

## **A Raisin in the Sun Summary**

The Youngers are a poor African-American family living on the South Side of Chicago. An opportunity to escape from poverty comes in the form of a \$10,000 life insurance check that the matriarch of the family (Lena Younger or Mama) receives upon her husband's death. Lena's children, Walter and Beneatha, each have their plans for the money. The oldest son, Walter (a man of 35 with a wife and a young son), wishes to invest in a liquor store. The younger sister, Beneatha, currently a college student, wants to use the money for medical school. Lena has plans as well for the money: she wants to buy a house for the family and finance Beneatha's medical school.

The environmental pressures are high: five people live in a tiny one-bedroom apartment, two families share a single bathroom, and the building is run-down and roach-infested. These pressures increase when Walter's wife, Ruth, finds out that she is pregnant for the second time, and begins seriously contemplating abortion. Yet even in an environment where a request for fifty cents becomes a family conflict, there is room for ideas and dreams.

Beneatha Younger is the source of the many of the new ideas and philosophies that infiltrate the family's home. Currently in college, she is constantly challenging the notions of culture, race, gender, and religion that her family has grown up with. She is dating two men who represent very different aspects of African-American culture. George Murchison, the first, is a wealthy African-American classmate of Beneatha's. Through his character, Hansberry is able to illustrate many of the class tensions that exist within the African-American culture. Asagai is her second boyfriend, a college student who is from Nigeria. Through Asagai, Beneatha is able to learn more about her African heritage. He gives her Nigerian robes and music, encourages her idealistic aspirations, and near the end of the play invites her to return to Nigeria with him to practice medicine there.

Walter Younger truly encapsulates the American dream. He has a genuine entrepreneurial spirit and desire to progress. Walter doesn't want to challenge the present system as Beneatha does. Instead, he wishes to progress up the social ladder into a higher class. He is unsatisfied with his job as a chauffeur, and wants a big house, a nice car, pearls for his wife, and an office job. In short, he desires the bourgeoisie lifestyle. Walter's idolization of wealth and power actually creates a deep hunger within him for change, but as long as obstacles like racism keep him stagnated, his hopes and dreams fester. After several events, Mama realizes the significance of his plans even though she morally objects to the idea of a liquor store.

After having made the down payment on a house in a predominantly white neighbourhood, Lena gives her oldest son responsibility over the rest of the insurance money, asking him to put away a significant portion for his sister's medical school education. To the contrary, Walter decides to invest all the money in the liquor store business with two men of questionable character. The plan falls through when Willy, one of the "investors", runs away with all of the money.

The family is entirely dependent on the money: they already have made plans to move, and are in the midst of packing up their things. Devastated, Walter seriously considers taking an offer from Mr. Lindner, a representative from the white neighbourhood that would pay the Youngers extra not to move into their neighbourhood. The option is immoral in the family's eyes, and prioritizes money over human dignity. Walter is determined to make the deal despite his scruples, but at the last moment Walter is unable to make the transaction under the innocent gaze of his son, Travis. In the end, the family decides to move. Even though the road ahead will be difficult, they know that they have made an honourable choice

## **A Raisin in the Sun Character List**

### **Walter Lee Younger**

A 35-year-old chauffeur who has a young son, Travis, with his wife, Ruth. The family lives in small apartment with Walter's mother and sister in the South Side of Chicago. Hansberry describes Walter as a lean, intense man with nervous movements and erratic speaking patterns. Played by Sidney Poitier in the original Broadway production.

### **Lena Younger (Mama)**

The 60-something matriarch of the family. She has recently lost her husband Walter Sr., and will be the recipient of a \$10,000 life insurance check. Played by Claudia McNeil in the original Broadway production.

### **Beneatha Younger**

Walter's 20-year-old sister, a college student who invades the Younger household with her modern ideas and philosophies on race, class, and religion. She is a handsome intellectual who has worked hard to refine her speech. Played by Diana Sands in the original Broadway production.

### **Ruth Younger**

Walter's wife and Travis' mother. In her early thirties, Ruth is exceptionally pretty, but is aging before her time because of her impoverished surroundings. During her 11 years of marriage, she often bore the responsibility of keeping the household running, in addition to working as a domestic servant. Played by Ruby Dee in the original Broadway production.

### **Travis Younger**

Walter and Ruth's 10-year-old son.

### **Joseph Asagai**

A Nigerian college student pursuing Beneatha.

### **George Murchison**

Beneatha's boyfriend and fellow classmate, who hails from a wealthy black family.

### **Mrs. Johnson**

The Youngers' nosy neighbour, who points out the dangers of moving into Clybourne Park

**Karl Lindner**

A white, middle-aged representative from the Clybourne Park Improvement Society.

**Bobo**

A fellow investor in the liquor business, along with Willy and Walter.

**Willy**

A partner in the liquor business scheme who eventually runs off with Walter and Bob's investment money.

**A Raisin in the Sun Glossary****Ashanti**

The largest tribe in Ghana, the Ashanti grew to prominence due to the wealth of iron and gold found in their country before the rival Mali tribe put an end to the Ghana Empire in 1180.

**Benin sculpture**

One of the longest-lasting civilizations in West Africa, the kingdom's art centered on sculpture that recounted historical events. Utilizing bronze, ivory, or terra cotta, this style was influential because of its high degree of realism and stylization.

**Chaka Zulu**

Known for his innovative and revolutionary battle formations, this great military warrior built the Zulu tribe into a powerful nation that united against colonial powers in the early nineteenth century.

**Ethiopia**

Earlier called Abyssinia, the country is located in north-eastern Africa. Having enjoyed a long history of trade with the Middle East, Ethiopia has been referenced in many sources, from Homer to the Bible. Ethiopia is unique in that it avoided much of the colonial rule experienced by its neighbouring African countries, with the exception of a short Italian occupation from 1935-1941.

**Ghetto**

The term originates from *gheto*, an island off the coast of Italy where Jews were forced to live. Today, it refers to a portion of the city where an ethnic group is forced to live due to socio-economic pressures.

**Mali**

The Mali Empire was the most wealthy and prominent in Africa from about 1100-1500, when it was conquered by the Songhai Empire. Present-day Mali is a landlocked West African nation that was invaded by France in 1880 and, along with Senegal, gained its independence in 1960.

**Monsieur le petit bourgeois noir**

French phrase meaning "Mister small businessman"

## **Mrs. Miniver**

A 1942 Oscar-winning film that starred Greer Garson as a English bourgeoisie wife during WWII. Mrs. Miniver appeared tending roses in many of the scenes.

## **Nigeria**

The largest and possibly the most diverse country in Africa, with approximately 130 million people and 250 different ethnic groups. The two major ethnic groups in the south of Nigeria are the Ibo and Yoruba people. In the past Nigeria has been ruled by several colonial powers, including the Portuguese, Spaniards, and the British. In 1963, Nigeria gained its independence from Britain.

