

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	OLHS English	School:	OLHS
Book Title:	A Raisin in the Sun	Genre:	Drama
Author:	Lorraine Hansberry	Pages:	151
Publisher:	Vintage	Copyright:	1959

In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.

Book Summary and summary citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

This classic twentieth-century play about the Younger family is set in Chicago in the 1950s. The play delves into the inner workings of an African American family and its struggles to defeat discrimination and oppression. Three generations of the Younger family live in a tiny, roach-infested, two-bedroom apartment. At the beginning of the play, Mama, Walter, Ruth, Beneatha, and Travis are awaiting the delivery of a ten thousand dollar insurance check from Walter senior's death. The decision of what to do with the money rests with Mama, however; Walter wants to open his own liquor store, while Bennie hopes to use some of the money for medical school. Ultimately, Mama decides to purchase a home for the family in a "white" neighborhood and divide the rest between Walter and Bennie. But, before Mama splits the remaining money between her two children, Walter and Bennie argue over who deserves them money and why. This tension also causes problems between Walter and his wife Furch. They experience difficulties in their marriage and struggle to understand one another and why they have grown apart. The situation between them is compounded when Ruth discovers she's pregnant and Walter takes to drinking. At this point, Ruth seriously contemplates abortion because she sees her marriage dissolving right before her eyes. The mere mention of abortion gravely disappoints Mama and leads Walter to question what he and Ruth should do.

Simultaneously, Beneatha is growing into herself and contemplating what it means to be an African American woman in an oppressive society that considers white womanhood to be the standard of beauty. She is also struggling to make a break from traditional female roles, as she wants to become a doctor. Her struggle with identity is also reflected in the choice she must make between the two men she is dating: Asagai--the intellectual who represents the struggle of African Americans--and George--the wealthy African American who has no desire to embrace his heritage. Beneatha's eventual choice of Asagai represents the coming of both the Feminist and Black Rights movements.

As moving day approaches, the Younger family is readily packing and sorting through their belongings. They are happy and excited to have their own home, something Mama and Walter senior had always hoped for. Things seem to be falling into place for all of the characters until a white man from the Neighborhood Association Committee, Mr. Lindner, arrives at their door to make them an offer on their new home. Walter, Ruth, and Bennie are undeterred and send Mr.

Lindner on his way. However, Walter then discovers that one of this business partners left town with the money for the liquor store and Bennie's money for medical school. Much to the family's disapproval, Walter decides they must take Lindner's offer and stay where they are in the Chicago Southside. After a great deal of deliberation and discussion amongst the Younger family, Walter decides that he can not bow down to another white man and accept such a blatantly racist and hostile deal. The play ends with the arrival of the movers and the Younger family exiting their old apartment.

-- Summary from National Council of Teachers of English, written by Nicole Ceccacci.

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s): (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

This work extends the themes of the Harlem Renaissance, giving students a chance to see how the themes, struggles, and triumphs studied in Harlem Renaissance poetry can also play out in a fictional play (Reading Applications Literary, 11, 12). Students will also write a literary analysis essay in which they explain how Hansberry's portrayal of one character's dream illustrates the metaphors in Langston Hughes's poem "A Dream Deferred," from which the play receives its name (Literary Applications Literary 10, 13; Writing Process all; Writing Application 4; Writing Conventions all). The play also provides an opportunity to study the literary devices of characterization, particularly character foils--via the diverse personalities and dreams found among the members of the Younger family (Reading Applications Literary 10)--and static and dynamic characters. Finally, the play provides rich symbolism via the use of Mama's plant (Reading Applications Literary 13).

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be "cut and pasted" (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

"Viewers of A Raisin in the Sun can be moved by a tragic hero who is elevated by his growth from ignorance to knowledge, and deeply affected by a realistic hero whose transcendence involves a tremendous sacrifice" -- Black American Literature Forum (Spring, 1988, pp. 109-124)

Review #2

"Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun is a play primarily about racism and discrimination in housing in the 1950s. Against this bleak setting, Hansberry conveys the themes of hope, courage, and idealism that are born out of despair, fear, and fatalism. The play shows how humans are perpetually struggling against oppression and how individuals constantly strive for fulfillment, recognition, and freedom." -- The Explicator (fall 1993).

Review #3

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

<u>Title:</u> Fences	<u>Author:</u> August Wilson
<u>Title:</u> Death of A Salesman	<u>Author:</u> Arthur Miller
<u>Title:</u> Twelve Angry Men	<u>Author:</u> Reginald Rose
<u>Title:</u>	<u>Author:</u>
<u>Title:</u>	<u>Author:</u>
<u>Title:</u>	<u>Author:</u>

Document any potentially controversial content:

1. The book uses derogatory terms and racial slurs including nigger and cracker, but it is important to note that Hansberry uses such references as a way of explaining the time period and oppressive society that the Youngers lived in. The play does not promote the usage of these terms; rather, Hansberry uses them to illustrate the power of bigotry and hatred. Furthermore, Mama does not allow anyone to use the word "nigger" in her home, even if it is spoken by an African American person. The book also contains mild swearing, such as four cases of "damn" and two cases of "son-of-a-bitch," which are used to convey characters' anger.

2. Ruth considers aborting her unborn child; this inclusion into the plot highlights the desperate measures the family feels as they consider the effects of bringing another child into the family. However, Mama is opposed, and in the end, Ruth and Walter decide not to terminate her pregnancy.

3. Throughout parts of the play Walter is depicted as an irresponsible drunk. However, Walter acknowledges the poor choices he has made in the past and proves himself to be a strong man when he rallies his family together in opposition to Lindner's offer to buy the new home. Walter comes into his own and strives to be a good father, husband, and son, illustrating himself as a dynamic character.

4. Interracial tensions and the division between rich and poor African Americans arises in regards to the family of George, one of Bennie's male friends. There is also tension between Mrs. Johnson and the Youngers. Hansberry's message is that jealousy and disunity will not help to promote social equality and progress for African Americans. Just as Mrs. Johnson is jealous of the Youngers for moving, the Youngers were jealous of George's family for their material belongings and status. Hansberry subtly expresses the need for collectivism in the African American community.

All potentially objectionable content relates to issues of characterization and to lay bare the realities of living with "a dream deferred." These details help evince the book's major themes and illustrate how the struggles of the Harlem Renaissance played out and influenced the Civil Rights movement.

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated Regular At Risk

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Reading level of this title (if applicable): 7-12

Date Submitted to Department Chair: April 13, 2007

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults