

Significant symbols in everyday use



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Symbols are marks used to represent an object or function. The symbols in the story are practical for Mama and Maggie and representative for Dee. Mama and Maggie both create and use everyday their family's heritage, but Dee only wants praise and credit for what her family has created. Alice Walker uses symbols to depict Maggie and Mama as practical souls and Dee as a romantic soul.

In *Everyday Use*, the churn is a symbol of heritage for Dee, while it is still practical and used everyday by mama and Maggie. Dee feels the need to display her heritage rather than use it practically like Mama and Maggie. When Dee arrived and they sat down to eat dinner, she noticed the churn in the corner of the room. She excitedly jumped up and said that she knew there was something she wanted to ask for. This churn top is what I need, she said (56). She went on to tell them that she could use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table(56). Dee wanting the churn top for decoration indicates that she is more interested in showing off what her family has done, rather than the fact that it is a tool used everyday by Mama and Maggie.

Another symbol Walker uses is the bench. The bench also symbolizes heritage for Dee. Mama says that although Hakim- a- barber did not eat the food because it was unclean, Dee was delighted by everything, even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made (55). Dee cried, i never knew how lovely these benches are(55). When Dee sees the bench, she sees old and poor, because these were built when they could not afford chairs for the table. Although Dee appreciates the bench her dad built for its age, Mama and Maggie appreciate it because it is where they sit to eat dinner. It still has

a practical purpose for them, Maggie just likes it because it is old and a part of her family history.

The quilts mentioned in *Everyday Use* are important symbols in the story. These symbolize the way Dee looks at things made by her ancestors compared to the way Maggie and Mama see things. After Dinner, Dee looks in the trunk at the end of mamas bed. She comes out of the room with two quilts and asks mama, Can I have these old quilts? (57). Mama asks her to take different ones, because she has promised those to Maggie. Dee gets mad at mama because Maggie cant appreciate the quilts (58). Mama asks Dee what she would do with the quilts and she said Hang them, in a curious voice as if that was the only thing you do with quilts (58). Dee does not see that Mama and Maggie need the things that she thinks are decorations. Dee, again, wants to display her heritage as a work of art, while Mama and Maggie see them as things that should be used everyday.

The symbols used in *Everyday Use* show that Dee is more into displaying her heritage to make herself feel better about her life rather than using them in a way that properly represents and expresses her ancestors ways. Mama and Maggie are shown as more practical people, while Dee is looking for approval from people of her own ethnicity. Dee is displaying the parts of her unhappy life that she thinks make her look authentic or good. She picks and choose the parts that she wants to acknowledge, which shows the romantic she truly is. She is skipping over the pain of creating and enjoying the peace of displaying, while Mama and Maggie have embraced the life they have built, all parts of it. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

Walker, Alice. Everyday Use. In *Love & Trouble: Stories of Black Women*. New York: Harcourt, 1973. 49-59