

An Exploration of Social Change Through Literature: Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

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INTRODUCTION

African American culture is rich with art, music, and literature that, perhaps better than any historical document, accurately preserves the culture and the past. Because artists, musicians, and writers are reflections of the times in which they live, and are therefore inseparable from them, it is important to view the world from their point of view. Through an examination of the art, music, and literature produced by African Americans from the Harlem Renaissance through the time of civil rights movement, my students and I will view a perspective of history through the eyes of those who lived it.

The focus of my curriculum unit will be the times surrounding the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. In her journals, letters, plays, and autobiography, Lorraine Hansberry documented the 1950s, a time when America was reeling from the atrocities of a world war and beginning to realize that she had another war inside her borders. After returning from a war that abolished a tyrannical leader overseas, America came to recognize that she had a greater monster within her borders – racism. The hatred and prejudice toward people of color that had existed since the infancy of America was beginning to increase. Blacks, no longer content with the second-class citizenship status that America had forced upon them through segregation and Jim Crow laws, began their epic battle for freedom and civil rights. African Americans, wanting better for themselves, were beginning to rise up against oppression and claim their rights.

Lorraine Hansberry preserved this time period in her semi-autobiographical play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. In the play, she articulates a world where each family member's life is dependant upon the choice to postpone or actualize dreams. Through Hansberry's rich, well-developed characters, we see archetypal representatives of an African American family in urban, south-side Chicago in the early 1950s. These characters are experiencing the same problems that many African Americans were encountering during that time period. By carefully chronicling these experiences, Hansberry gives us an accurate picture of a family's attempt to integrate an exclusively white neighborhood. We see the problems with price gouging in predominately minority areas, the hardships of integration, the universal lure of greed, and the beautiful relationship of a family that must stick together to survive. These characters ask and answer questions about race, integration, assimilation, poverty, desperation, and, above all, hope.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TEACH THIS TOPIC?

Too often in study we look at the negative parts of African American history without looking at the beauty and richness of the culture and the accomplishments made by the

individuals who were living it. I find in talking to my students that they have very little knowledge of African Americans beyond slavery and Martin Luther King. They do not realize the depth of the culture and the arts that reflect perspective that is American, but most important, uniquely African American. Additionally, they are seemingly unaware of the poets, artisans, playwrights, and musicians who pioneered and influenced African American arts and literature. Without a Langston Hughes or Lorraine Hansberry, much of the work created by the artists, musicians, and writers who are popular with my students today would not have been possible. It is vital that they understand the past to appreciate the present.

HOW WILL I TEACH THIS TOPIC?

I teach American literature by time period and characteristic. *A Raisin in the Sun* will conclude my unit on realism and will be intertwined with 20th-century literature. We will begin our journey with a day in which we examine a portion of African American history, beginning with the abolition of slavery and continuing through the 1960s. I will guide my students through the major legal victories that African Americans gained including the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments and *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. We will also look at one court case that was a blow to the movement for equal rights, *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

AMENDMENTS

The Thirteenth Amendment

Ratified January 31, 1865, Article 13 of the Amendments to United States Constitution makes slavery and involuntary servitude illegal in the United States (*Amendments*). Freed slaves now had the double-edged sword of freedom with all its glories and its burdens. These former slaves now had to provide for their families' needs for food and shelter.

The Fourteenth Amendment

Three years later, freed slaves were granted their American citizenship. Ratified on July 9, 1868, the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution grants citizenship to all who are born or naturalized into the United States. This allowed freed slaves to have the rights and privileges of full citizenship in the United States.

Section two of this amendment took away the earlier provision that stated that slaves were to be counted as 3/5 of a person for census purposes. It states that "representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State" (*Amendments*). A century before Lorraine Hansberry and Martin Luther King, America's newest citizens would have to wait for this Amendment's awards to come to fruition (*Amendments*).