## **Owimoweh**

Popularized by "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" by Pete Seeger and the Weavers, the term refers to the title of an African chant about the waking of a lion.

## **Prometheus**

A figure from Greek mythology most noted for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to the humans. Prometheus was punished by being tied to Mount Caucasus, where his liver to be picked out daily by an eagle. *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus became highly regarded by Romantic writers like Percy Shelley, and the figure is emblematic for his defiance against the gods.

## **Sharecroppers**

Farmers who live on someone else's land and pay a disproportionate share of their crop as rent, leaving little for their families to live on.

## **Songhai**

After Songhai conquered the Mali Empire in 1470, Timbuktu became the centre of education and commerce in the Muslim world. At its zenith, the Songhai Empire reached from modern-day Nigeria to parts of the Atlantic coast in the West. However, by the 1600s the empire had disintegrated into several smaller kingdoms.

## **South Side of Chicago**

A poor neighbourhood in Chicago where many blacks lived; also known as "the ghetto".

## **A Raisin in the Sun Themes**

### **The American Dream**

The long-standing appeal of [\*A Raisin in the Sun\*](#) lies in the fact that the family's dreams and aspirations for a better life are not confined to their race, but can be identified with by people of all backgrounds. Even though what that "better life" may look like is different for each character, the underlying motivation is universal. The central conflict of the play lies in Walter's notion of this American dream. Walter buys into the middle-class ideology of materialism.

The notion of the self-made man who starts with nothing and achieves great wealth through hard work seems innocuous enough, but the idea can become pernicious if it evolves into an idolization of wealth and power. In the beginning, Hansberry shows how Walter envies Charlie Atkins' dry-cleaning business because it grosses \$100,000 a year. He ignores Ruth's objection to his potential business partner's questionable character and dismisses his mother's moral objection to achieving his goals by running a liquor store. The liquor store is a means to an end, and Walter is desperate for his dreams to come to fruition. That same Machiavellian ethic is demonstrated when Walter plans to accept Mr. Lindner's offer. Walter is not concerned with the degrading implications of the business deal. It is simply a way to recover some of the lost money. However, Hansberry challenges Walter's crude interpretation of the American dream by forcing him to actually carry out the transaction in front of his son. Walter's inability to deal with Mr. Lindner marks a significant revision of his interpretation of the American dream, a dream that inherently prioritizes justice and equality over money.

### **Female Gender Identity**

Three generations of women are represented in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Lena, who is in her early thirties, becomes the default head of the household upon the passing of her husband, Walter Sr. Raised in the South during an era where blacks' very lives were in danger because of the prevalence of lynching, Lena moved to the North with the hopes of leading a better life. The move up North was significant in that she had hopes of a better life for herself.

Although Lena is ahead of her times in some respects, her dreams and aspirations are largely linked to her family's well-being, rather than to her own. Scholar Claudia Tate attributes Lena's low expectations for her individual self to gender conditioning - a term used to describe the expectation that a woman's goals and dreams be linked to her family alone. Lena tolerates her husband's womanizing and remains loyal to him even though they suffer under the same impoverished conditions throughout their marriage.

Walter's wife, Ruth, is in her early thirties. She is different from Lena in that she vocalizes her frustrations with her spouse, Walter. Ultimately, however, she seeks to please him, talking positively about the business to Lena on his behalf, encouraging Beneatha not to antagonize her brother so much, and being willing to work several jobs so that the family can afford to move into the new house.

Beneatha, a young feminist college student, is the least tolerant of society's unequal treatment and expectations of women. Beneatha constantly challenges Walter's chauvinism, and has no time for shallow men like [George Murchison](#), who do not respect her ideas. Through these three women, Hansberry skilfully illustrates how women's ideas about their identity have changed over time.

### **Masculinity**

"What defines a man?" is a critical question that Hansberry struggles with throughout the entire play. In many ways, the most debilitating affronts Walter faces are those which relate to his identity as a man, whether it be in his role as father, husband, or son. Being a father to Travis appears to be the role that Walter values the most.

He sincerely wants to be perceived as honourable in his son's eyes. Knowing the family has little money to spare, Walter gives Travis a dollar when he asks for fifty cents. Walter chooses the liquor store investment not just to make more money for himself, but also to be better able to provide for his wife and family. He wants to be able to give Ruth pearls and a Cadillac convertible; he wants to be able to send his son to the college of his choice. As a son, he wants to walk in his father's footsteps and provide for his mother in her old age. Walter is framed by the examples of his father and son. At first, Walter is willing to degrade himself in order to obtain these goals, but he faces a critical turning point when he reconsiders Mr. Lindner's offer. Ultimately, he chooses the honourable path so that he can stand before his son Travis with pride.

### **Afrocentrism**

There is a strong motif of Afrocentrism throughout the play. Unlike many of her black contemporaries, [Lorraine Hansberry](#) grew up in a family that was well aware of its African heritage, and embraced its roots. Lorraine's uncle, Leo Hansberry, was a professor of African history at Howard University, a well-known, historically black college in Washington, D.C. Hansberry's uncle actually taught Kwame Nkrumah, a revolutionary who fought for the independence of the Gold Coast from British rule. Hansberry's Afrocentrism is expressed mainly through Beneatha's love for Asagai. Asagai, a Nigerian native, is who Beneatha seeks out during her search for her own identity. She is eager to learn about African culture, language, music, and dress. The playwright is well ahead of her times in her creation of these characters.

Hansberry is able to dispel many of the myths about Africa, and concretely depict the parallel struggles both Africans and African-Americans must face.

### **Class Tensions within the Black Community**

*A Raisin in the Sun* is not just about race; class tensions are a prominent issue throughout the play. George Murchison is Beneatha's well-to-do boyfriend. Although he is educated and wealthy, Beneatha is still trying to sort out her feelings about him. Her sister-in-law, Ruth, does not understand Beneatha's ambivalence: he is good-looking, and able to provide well for Beneatha. However, Beneatha is planning to be a doctor, and is not dependent on "marrying well" for her financial security. Hansberry also hints that marriage into the Murchison family is not very probable. Beneatha says, "Oh, Mama- The Murchison's are honest-to-God-real-*live*-rich coloured people, and the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people are rich coloured people. I thought everybody knew that I've met Mrs. Murchison. She's a scene!" Beneatha is sensitive to the reality that even though the two families are black, they are deeply divided. Beneatha suggests that class distinctions are more pronounced amongst African-Americans than between African-Americans and whites. Despite their degree of wealth or education, blacks in America were discriminated against. Wealthy African-Americans had limitations on schools, housing, and occupations just like their poor counterparts. Mrs. Murchison's 'snobbishness' is emblematic of a desperate yet futile attempt to be seen as different from poor blacks and thus gain acceptance by whites. However, radical legislative and social change proves to be the only substantive solution to America's problem.

## **A Raisin in the Sun Summary and Analysis of Act I scene I**

The furniture in the Youngers' apartment is old and worn, but clean. The pattern on the carpet is threadbare; the couch is covered with dollies. Although it is only a one-bedroom apartment, five people live there. Beneatha and Mama live in the bedroom. Walter and his wife Ruth have converted the small breakfast nook into their bedroom. Their son Travis sleeps on the sofa in the living room, which serves as the dining area in the daytime. The multiple functions of the room present a challenge for young Travis. The night before the play begins, Travis has been up late because his father had friends over and the young boy was not able to go to sleep until they left.

Ruth is responsible for getting her son and husband up before cooking breakfast for the family. The Youngers' mornings are rushed. The fact that they share a bathroom with the Johnsons only increases the difficulty of getting to school and work on time. Within the first few moments of the play, the audience is not only exposed to the Youngers' morning routine, but also becomes aware of the extent of the financial pressure on them. Travis needs fifty cents for school, but Ruth refuses because she knows the family cannot spare the money. Travis offers to carry groceries in order to earn the money, but it is beginning to get cold outside, and Ruth is concerned for her son's health. Walter gives his son a dollar anyway, in order to give him the impression that they are not financially strained.

Walter desperately dreams of bettering his situation. Just the night before, Walter was up late talking and planning with friends. He wants to go into business with his friend [Willy](#) Harris, whom Ruth calls a "good-for-nothing loud-mouth." He is determined to finally follow through on his plans because he missed out on the last opportunity to start a dry-cleaning business. The owner, Charlie Atkins, now grosses about \$100,000 a year. Walter's plan for a liquor store requires an investment of \$75,000. The initial investment of \$30,000 would be split between three partners, and would consume the whole of the \$10,000 life insurance check left to the family by Walter Sr.

While Walter tries to tell Ruth (who is tired and reluctant to listen) about his plans, his sister wakes up and enters the kitchen. Beneatha is a 20-year-old college student, and has a combative relationship with her older brother. She is determined to be a doctor, but Walter is doubtful about the idea. Few women, he declares, decide to become doctors rather than nurses. Ultimately, however, he is concerned about the cost of medical school, and how the burden will infringe upon his dreams. While arguing, he says to Beneatha, "go be a nurse like other women- or just get married and be quiet."

Walter leaves for work and must ask Ruth for fifty cents to take a taxi because he has given Travis all his money. Mama, a robust woman in her early sixties, enters. She is immediately concerned about the well-being of others. She is worried that Beneatha will catch cold without a robe, and about whether Travis got a hot breakfast. After inquiring about the subject of Walter's and Beneatha's argument, Mama notices that Ruth is looking thin and tired. Mama even cares for a little plant that becomes a small but important symbol in the play.

Ruth initiates the conversation about what Mama will do with the insurance check. Just as Walter has asked her to do, Ruth tries to persuade her mother-in-law to invest the money in the liquor store. When Mama asserts that the family is not the investing type, Ruth says, "Ain't nobody business people until they go into business." Despite these words, Ruth encourages Mama to do whatever she wishes with the money, such as travel to Europe. Mama says that she has always wanted a house, and wishes to use the money to make a down payment on a bigger place. Walter Sr. and Mama had always planned to live in a house: the plan was to live in the apartment for a year, and then move to Morgan Park. The dream never came to fruition during Big Walter's lifetime.

Beneatha enters the scene annoyed by the vacuum cleaner being run in the upstairs apartment and exclaims, "Christ's sake!" Mama reprimands Beneatha for swearing. Beneatha reveals to her family that she plans to take up the guitar. Ruth and Mama tease her because Beneatha has taken up so many short-lived hobbies, including horseback riding and photography. Beneatha defends their derision by saying that they are all used to "express" her. Ruth and Mama laugh again and inquire about her courtship with George. Beneatha is dating a wealthy college student named George, but believes he is shallow. George also is not supportive of her desire to become a doctor. Mama emphasizes God's role in her becoming a doctor, and Beneatha dryly responds, "God has nothing to do with it." Mama addresses Beneatha's atheism, warning her that she and her father raised her to believe in God. Beneatha succinctly denounces God as only an idea that she does not believe in.

Mama slaps her and makes her repeat, "In my mother's house there is still God." After Beneatha leaves, Mama sadly reflects on the changed relationships between herself and her children, and realizes that she no longer understands them fully.

## **Analysis**

Playwright Amiri Baraka describes [Lorraine Hansberry](#) as a "*critical realist* [who] *analyses* and *assesses* reality and shapes her statement as an aesthetically powerful and politically advanced work of art." The first scene of [A Raisin in the Sun](#) creates this realistic setting. Following a history of blacks being portrayed on Broadway as happy, jovial, and exotic, Hansberry seeks to debunk this myth of contentment by portraying the realities of poverty and the concrete obstacles racism places in front of the achievement of the American dream.

The set in *A Raisin in the Sun* is critical to this goal, giving the audience a visual testament to the Youngers' poverty. The apartment the Youngers live in has been relentlessly cleaned over the years. The carpet is threadbare from vacuuming; the furniture is worn from dusting; the apartment is sprayed weekly to keep roaches away. Despite their efforts, the facilities are inadequate. The apartment is overcrowded, and one small bathroom serves two large families. During this scene, Hansberry refuses to allow these inadequacies to be forgotten and fade into the background; they constantly disrupt the plot as Travis, Walter, and Beneatha carry on various conversations while keeping an eye out for the bathroom to be free.

The pressures of everyday life in the ghetto have taken a toll on Ruth: "disappointment has already begun to hang in her face." In addition to working as a domestic servant, she is responsible for keeping her family together. Ruth is



concerned about the necessities, such as getting the family up on time, making breakfast for her son and husband, and having enough money to get to and from work. She does not have time for world events or Walter's pipe dreams. When Walter begins to talk about his liquor store investment, she responds, "Eat your eggs." When he says how disappointed he is that he can only tell his ten-year-old son stories about rich white people, Ruth again responds, "Eat your eggs." After Walter explodes, Ruth explains:

Honey, you never say nothing new. I listen to you every day, every night and every morning, and you never say nothing new. (*shrugging*) So you would rather *be* Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur. So-I would *rather* be living in Buckingham Palace.

Ruth is stifled by the absurd redundancy of everyday life. For the eleven years of her marriage, she has seen no real progression. The Younger family is the epitome of the American work ethic: even though they toil, they do not see the fruits of their labour. In fact, Ruth is not only responding to the disappointments of her lifetime, but to the disappointments experienced by previous generations, as well. Walter Sr. had moved into the same apartment with the hopes of owning a house within a year. Now Walter Sr. has passed, and three generations live in the same tiny apartment. Ruth, overcome by this stagnation, has lost hope.

Both Walter and Beneatha are sustained by their dreams. Walter dreams of being an entrepreneur. He, along with his friends Willy and [Bobo](#), plan to open up a liquor store. Beneatha, currently a college student, wants to become a doctor.

Both of these dreams rely upon their father's life insurance check for its realization. Therefore, beneath the seemingly normal brother-sister dissent lies a fierce struggle for the survival of each individual's dreams. This tension surfaces the morning before the insurance check arrives. Walter's deceptively simple inquiry about how Beneatha's studies are going in school leads to an argument. Walter accuses Beneatha of being ungrateful for the sacrifices the family has made for her to go to college. For the first time he reveals that he wishes his sister would "be a nurse...or just get married and be quiet." Walter's chauvinist statement is an open affront to Beneatha, who is struggling to go beyond what society says women ought to do. Walter's dreams for his sister are no bigger than society's. The argument ends with both siblings admitting that the insurance money belongs to Mama, and it is for her to decide how it will be spent. However, the scales are weighed against Walter because his mother is not likely to support the idea of a liquor store.

Both Walter and Beneatha battle with Mama's conservative Protestant ethic. Mama disapproves of Walter's business plan because she disapproves of selling liquor. She says, "Well-whether they drinks it or not ain't none of my business. But whether I go into business selling it to 'em *is*, and I don't want that on my ledger this late in life." Lena's objection is short and succinct: she notifies Beneatha of her moral conviction, and does not seek to debate its validity. Mama's rigid beliefs conflict with Beneatha's new philosophies. When Beneatha asserts that God is just an idea that she does not believe in, Mama slaps Beneatha across the face, giving her daughter the clear message that atheism will not be tolerated in her household.

## **A Raisin in the Sun Summary and Analysis of Act I scene II**

The Younger house is full of anticipation as the family awaits the arrival of the insurance check. Mama cleans the kitchen as Beneatha sprays for cockroaches.

Travis, finished with his chores, wants to go outside and play. Beneatha and Travis all inquire where Ruth has gone this morning, and discover that she is at the doctor. The phone rings: Beneatha's friend Asagai wants to come over. Even though the house is messy, Beneatha allows him to come because Asagai does not let superficial things influence his judgment. Mama, however, is not pleased because she feels her house is a reflection of herself. Beneatha then begins to deliver a diatribe about Asagai's native country so that Beneatha will not be embarrassed by her mother's comments. Asagai, Beneatha tells her mother, is from Nigeria. Beneatha informs her mother that even though she donates money to missionary workers in Africa, the real threat to Africa is colonialism.

Ruth comes home from the doctor and despairingly announces that she is pregnant. Mama is enthusiastic about any new member of the family, but both Beneatha and Ruth are worried about finding the resources with which to provide for the child. Ruth has already inquired about getting an abortion. The conversation is interrupted when Travis gets into trouble for chasing rats with his friends.

Asagai arrives carrying a large package. He greets Beneatha as Alaiyo. Asagai has just returned from his studies in Canada, but is more interested in discussing their relationship than his studies. While Asagai knows how he feels, Beneatha still needs time to figure out whether she loves him in return. Asagai gives Beneatha a Nigerian robe and promises to teach her how to drape it. Asagai's light comment about her straightened hair sparks a debate.

Asagai feels that Beneatha's decision to straighten her hair rather than wear it naturally, in an afro, is symptomatic of the broader problem of assimilation amongst blacks in the United States. Beneatha adamantly denies being an assimilationist. Asagai dismisses her serious nature in a paternalistic manner and returns to the topic of their relationship.

As Beneatha again reasserts her feminist viewpoints, Mama enters the room and the conversation shifts. Beneatha introduces Lena to Asagai. Mama, determined to prove to her daughter that she understands her modern viewpoints on Africa, recites Beneatha's previous tutorial on the injustice of Africa's colonialism and the infiltration of Christianity. Having "flashed a superior look at her daughter upon completion of her recitation," Lena becomes truly sympathetic towards Asagai. She looks at him like her own son, asking him if he misses his mom and inviting him to come over to eat since he is so far away from home. Over the course of the conversation, Asagai calls Beneatha "Alaiyo", which in Yoruba means "One for Whom Bread Is Not Enough."

Asagai leaves, and the family returns their attention to the insurance check. The check arrives, and Travis brings it to his grandmother. The family is at first very excited, checking to make sure the amount is correct. Then, the gravity of the situation hits Lena. As she realizes this the compensation for her husband's life, she sobers and says, "Ten thousand dollars they give you. Ten thousand dollars."

After Travis leaves, Lena inquires more about Ruth's doctor visit. Lena senses something is amiss, but Walter soon enters and is too preoccupied by the insurance check to be worried about his wife. Walter excitedly brings up the liquor store investment, but Mama shoots him down immediately. Walter, upset, gets up

to leave. Ruth, wanting to talk to him, gets her coat too. Frustrated and unable to reason with him, Ruth goes into the bedroom.

Lena, disturbed by the relationship between her son and her daughter-in-law, tries to figure out what is going on with Walter. Walter expresses how he is tired of his situation and wants to make more money. He says, BLOCKQUOTE [Mama-sometimes when I'm downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking 'bout things...sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars...] Mama is frustrated with Walter's obsession with money. She tries to put things in perspective, and talks about when freedom used to be the most important thing to their ancestors. Walter still objects, and as a last attempt to put things in perspective, Lena tells her son that Ruth is pregnant and has been considering getting an abortion. Ruth, having just come out of the bedroom, confirms the story. Lena expects her son to be enraged and to talk some sense into Ruth, but Walter is speechless. Lena, in turn, becomes furious. As Walter walks out of the door, Lena says, "You are a disgrace to your father's memory." She too prepares to leave.

## **Analysis**

It becomes clearer that Walter's impulses are primarily class-motivated. After describing to his mother how he sees wealthy white men downtown, he expresses a very important principle that is at the crux of the formulation of his identity.

MAMA Son-how come you talk so much 'bout money?

WALTER (*With immense passion*) because it is life, Mama!

In this statement, Hansberry reveals that Walter's dreams and aspirations are a perversion of the American dream. American dream in its entirety upholds intangibles such as liberty, justice, and equality. Walter's version, however, has reduced this dream into the crude, materialistic desire for money. Walter has accepted a corrupt middle class ideology that places money and power above all else. As he is unable to achieve that which he most desires, a peculiar breed of bitterness begins to consume him. A major obstacle in Walter's path is racism. As an African-American male, Walter has been systematically disenfranchised from the American dream he so fervently praises. The system of racism has placed the white man's desire for economic power and elevated social status above the ideals of liberty, justice, and equality. Therefore, the very perversion of the American dream that Walter buys into is the same one that oppresses him.

Part of Walter's oppression is his emasculation. His subservient job as a chauffeur and his inability to provide adequately for his family all whittle away at his self-esteem. When Mama refuses to invest in the liquor store, Walter says,

Well, *you* tell that to my boy tonight when you put him to sleep on the living-room couch...Yeah-and tell it to my wife, Mama, tomorrow when she has to go out of here to look after somebody else's kids. And tell it to *me*, Mama, every time we need a new pair of curtains and I have to watch *you* go out and work in somebody's kitchen.

Economic oppression hinders Walter's ability to fulfil his roles as a father, a husband, and a son. Up until now, Walter has "performed" these roles despite his inability to truly fulfil them. He plays his part well: when Travis asks for fifty cents, he gives his son a dollar even though he does not have enough money left to get to work.

However, when his wife tells him she is considering an abortion, Walter is no longer able to perform the role of the content husband. His mother expects him to be like his father.

MAMA I'm waiting to hear how you be your father's son. Be the man he was...*(Pause. The silence shouts)* your wife say she going to destroy your child. And I'm waiting to hear you talk like him and say we a people who give children life, not who destroys them-*(she rises)* I'm waiting to see you stand up and look like your daddy and say we done give up one baby to poverty and that we ain't going to give up nary another one...I'm waiting.

WALTER Ruth- *(He can say nothing)*

MAMA If you a son of mine, tell her! *(WALTER picks up his keys and his coat and walks out. She continues, bitterly)* You...You are a disgrace to your father's memory. Somebody get me my hat!

The world the Youngers live in stifles reproduction and forward motion. Walter is unable to provide for the physical needs of his unborn child, and is unable to reproduce the model of masculinity given to him by his father. Lena pushes her son to act like his father, but Walter is unable to do so. He falters under his mother's gaze, and must run away from her disapproving stare.

With such a brief play, Hansberry is able to address a remarkable number of issues pertinent to the African-American community. One issue dealt with in this scene is the relationship between African-Americans and Africa. Like many cultures who have experienced Diaspora, there is a disconnect between the native and displaced peoples. Mama represents the knowledge base of the majority of African-Americans about Africa at that time. She believes the image perpetuated by the media (which includes not only radio and television but also plays) about Africa. One misconception Beneatha brings up is about Africans not wearing clothes, like in *Tarzan*. Beneatha also addresses the danger of the church's "saving missions" to Africa. Beneatha explains how this paternalistic attitude is misdirected, and says that what Africa really needs is to be rescued from French and British imperialism.

## **A Raisin in the Sun Summary and Analysis of Act II scene I**

Later on Saturday, the scene opens with Ruth ironing and Beneatha getting ready for a date that night. She has on the Nigerian dress that Asagai gave her earlier. Beneatha dances to Nigerian music as she shows off her African garb, and sings in

a Nigerian dialect. Walter walks into the apartment drunk but instinctively starts dancing, loving the beat of the drum in the music. During this scene, the inebriated Walter begins to act out a scene in which he is the chief of a tribe. He prepares his imaginary tribe for war by invoking war songs and the songs of his ancestors.

Just as he makes his great speech, Walter is jerked back into reality, the stage lights turn back on, and [George Murchison](#) enters. Ruth, embarrassed, tells Walter (who has gotten on the table in his excitement) to get down and act properly. George, thoroughly confused, addresses Beneatha and asks her to change out of her "costume" and get ready for their theatre date. Beneatha, in a moment of indignation, removes her headdress and reveals to George Murchison her hair in its natural afro state. George is completely shocked. Beneatha seems to have expected this reaction and challenges George's discomfort with her natural hair, accusing him of being "an assimilationist Negro." Thus, the debate about the merits of their African heritage begins. George minimizes the importance of West African history and calls their heritage "nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!" Beneatha, highly insulted, asserts the importance of African history to civilization, citing the example of the surgical advances made by the Ashanti people.

Beneatha leaves George in the living room while she gets changed for their date. George, left to be entertained by Ruth and Walter, takes every opportunity to brag about how well-travelled he is. When asked what time the show starts, George says, "It's an eight-thirty curtain.

That's just Chicago, though. In New York standard curtain time is 8:40." In order to save face, Walter pretends to have been to New York several times, and then begins to ridicule George about his collegiate dress. Walter, still inebriated, inquires about George's wealthy father, and then begins to tell George about his business plans. Insulted when George snubs him, Walter begins to challenge George in earnest. George dismisses Walter as bitter, and Walter responds, "And you-ain't you bitter, man?...Bitter? Man, I'm a volcano." Beneatha enters the scene again dressed in a cocktail dress but with her hair still natural. George and Beneatha get ready to leave, and as a final insult, George says to Walter, "Good night, Prometheus!" to highlight Walter's ignorance of Greek mythology.

With George and Beneatha gone, Walter turns his agitation towards his wife. Ruth offers Walter hot milk and coffee to help him with his hangover, but Walter complains that she does not give him what he really needs. He begins to ask Ruth about what has come between them, and why their relationship has changed.

Mama comes back home after having been gone all afternoon. Lena calls Travis to her and reveals to all of them that she has used the insurance money to put a down payment on a house. Ruth and Travis are excited; Walter remains silent. When Mama reveals that the address is 406 Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park, Walter voices his objection about moving into a white neighbourhood.

Mama explains that she did her best and tried to find the nicest house for the least amount of money. After sharing her news, Lena asks what Walter thinks. He ends the scene by stating,

What you need me to say you done right for? You the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to. It was your money and you did what you wanted with it.

So what you need me to say it was all right for?...so you butchered up a dream of mine-you-who always taking 'bout your children dreams...

## **Analysis**

While the last scene focused on Asagai, George Murchison, his antithesis, is introduced in this scene. Whereas Asagai represents liberal idealism and progressive free thought, George Murchison represent the conservative bourgeoisie. The interaction between Walter and George reveals the tension between the working and upper-middle classes. Beneatha is excited about her newly obtained gifts from Asagai: a Nigerian robe and music. Having tried on the robe, Beneatha turns on the Nigerian music. Walter, drunk, walks in and almost instinctively starts dancing to the rhythm of the drums. On a conscious level, Walter is not necessarily receptive to Beneatha's Afrocentric ideology. For example, Walter makes fun of Beneatha's hair when she wears it in a natural afro as opposed to straighten. In front of her guest, Walter laughing says, "Well, I'll be damned. So that's what they mean by the African bush." On a subconscious level, however, Walter acknowledges their common African heritage when he dances to the drumbeat. It is in the African setting that he is able to imagine his masculinity restored. In his imagination, he is a great chief and a descendant of royalty. However, George's arrival disrupts Walter's world, jarringly bringing him back to a reality where he is poor, working-class, and unable to provide for his family.

Education and class create a chasm between George and Walter. Walter's resentment of Beneatha's college education is demonstrated in his expressed desire for Beneatha to be a nurse in the play's first scene. That resentment resurfaces in his conversation with George. Intimidated by George's exposure and travels, Walter begins to attack George's attire.

WALTER I(Looking MURCHISON over from head to toe, scrutinizing his carefully casual tweed sports jacket over cashmere V-neck sweater over soft eyelet shirt and tie, and soft slacks, finished off with white buckskin shoes)

Why all you college boys wear them faggoty-looking white shoes?] Whereas in the beginning of the scene George ridicules Beneatha's Nigerian costume, now the tables are turned, and Walter ridicules George's bourgeoisie costume. In this conversation, he not only undercuts the value of his education, but also challenges his masculinity with the homosexual connotation of the word "faggoty." George returns the insult at the end of his visit by referring to Walter as "Prometheus" in an effort to highlight his ignorance.

Hansberry skilfully captures the intra-racial tensions in the African-American community. Because society often places blacks in a single, indistinct category, wealthy African-Americans try even harder to distinguish themselves from poor African-Americans. As illustrated in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, blacks in America are treated as if they are invisible and insignificant. The threat of being treated as such is imminent.

Often, the difference between affluence and poverty within the black community is only a generation removed, and assimilation becomes a survival strategy in order to gain acceptance by the majority. George Murchison's collegiate dress is a prime example of how he attempts to use his clothes to set him apart from the uneducated working-class.

## **A Raisin in the Sun Summary and Analysis of Act II scene II**

On a Friday night a few weeks later, George and Beneatha come back to the apartment. George wants to kiss; Beneatha, however, wants to talk. George, frustrated, says to Beneatha, "You're a nice-looking girl...all over. That's all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere...I don't go out with you to discuss the nature of 'quiet desperation' or to hear all about your thoughts." Beneatha takes all this in and then asks George to leave. As he is leaving, Mama enters. Sensing the awkwardness, Mama asks what the matter is. Beneatha tells her, and for once Mama agrees with her daughter's assessment that she should not be bothered with George.

[The following scene with Ms. Johnson was cut from the original version of this play. Ms. Johnson, a nosy neighbour, has heard that the Youngers are moving. Under the pretence of offering the Youngers congratulations on the move and on Ruth's pregnancy, the woman comes over to cast doubt on their decision to move into a white neighbourhood. Ms. Johnson happens to mention a recent newspaper article about a local Chicago family that moved into a white neighbourhood and was bombed. After implying that Beneatha is uppity because she has a college education and that Walter ought to be satisfied as a chauffeur, [Mrs. Johnson](#) agrees to disagree with Lena and leaves.

Ruth receives a call from Walter's boss's wife, Mrs. Arnold. Ruth discovers that Walter has not been at work for the past three days, and will lose his job if he does not show up soon. When Mama inquires where Walter has been, he confesses that on the first day he borrowed his friend [Willy](#)'s car and drove into the country to look at steel mills, and then went to a local bar, the Green Hat. On the second day, he drove the car all the way up to Wisconsin to look at the farms, ending the day again at the Green Hat. Today, he says, he walked all over the South Side of Chicago, and plans to go right back to the Green Hat.

Mama realizes that her son is in a crisis and makes an important decision. She says, BLOCKQUOTE [There ain't nothing as precious to me...There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money dreams nothing else-if it means-if it means it's going to destroy my boy...I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you suppose to be.] Lena then gives Walter the rest of the insurance money to invest as he pleases. After giving him \$3,500 as a down payment, Mama gives the remaining \$6,500 to Walter, asking only that he put aside \$3000 for Beneatha's medical school education. Walter is amazed that his mother trusts him with the money. Travis enters the room, and Walter, excited about his new-found responsibility, tells his son about his hopes and dreams of working in an office, driving a nice car, having a nice house, and sending his son to college.

### **Analysis**

Like many college students in their early twenties, Beneatha is searching for her identity. Through Beneatha's relationships, Hansberry makes a valid point that the type of person one chooses as a partner is just as much a statement of one's identity as the ideas and thoughts they profess with their own mouths. George

reveals in this scene that even though he and Beneatha are being exposed to the same radical and enlightening ideas, he does not truly accept them as his own. He has probably learned about women's struggle for suffrage just as Beneatha has, but he still values a woman's physical attributes over the thoughts and ideas she has to offer. George says, "You're a nice-looking girl...all over. That's all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere...I don't go out with you to discuss the nature of 'quiet desperation' or to hear all about your thoughts."

The scene with Ms. Johnson was cut from the original production, yet the scene is significant because it reveals the feelings that other African-Americans might have had about the move. Ms. Johnson has dropped by uninvited to share her opinions. She feels that Beneatha has been acting snooty since she has started college, and believes that Walter should be satisfied as a chauffeur. Unable to withhold her comments any longer, Mama defends her son by saying,

My husband always said being any kind of servant wasn't a fit thing for a man to have to be. He always said a man's hands was made to make things, or turn the earth with-not to drive nobody's car for 'em-or...carry they slop jars. And my boy is just like him-he wasn't meant to wait on nobody.

This speech is interesting because it reveals where Mama draws the line: one might expect that distinction between servants and those being served might be made along monetary lines, but Mama asserts that what gives a man honour is the act of creating, whether he is a carpenter or a farmer. Walter's liquor store hits the essence of this philosophy.

Even though Lena may have moral objections to liquor, ultimately Walter's entrepreneurial spirit is what validates his dream in Mama's eyes.

Lena understands what is at stake when a man's dream is deferred. Even though Walter has been talking about his plans and dreams for so long that Ruth has begun to turn a deaf ear, Mama does not grasp the fragility of his state until Walter is unable to stand up like his father and demand that Ruth not have an abortion. Lena attempts to remedy the situation by making a down payment on the house. When Walter misses work, however, Lena realizes that the house is her dream - not Walter's. At the end of the first scene of the second act, Walter feels insignificant even while Ruth becomes elated at the news of the new house. He wanted to be the heroic provider, bringing redemption to his family. At this point Lena makes a very difficult decision, and gives him authority over the insurance money.

In this play, Hansberry makes a statement about black families and how they are driven to support one another unconditionally. Mama realizes that her attempt to fix the problem is insufficient. The money represents a transfer of power. Walter is now the head of the Younger household. For the first time, he is trusted to make critical decisions that affect not only himself, but his entire family.

Even though both Ruth and Lena have reservations about the sustainability of his plans, they must follow his lead. At last, the scene when Walter pretended to be Chaka Zulu has become reality: he is now the leader of his family.

### **A Raisin in the Sun Summary and Analysis of Act II scene III**



The play continues one week later on moving day, a Saturday. The scene begins with Ruth singing, "I don't feel no ways tired" in a triumphant voice before the curtain rises. Ruth is alone in the living room when Beneatha enters with a guitar. Ruth is excited about their new house; she has bought new curtains, even though she does not know the window measurements. As Beneatha helps Ruth pack up and label the good china, Ruth excitedly says that she and her husband went on a date the night before, and that they held hands during the movie. Walter and Ruth's relationship, it seems, is flourishing.

