

ENG2603

Assignment Two

A Raisin in the Sun

716359

5419-983-2

M. Sulter

The American Dream has long since been a desire for most, it typically revolves around materialistic objects. The more you can acquire, the happier you will be...or so people tend to think. 'Raisin in the Sun' focusses on a family in the 1950's – during a time of segregation, potential re-enslavement and lynching. It is essentially about dreams and acquiring money, the money from a life insurance policy.

The title of the play derives from a poem written by Langston Hughes where he wrote about dreams that were either forgotten or put off due to circumstances in their lives that prevented them from reaching these goals. Hughes speculates whether those dreams shrivel up like 'a raisin in the sun' the perfect title for a play themed such as this one.

Each member of the Youngers family has separate dreams for the use of the \$10 000 that they would receive from Big Walters insurance payout, but despite that, the issue causes conflict in the Youngers household. Hansberry draws attention to generational relationships and between characters and how their ideals and values differ. This becomes more apparent as the story line unfolds. Youngers, although alienated from white middle class families they also wish to obtain that American dream of their own - whatever that may be to them personally.

Big Walter worked hard, he sacrificed his life for his children, always trying to make sure that their needs were met. Making it his goal to ensure that they would never experience the same discrimination that he and Miss Lena grew up with and ultimately giving them the dream of freedom. He took out a life policy and when he died his family received \$10 000. Big Walters race determined that he would never be able to own his own house. The money granted to the Youngers epitomizes the hope and dignity they receive through this finance, no matter what they decide to do with it. However, throughout the play we can quite distinctly detect that money seems to divide the family in arguments over what to do with it.

Such as with the older generation – Mama (Miss Lena) who had the American Dream of freedom and family, money was the least of her worries. Her safety and liberation of fear from slavery and free of dangers based on race were her priority. She struggles to understand Walter and Ruth's obsession with money because she lived in a time when that was the least of her concerns. ✓ Since Walter and Ruth do not have to deal with slavery their focus has become more on materialistic items. After Walter claims money is life, Mama says "Oh so now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life NOW its money. I guess the world really do change." From this quote Mama can recognize the difference between generations. Mama believes her family is the most important to her – freedom and her family. Therefore, she wants to use the \$10 000 to purchase a two-story house for the whole family with a garden for her to tend to and for Travis to play in. On page 23 where Miss Lena makes her debut in the play, the first thing she does is tend to her plant that lives on the sill of the only window in the house, symbolizes her family which she nurtures and cares for each day ✓ regardless of the fact that it does not develop (her family) and the plant that does not grow.

Coupled with that the plant embodies the reality that she has the burning desire to one day own her own garden which she can tend to daily, this is part of her American Dream.

When the cheque comes through in the post, Mama takes a moment and realizes that that was all her husband's life was worth. In addition to that she has never been in possession of so much money before, she does not know exactly how to feel and seems to discern a sense of want ✓ when holding the cheque, maybe she begins to understand what Walter and Ruth were saying all along. Mama says "Now you all be quiet. It's just a cheque." (page 48, Scene One, Act Two)

On page 53, Act One, Scene Two, Mama gives a speech about how she sees the generation difference. How hard her and her husband worked just to keep them safe. "Now here you comes you and Beneatha – talking 'bout things we ain't even thought about hardly, me and your daddy." Walter's mother communicates ✓ that she feels Walter and Beneatha are not grateful at all for the sacrifices their parents made for them. "You

ain't satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home, that we kept you out of trouble til you was grown." ✓

In this line Miss Lena accepts this change. She feels somewhat disappointed but she has come to terms with the generational gap, "...but how different we done become."

Walter Lee Younger is a 35 year old man, hardworking just like his father and dedicated to his family, so much so that he wishes to provide. However, he dreams bigger than just owning a big house but starting and owning a liquor store in the community, one that he will start up with his two friends and investors – Bobo and Willy. He thrives on living his dream through talking about it, although when he does mention it to Ruth – his wife – responses with "Eat your eggs" (page 18 Act One, Scene One). This is Ruth's way of keeping her husband quiet as all he does is repeat the same story almost every day. Ruth does not fully support her husband's ~~dreams~~. She feels as though it is unrealistic because of the circumstances they live in.