The Fifteenth Amendment

The 15th Amendment granted everyone who was a citizen the right to vote. It abolished voting rules that discriminated against people based on race or servitude. This amendment was ratified on February 3, 1870 (*Amendments*).

COURT CASES

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896 interpreted the 13th and 14th Amendments to state that separate facilities, in this instance, a railcar in Louisiana, were constitutionally legal as long as the facilities for both black and whites were equal. Justice Henry Brown, speaking for the majority opinion, states,

. . . laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation in places where they are liable to be brought into contact do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other, and have been generally, if not universally, recognized as within the competency of the state legislatures in the exercise of their police power . . . (*Plessy v. Ferguson*).

This decision helped usher in the era of so-called “Jim Crow Laws,” which established white-only and black-only areas and facilities as the norm for the next half century. It was not successfully challenged until *Brown v. Board* in 1954.

Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954)

In 1954, *Plessy v. Ferguson* was finally reversed when a father, Oliver Brown, challenged it because he did not believe that his daughter, an African American child, should have to ride the bus five miles away to an inferior school. The Supreme Court agreed and decided unanimously to overturn the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* with its landmark decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*. Justice Earl Warren stated in his opinion that

to separate them [students] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone. . . Whatever may have been the extent of psychological knowledge at the time of *Plessy v. Ferguson*; this finding is amply supported by modern authority. (“*Brown v. Board*”)

The ruling in *Brown v. Board* did not end segregation totally or quickly. In parts of the South, it would take more than 20 years to integrate society and the public school system.

Beginning with the passage of the 13th Amendment and continuing through the civil rights movement, many blacks were faced with a new challenge, finding homes and work in a free society. However, they still had to deal with the prejudice and the strife that so many years of servitude brought. Following the abolition of slavery, many blacks were unable to find living conditions in which they felt safe or jobs that would pay them adequately. Many factors contributed to this unrest, including racism, resentment, unfair sharecropping practices, and the devastation to cotton farming caused by the boll weevil. With European immigration at an all time high because of the impending Great War, blacks also found themselves displaced by whites in jobs, which, up until then, were performed by African Americans. With tensions growing out of government-sanctioned racism because of fallout from its separate but equal ruling in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, many blacks were beginning to feel that greater opportunity lay outside of the segregated south. Additionally, many felt unprotected by the law as the numbers of race-related crimes and lynching occurred in the South.

MIGRATION PATTERNS OF FREED BLACKS AND THEIR DECENDANTS

Opportunity for better jobs finally opened up for African Americans when many of America's white men went off to war, leaving behind good jobs in industry. Employers became willing and eager to hire minority workers. A great migration northward ensued when Southern blacks sought out and found more opportunities in urban cities like New York and Chicago (*Cotton*). It was in these cities that African Americans were able to create epicenters that represented themselves and their culture.

History of Harlem

At the turn of the century, mere decades after slavery was abolished, many urban cities and neighborhoods were becoming populated with majorities of minorities. One such area was the Harlem area in New York City. Originally planned and developed for middle and upper class white families, "Harlem became available to blacks when it seemed clear that the area was seriously overbuilt; facing economic hardship, real estate interests among both races in effect conspired to break the exclusionary practices that had hitherto kept blacks out" (Gates 930). At this crucial point, many black business owners, real estate developers, and churches bought up a large portion of land near 135th Street and 5th Avenue, causing a "white flight" away from this area. With its beautiful architecture, well-built homes, and broad streets and sidewalks, African Americans were finally able to afford a good living at a reasonable price. Harlem became very attractive for black political activists, artists, playwrights, authors, poets, and other high-profile people. It was through this convergence of dynamic and thoughtful African Americans that the Harlem Renaissance began.

For the 20 years between World War I and World War II, blacks flocked to Harlem to become a part of this dynamic scene. They were inspired and influenced by each other and became the pioneers of great African American art and literature. Harlem, however

was not the only place where this convergence was occurring; Chicago became a mecca for the working class African American.

THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CHICAGO

Since the main focus of our unit, *A Raisin in the Sun*, takes place in Hansberry's native south-side Chicago, it is necessary to examine the historical and social context of Chicago in order to see how they affected the minority population in this city. We will view the video, *Goin' to Chicago*, which discusses the migration of freed slaves to the south side of Chicago. By examining this migration and the issues blacks had with segregation, poverty, and racism, we will see how the culture and people of south-side Chicago were changed. Additionally, we will be able to appreciate what impact these factors had on Hansberry and her contemporaries (*Goin' to Chicago*).

The Great Migration and its Impact on the South Side of Chicago

Prompted by the horrors of the South, an estimated 120,000 blacks migrated to Chicago at the turn of the 20th Century. Urged by the promises of better lives and jobs made by media outlets such as the African American newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, many blacks sought out and found opportunity in Chicago. Although they still experienced racism, lower wages, and segregation, most found a slightly better life for themselves and their families. Most settled in the south side in the areas known as Douglass and Bronzeville (*Chicago's Black Metropolis*).

After approximately one week of studying the areas and cities that became the hubs for African American literature and art, we will begin our study of the art and literature that was produced during these periods.

MAJOR WRITERS AND ARTISTS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Langston Hughes

Perhaps the most prolific writer of the Harlem Renaissance was Langston Hughes. Hughes was born of humble beginnings but emerged as one of the most influential people of his time. His poetry captures the essence of the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance. Additionally, his essays and letters influenced others as to what should typify the work of African American writers (*Today in History*). The most notable of his essays was published in *The Nation* in 1926. Called "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," this text encouraged African American writers to represent themselves accurately, "without fear or shame," and discouraged writers from trying to be other than simply what they were, African Americans (Hughes). Writers looked to this essay for guidance. Hughes wrote prolifically as well as inspired and led African Americans throughout his life as an activist and a champion of the African American

people. Writers such as Lorraine Hansberry were inspired by his work to create landmark pieces of their own (Gates 1251-1253).

To experience the power of Hughes influence first-hand, my class will read his essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” and outline the major ideas within the essay. We will begin by discussing the following quotation: “[a] truly great Negro artist [is] one who is not afraid to be himself;” we will discuss the author’s argument that black artists should not try to conform to the ideals of the white population (Hughes).

My students and I will attempt to deduce what Hughes was trying to convey through this text. We will then ask, research, and answer such questions as, “What impact did this text have on the African American artists, playwrights, and authors who were producing art during this period? What implications did it have on the works that came later? Moreover, what impact did it have on the questions of culture, society, and assimilation? How did this text influence writers such as Hansberry merely thirty years – but a full lifetime later?”

After challenging ourselves with these questions, we will begin examining the artwork produced by the African American masters, Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence, to find similar themes in the visual arts.

SOCIAL REALISM AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS

Social Realism is a term applied to a genre of art that focuses on “social problems and the hardships of everyday life.” Generally considered political, Social Realism strives to bring to the forefront the hardships of working class (“The Papers of African American Artists”). By examining two artists in this genre – African American painters Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence – we will look at predominant themes prevalent in African American art. We will explore themes such as isolation, hope, assimilation, and community and see how these particular artists manifested the lives of African Americans in their work. Through these images, we will see and explore elements of African American culture in this dynamic time. Looking at the paintings from the perspective of the artists, we will look at what message they appeared to convey in their art. We will ask question such as, “What were the artists fighting for or against? What did they value in their lives? How were the struggles and the victories of the African American people documented through this art?” We will also critique the art from the perspective that Hughes establishes in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.”

Jacob Lawrence

One of the most influential Social Realist painters was Jacob Lawrence. Lawrence chronicled the life and culture of his beloved Harlem, beginning with Great Migration and continuing through the flowering of the Harlem Renaissance. His paintings accurately depict daily events and activities of blacks in Harlem without censorship or

apology (*Meet Jacob Lawrence*). We will study several of his major paintings from different periods of his life and look for the history of the migration and of Harlem documented in his work.

