says, " George looks good, he's got a beautiful car and he takes me to nice places- but if the Youngers are sitting around waiting to see if their little Bennie is going to tie up the family with the Murchisons, they are wasting their time. "(31).

She also makes the comment, " Oh, I just mean I couldn't ever really be serious about George. He's- he's so shallow. "(30). Beneatha realizes that there is more to a person than their wealth.

Another one of Beneatha's suitors, Asagai, is a student from Nigeria who is very proud of his African heritage. In contrast to the others, Asagai looks at money as a way of helping others, not benefitting himself. His ultimate

dream is to return to Africa and help bring about change and advancements. He realizes that money is not life but it can help people.

Asagai talks about his dream with Beneatha and says, “ I will go home, and much of what I say will seem strange to the people of my village... But I will teach and work, and things will happen, slowly and swiftly. ”(108). Asagai is very intent on putting money towards missions and he thinks that money should be used to help the common good. Overall, Lorraine Hansberry discusses the concept of money a great deal in the play. However, she conveys the message that money is not life, as Walter claimed it was. Rather, family, pride in yourself, and pursuing your dreams are the things that are really important.

The character that seems to express this view the closest is Mama. In Act III Mama tells Beneatha, “ There is always something left to love. And if you ain’t learned that, you ain’t learned nothing. (118).

Even after all the mistakes Walter has made, Mama shows that love for your family, not money holds greater value. By the end of the play, Walter has made a complete reversal from his materialistic ways. This is shown when he turns down Mr. Lindner’s offer of money to deter them from moving into the new house. It seems that Walter eventually comes to a more mature understanding of the important things in life, or as Mama says to Ruth, “ He finally come into his manhood today, didn’t he? ”(123). In this play, each character has their own idea of money.

Mama wants money to better her family’s conditions and buy a new house. Walter, who was initially obsessed with money, wants it to be a better man

and provider for his family. Beneatha wants money to become a doctor and Asagai wants money to help his people in Africa. Though they each want different things, each character feels that money will help them to attain their dreams. In the end Lorraine Hansberry shows us that money isn't everything.

Other things such as pride in your family will ultimately help you to succeed. I guess it is safe to say, money doesn't buy happiness after all.