Walter guilt trips his mother for not wanting to follow through with the investment plan (page 50 Act One, Scene Two) "Well you tell that to my boy tonight when you put him to sleep on the couch..." Page 53 Act One, Scene Two Walter says "...because it is life Mama." Here he is referring to money. Lena realizes how different their priorities are. He also makes a comment because he feels emasculated as he cannot provide for his family. (page 71, Act two, Scene two) "...You (Mama) the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to." But then he ends off with this comment which put Mama in a position of feeling accountable for not using the money in the way Walter wanted to use it. "So you butchered up a dream of mine – you – who always talking 'bout your children's dreams." ✓

Beneatha is a young college student in her 20's striving to become a doctor. She has other aspirations such as playing the guitar, acting group as well as horseback riding all

in the chance of 'expressing herself'. On page 30 Beneatha says "People have to express themselves in one way or another." ✓

She does not follow the traditions of the a coloured woman. She does not have any desire to get married page 32, Act One, Scene One. Beneatha is an independent woman, determined and never allowing others to influence her decisions. She finds solace in learning about the African through Asagai – a friend from college who wishes to pursue her romantically. Beneatha does not – however – reciprocate the feeling. Asagai gives Beneatha a nickname (page 45) Alaiyo "one for whom food is not enough." Miss Lena and Beneatha find Asagai entertaining in his language, culture and dress. ✓

Beneatha feels misunderstood by her family and specifically by George when she is dressed in traditional African clothing and headdress (page 58, Act One, Scene two) Ruth says "Girl you done lost your natural mind?! Look at your head!" George follows by saying "What have you done to your head, I mean your hair?!" ✓

At the beginning of act two scene one page 55 Beneatha is dancing to traditional African music, she wants to connect with her roots, her ancestors. She feels a sense of importance in finding herself. Page 57 Walter indulges in the festivities of Beneatha's mood. Walter is mocking George while he waits for Beneatha to get dressed appropriately. He teases Georges attire on page 61 Act 2, Scene One "Why all you college boys wear them faggoty looking white shoes." Walter is jealous of George for being more educated, business minded and more privileged than him. ✓

Ruth does not have much to offer in this life. She is seen mostly doing housework and making food. Ruth is an attractive woman but seems to be aging before her time because of the stress of her family. Living in the small apartment with her extended family takes its toll on her. We detect this on page 26 Act 1 Scene 1 where Ruth says to Mama she is feeling poorly but pushes through to want to go to work. Miss Lena says she must stay at home, at the end of the scene Ruth faints (she is exhausted physically and emotionally). ✓ Ruth falls pregnant (page 54, Act One, Scene two) she announces

she is in the process of terminating the pregnancy as she feels as though it is financially impossible combined with the fact that they already have a plethora of problems related to family issues. Ruth knew she could not bring another child into this world. Mama is waiting for Walter to convince Ruth to keep the baby. Walter walks out, as he does so Mama says "You're a disgrace to your father's memory." (page 54, Act One, Scene two). Here Walter displays signs of losing faith, losing faith in ~~his~~ his family because they do not support his dreams but also losing hope within his own ability.

On page 79, Act two, Scene two Walter hits a rocky path within his family dynamic and his dreams. On page 80 & 81 he explains how he went to Green Hat to see who and what else was out there. He discovers people living very simply lives – however – they are cheery and he wonders why he can't be as grateful as they are for the little they have. "You can sit there and drink and listen to them ~~three~~ three men play and you realize that don't nothing matter worth a damn but just being there..."

Mama can sense his pain and understands she has been wrong in not supporting his dream of becoming a real man who can provide completely for his family. "There ain't nothing worth holding onto, money, dreams, nothing else if it means – if it means it's going to destroy my boy." ✓

Miss Lena gives Walter the responsibility of being the man of the house. She values her family so much more than money that she gives her last penny of the insurance money to him, for him to with as he wishes. "For you to decide it ain't much, but its all I've got in this world and I'm putting it in your hands I'm telling ~~you~~ you to be the head of this family, like it's supposed to be (Page 81, Act two, Scene two).

On page 98 of Act 2 Scene three Bobo – Walter's friend explains how Willy Harris took the insurance money. Their potential move to Clybourne Park falls through, in other words, their American Dream disappears before them. Walter sees the scam as an

opportunity to learn from. Mr Lindner wants to pay the Youngers money to prevent them from moving into the affluent neighbourhood. Walter wants to jump at this. Mama disagrees by saying “Son – I come from five generations of people who 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.” (page 111, Act two scene three)

Once Mr Lindner walks in, it seems as though Walter changes his mind, he in turn rejects the offer from Mr Lindner. He yearns to move into the house despite the offer – they wish to break the cycle and gain their freedom within their race.

In the last act of the play on page 118 – Mama is the last off the set, she stays behind to collect her plant which symbolizes her family and its growth. She hopes to take her family (plant) from the past into the future.

64

There is too much narration and too little discussion. Nyoni K

Bibliography

Hansberry, L. 2011. *A Raisin in the Sun*

DECLARATION REGARDING PLAGIARISM

NAME: M. Sulter
STUDENT NUMBER: 5419-983-2
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Signature: ~~MS~~ *M. Sulter*

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