The relationship between Beneatha and Walter also seems to be getting better. Walter enters the living room and dances with his wife, and then begins to playfully tease his sister about her new ideas, calling her "the chairman of the Committee on Unending Agitation" because she is always talking about race. Beneatha takes the teasing in stride and answers the doorbell.

A middle-aged white man in a business suit stands there, and declares that he is looking for Lena Younger. Since Mama is not home, Walter agrees to speak with the visitor. His name is Mr. [Karl Lindner](#), and he is from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association. Walter invites him in and offers him something to drink, but Lindner declines. He introduces the association as a welcoming committee for people moving into the neighbourhood. Lindner mentions the recent incidence of a bombing after a black family moved into a white neighbourhood. In order to prevent this sort of deplorable event, Lindner and the association he represents want an open discussion where they can just "sit down and talk to each other." Lindner, it seems, does not want the family moving into the neighbourhood. He explains,

You've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighbourhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of a common interest in the life of the community, when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you the race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their *own* communities.

The Association is willing to pay them more than their down payment if they will abandon their plans to move into the neighbourhood. Beneatha, having suspected his intentions, is the first to react with sarcasm. Walter, taken aback, gathers his thoughts and tells the visitor to get out. Mr. Lindner, placing his business card on the table, leaves.

Mama returns with Travis, and the family tells her about Mr. Lindner's visit. Mama shakes her head in response. Beneatha cracks a joke to break the awkwardness, and then turns Mama's attention to her plant, asking if she is going to take that "raggedy-looking old thing." Lena, in mock imitation of her daughter's earlier statement, replies, "It expresses ME!" During this time, Walter, Ruth, and Beneatha present Mama with a gift of gardening tools.

Young Travis is anxious to give his grandmother his own gift, an elaborate gardening hat. The rest of the family teases Travis for its lavishness, but Lena defends him and promptly put on the hat to show her approval.

The door bell rings: it is [Bobo](#), visiting unexpectedly. Bobo is nervous and frightened, and wants to speak with Walter. Walter is excited to hear about how the business venture is going, as both Walter and Bobo gave [Willy](#) their share of the money to invest in the liquor store. Although Walter could not make it to the meeting, Willy and Bobo were to meet at the train station in order to go to Springfield. In Springfield, they would obtain the liquor license necessary to proceed. Bobo, however, says that Willy never arrived. Walter learns that he has been scammed out of his father's insurance money. No money has been put away for Beneatha's medical school: he has invested all of the \$6,500 Lena gave him in the store. Walter, in a moment of despair, cries out, "THAT MONEY IS MADE OUT OF MY FATHER'S FLESH." Walter must now tell his family the news. Upon learning of her brother's deception, Beneatha cries out in rage. Mama is devastated, remembering how her husband worked himself to his death. The scene closes with Lena looking to heaven for strength.

## **Analysis**

The title of the play comes from a phrase in Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem." The poem's images beautifully capture the tensions between life and death, hope and despair, and destruction and fulfilment. Hansberry could have chosen numerous images to represent these themes. In fact, a draft version of the play was named *The Crystal Stair* - an image borrowed from Langston Hughes's poem by the same title. The raisin, however, is particularly significant to the themes of salvation and fertility. Hansberry paints a landscape of poverty that is in itself a wasteland: dry, desolate, and infertile. Walter works, but is unable to provide for his family. Ruth considers abortion because the family cannot support another life. Even Walter's dreams falls on deaf ears.

In the midst of this spiritual drought, Walter seeks refuge in the bar the Green Hat: a mirage that offers false refuge through a liquid that cannot hydrate the body or the soul.

On the surface, it may appear that regeneration comes to Walter through the insurance money. The scene opens with the family packing, a silent action that symbolically speaks volumes about the family's potential for growth and mobility. The relationship between Walter and Ruth is budding once again: they go out on a date, hold hands, and dance romantically in the living room (all activities emblematic of youth). Walter and Beneatha's arguments are filled with youthful teasing, rather anger and resentment, and when an obstacle rears its ugly head in the form of Mr. Lindner, Walter easily finds the inner strength to resist the temptation. By the end of the scene, however, defeat comes from within. Walter has trusted his friend Willy Harris without question to invest in the liquor store, and finds himself betrayed. It is a harsh reminder to the dreamer that greed and self-interest still do exist. By the end of the scene, the insurance money proves to have been a false saviour.

Hansberry's play is timeless because she is able to make the political realm symbiotic with the very art of the stage. The audience is drawn into a conversation that forces them to unite the idea of poverty with its reality. The appearance of Mr. Lindner on stage is the physical manifestation of the housing controversy that has

been a looming presence throughout the play, giving a voice to the roaches and rats that encroach upon the very livelihood of the Youngers. Mr. Lindner is the only white man who appears in the play. He not only represents the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, but also the attitude of many white people of that time. He speaks to imminent danger and the hypocrisy that surrounds the issue of integration. Lindner says, "I am sure you people must be aware of some of the incidents which have happened in various parts of the city when colored people have moved into the area." The address of "you people" immediately draws a distinction between the Youngers and Mr. Lindner, between "them" and "us", and between black and white. And even though he goes on to denounce such violent action, the very mention of the occurrence places the threat on the table. He continues to insist that people get along when they share "a common interest" and "that racial prejudice simply doesn't enter into it." Lindner uses the rhetoric of equality, but perverts it to justify a system that reinforces inequality. Through these words, the audience realizes that even though equality is inscribed in the Constitution, it is not yet ingrained in the heart of man. Lindner's words echo like empty rhetoric that is both contradictory and self-serving but, ultimately lies at the heart of many civil rights issues today.

### **A Raisin in the Sun Summary and Analysis of Act III**

One hour after [Bobo](#)'s visit, the Younger home is silent and sullen. The lighting is gloomy and grey. Walter lies dismally on his bed while his sister, Beneatha, sits at the living room table. Asagai happens to drop by: unaware of the recent turn of events, he is genuinely happy and excited about the Youngers' move. Before he is able to get started on a diatribe about movement and progress, Beneatha informs Asagai that Walter has lost the insurance money.

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Asagai asks Beneatha how she is doing. Beneatha, it appears, has lost hope. For the first time, the audience learns why she wants to become a doctor. Beneath recalls sledding on ice-covered steps in the winter time when a young boy named Rufus fell off his sled and severely injured his head. As the young boy got into the ambulance, Beneatha believed that he was beyond repair, but the next time she saw him he only has a small line down his face. Beneatha became fascinated by the concrete manner in which a doctor can identify a problem and fix it. Now, after recent events, Beneatha has lost sight of her childhood motivation, and believes that medicine is not enough to solve society's problems. She says, "What about all the and thieves and just plain idiots who will come into power and steal and plunder the same as before." Beneatha feels as if true progress is unattainable, and that her fate is not within her own control.