Romare Bearden

Romare Bearden grew up in Harlem, New York, in 1920, just as the Harlem Renaissance was beginning to wane. He believed that “aesthetic technique was simply the means that enabled the artist to communicate his message – which as [he] saw [art] then was always essentially social, if not political” (“The Papers”). Bearden’s socially relevant artwork documents the life he lived as a very young boy in the South as well as his world in Harlem. By applying what we learned about Harlem, we will see what images and messages Bearden captured in his art.

After getting a clear understanding about what typified the literature and art of the Harlem Renaissance, we will then be able to see how it influenced later writers and artists, specifically Lorraine Hansberry. The characteristics and themes derived from this unit will then be tied into our reading of *A Raisin in the Sun* facts we learned in the previous weeks.

LORRAINE HANSBERRY’S BIOGRAPHY

The first line of Lorraine Hansberry’s autobiography states, “For some time now – I think since I was a child – I have been possessed of the desire to put down the stuff of my life” (Hansberry, *To Be Young* 42). This desire not only inspired her to write her autobiography, but also became the basis of her epic award-winning play, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Lorraine Hansberry grew up in the south side of Chicago. Born to a prominent middle-class family, Hansberry was a participant in and a witness to many of the important events that faced African Americans in the 1940s and 50s. Her family, wanting to move to a better life, selected a home for themselves in a white neighborhood. Through this bold move, Hansberry’s family challenged the segregationist policies that existed in the Chicago real estate market. Hansberry’s father, Carl, purchased the home and moved his family into it. Immediately, the Hansberry’s home was besieged by “howling mobs,” who threw bricks and yelled for the family to leave. Hansberry, in *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* recalls her family’s struggle and the emphasis that her father put on fighting “white supremacy the right way” (51). Challenging the restricted covenant policy, Carl Hansberry fought in court to retain his house, challenging the unfair policies of the real estate association. The case eventually made it to the Supreme Court in *Hansberry v. Lee* (1940) and was a landmark win for integration.

Like her father, Lorraine Hansberry became an advocate for African Americans. She was a very powerful political activist for the advancement of blacks in America. It was

through Hansberry's words and influence that the minority voice in theater was finally heard. She truly paved the way for those who followed.

A pioneer in American drama, Hansberry became the first black woman to have a play produced on Broadway. She also was the first African American writer and youngest person ever to win the New York Drama Critic Circle Award. In winning this award, her play bested works created by American drama heavyweights Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neil (Kappel 165).

Following her successes with *A Raisin in the Sun*, she became a spokesperson for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and authored a book for them called *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality*. Her crusade for civil rights and her criticism of the American government angered and alarmed the FBI. They classified her as "a member of a black-nationalist hate group" and had her passport revoked (Gates 1727 and Kappel 15). Hansberry continued her struggle for her people and her rights until her premature death of cancer at age 34. She left behind a body of work and a legacy that is both socially and culturally important.

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Historical and Literary Significance

A Raisin in the Sun emerged in the infancy of civil rights movement. Produced in 1959, a mere five years after *Brown v. Board* and four years after the Montgomery bus boycott, it became, in the words of Amari Baraka, "the quintessential civil rights drama" (Gates 1726). *Raisin* was a watershed piece that not only broke color barriers, but also emerged as an important political and social document that quietly but poignantly protested the social injustices in the housing industry.

Major Issues in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Our examination of the *A Raisin in the Sun* will require that we look at this play from multiple angles; ideally, I would like to look at it from historical, social, literary, and production viewpoints. To begin our exploration of the social concerns presented in this piece, we will first address the major obstacles that blacks faced in the real estate market.