Asagai stays true to his idealism and belief in progress. He talks about how he still has hope for his people in Africa, no matter how many setbacks they may encounter. He encourages Beneatha to stop dwelling on the past and think about her future.

Giving her hope once again, Asagai surprises Beneatha by asking her to come to Nigeria with him and practice medicine there. Surprised, she refuses to give him an answer immediately.

Walter enters, and Beneatha immediately hurls sarcastic epithets at him, such as "Symbol of the Rising Class" and "Titan of the System". Walter leaves without responding to his sister. Meanwhile, Ruth and Mama are trying to figure out what to do - whether to continue on with the move, or to cancel the appointment with the moving men, who are scheduled to arrive shortly. Reflecting on how people in her past always told her that her ideas were too big, Mama feels ready to give up. She is already planning how they can make their present apartment more pleasant. Ruth, however, is insistent that the family should continue with the move. Ruth pleads,

Lena-I'll work...I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago...I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to- but we got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!

Walter comes back from his errand, having decided upon a plan of action. He has decided to accept Mr. Lindner's offer to buy the house from the Youngers for more than they paid. The family is horrified at his decision, but Walter is tired of being taken advantage of. He is tired of being concerned about right or wrong, when other people are getting ahead. Lena tries to reason with her son. She says, "Son-I came from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers-but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth." Walter's mind, however, is made up. He feels that he deserves to have nice things, and believes that doing business with Mr. Lindner is just a means to an end. Beneatha is furious, and disowns Walter as her brother. Mama confronts Beneatha about her words and insists that it is during Walter's lowest moments that he needs his family's love and support the most.

Mr. Lindner and the moving men arrive simultaneously. Ruth motions for Travis to go downstairs while Walter deals with Mr. Lindner, but Mama insists that Travis stay right there and witness the actions of his father. Under the innocent gaze of his son, Walter is unable to make the deal with Mr. Lindner, and tells him, "We don't want your money." The moment is truly heroic, and marks Walter's introduction into manhood. The family, triumphant, bustles into action as they continue with their move. As the family gathers their things together, Beneatha announces her decision to become a doctor in Africa. Walter retorts that she should be concerned about marrying a wealthy man like [George Murchison](#). Beneatha is furious, and they begin to argue just as they did at the beginning of the play. Everyone but Mama exits the stage. Making sure to bring her plant with her, Mama takes a last look at the apartment before leaving it forever.

## **Analysis**

Walter's nihilism manifests when his dreams dissipate before his eyes. He says,

Mama, you know it's all divided up. Life is. Sure enough. Between the takers and the "tooken." (*He laughs.*) I've figured it out finally. (*He looks around at them.*) Yeah. Some of us always getting "token." (*He laughs.*) And you know why the rest of us do? 'Cause we all mixed up. Mixed up bad. We get to looking 'round for the right and the wrong; and we worry about it and cry about it and stay up night trying to figure out 'bout the wrong and right of things all the time...And all the time, man, them takers is out there operating, just taking and taking."

Several events provoke Walter's reaction. Walter, having been mocked by misfortune, feels as if his autonomy has been lost and his manhood has been slighted once again.

Beneatha's idealism breaks down as she grapples with her brother's failure and its effect on her future. Asagai appears at Beneatha's most desperate moment, offering words of hope. He is able to use his knowledge of Africa's struggle for independence to provide her with encouragement, even while Walter struggles for his own autonomy. Through Asagai, Hansberry is able to connect the significance of global events to the individual. Some critics point out that Beneatha's relationship with Asagai (and thus her perception of Africa) is romanticized. Unlike Walter, whose dreams and ideas are seriously challenged within the scope of the play, Asagai's idealism remains pure and untainted. Critic C.W.E. Bigsby notes that Asagai is like an "oracle whose declarations make sense only to those who are to the stereotype African...rich in wisdom and standing, like the noble savage, as a reminder of primal innocence." At this moment, however, Asagai's idealist vision is the nourishment "Alaiyo" needs.

With the loss of the money, the entire family must face dreams that are deferred once again, and each one reacts differently. Walter and Beneatha are not the only ones who feel like giving up. Mama abandons hope, telling her children to unpack and to cancel the moving men. She says, "Lord, ever since I was a little girl I always remember people saying, 'Lena-Lena Eggleston, you aims too high all the time. You needs to slow down and see life a little more like it is. Just slow down some.' That's what they always used to say down home-'Lord, that Lena Eggleston is a high-minded thing. She'll get her due one day!'" Mama feels as if the unfortunate loss of the insurance money is due punishment for having high expectations. She has accepted her lot in life, and is already planning how to spruce up the apartment. Ruth is the one person who is unwilling to let go of her dream so easily.

When Lena gives up and begins making preparations to stay, Ruth insists, "We got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!!" She is willing to work several jobs in order to make the move possible.

Even though their goals are very different in nature, the insurance money from Walter Sr. is the catalyst for each of their dreams. The \$10,000 offers the Youngers the ability to achieve salvation: Mama will get her dream home, Beneatha her medical education, and Walter his liquor store. However, the money comes at a price: Walter Sr. must die for the Youngers to have any chance of getting out of their futile situation. In many ways, the insurance money acts as *adeus ex machina*.

The term is used in reference to a trope in ancient Greek plays when a character doomed to die is miraculously saved from destruction. At first glance the fortunate

and unfortunate ways in which the money comes in and goes out of the Younger household add absurdity to a play where circumstance and fate seems to overpower human autonomy. However, Hansberry complicates this assumption by making Walter's decision to choose dignity rather than submission the true means to salvation.

### **A Raisin in the Sun Housing Discrimination**

Hansberry's play is timeless because she is able to make contemporary political issues part of the very art of the stage, drawing her audience into a conversation that continues to be relevant even today. The appearance of Mr. Lindner on stage is the physical manifestation of the housing controversy that has been a menacing presence throughout the play. Housing has various implications not only for health, but also for education. Although the burden fell most heavily upon African-Americans, they were not the only ethnic group affected by housing discrimination during this era. Restrictive covenants also prohibited Italians, Asians, and Jews from residing in certain areas. The Housing Act of 1949 had only been in place for ten years when the play hit the stage, but the majority of African Americans were still living in poverty. The law suggests that integrated neighbourhoods will benefit from improved health and living standards, as well as from the growth and advancement of under-served communities. However, several practices continued even after the passing of the act that made integration difficult. Real estate agents would sell houses at an inflated cost after having coerced the white owners into selling at a loss because of the threat of integration. Rental agencies would delay appointments with African-Americans in hopes that a white customer would rent first. The Fair Housing Policy of 1968 attempted to address the problem by forbidding these deceptive practices. Even today, housing continues to be issue, particularly given how it affects education. Schools are still funded through property taxes in most area, and children have the option of attending alternate schools through busing or school vouchers to private institutions.