Real Estate Policies in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Segregationist regulations in real estate can be traced back to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in 1896. In 1924, partially because of this decision, the National Association of Real Estate Boards decided that it would be "unethical for its members to facilitate the sale of home in white neighborhoods to members of minority groups," assuming that such a sale would decrease property values to those who remained in the neighborhood (Domina 26). So, even if a homeowner were willing to sell to a minority family, he or she would be

unable to complete the sale because of this segregationist policy. Neighborhoods became “restricted covenants,” in which home real estate agents and owners agreed to disallow sales to ethnic or minority groups. This policy of division was upheld by the courts until it was ruled unconstitutional in 1948. It was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1968, a full two decades later, that an enforceable law supporting integration was established (Domina 26).

With this background anchoring us, we will now read the text of *A Raisin in the Sun* aloud while concurrently discussing major themes and issues reflected the African American community of the 1950s.

Themes in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Assimilation v. Integration

The question of whether to assimilate or integrate into a new culture it is one that is asked by almost every immigrant into a new country, culture, or society. They might question as follows: “How much of my old culture I bring? What do I leave behind? What are the consequences of each choice?” These questions are probed in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Lena, just wanting to get out of the ghetto and into a house where her grandson can have a room, decides that she does not care where the house is located, as long as it is nice and can be bought for the money she has to spend. She says “that she just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money” (Gates 1263). She does not use race at all as a factor for choosing the house. Conversely, Beneatha struggles for her identity in a clash between being true to her African roots and being of African descent in America. She is influenced and guided by those around her and eventually finds a compromise in which she can hold on to her people’s past while embracing her present.

Economic Exploitation

Because of the segregationist policies such as restricted covenants and the narrow-mindedness and unjustified fears from the white community, many blacks, like the Younger family in *A Raisin in the Sun*, were discouraged in fulfilling their dreams of home ownership. Unethical lending practices and unfair housing prices in minority neighborhoods led blacks to look outside of traditionally black neighborhoods for better and more affordable housing. People like the Lena Younger and Lorraine Hansberry’s own father, Carl, found such houses in exclusively white neighborhoods. Lena’s experiences with Karl Linder and his attempted buy-out bring to the forefront the exploitation that was happening in these communities. Many were scared off by the tactics of people such as Linder. Hansberry was able to show her audience, which would have been typically white middle and upper class, a strong black woman who is able to say “no” to *the man* and fulfill her dream.

Representing a Positive View of African American Culture

Hansberry stated that in her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, “that the thing [she] tried to show was the many gradations even in one Negro family, the clash of the old and new, but most of all the unbelievable courage of the Negro people” (Kappel 46). She succeeded in this task in her presentation of the Younger family in the play. Each member of the family represents a different generation, idealism, tradition, and dream, all of which were present in the African American culture of the 1950s and 60s. However, no matter how different they are, they are unified in one thing, “their heroic defiance of white hostility and threats” (Kappel 46). Lena is the strong matriarch prevalent in the African American community. Her guidance helps shape all those in her charge. Walter Lee takes on the burdens of many black men, trapped in a dead-end job, living in a home that is not his own, struggling to make his son proud of him, while trying not to emasculate himself in a woman-centered home. Beneatha, in her sharp jabs at a white-washed America, comments frequently on the others’ assimilation into the white culture of America. She honors her African roots through her interactions with Joseph Asagai and her questioning of her own place in society.

Hansberry knew her goal was to educate the predominately white audiences of Broadway that blacks in America were sophisticated, knowledgeable, multi-dimensional people with lives, jobs, families, and dreams.

The White Man

Karl Linder represents *the man*. He is symbolic of the many of the tactics used by white America to bully blacks into signing over their dreams. He does not employ the tactics of fear-mongers like the KKK. Instead he uses quiet, methodical, reasonable argument to attempt to persuade the Youngers to allow him to reimburse them for their “misguided investment.” Walter Lee’s ability to finally say no to Linder and follow his dreams is a symbol of hope for African Americans.

Understanding the Title

My students often struggle with the title of this piece because they are not sure what the symbolism of “a raisin in the sun” represents. I will tell my students that Hansberry states in that she considered lines from two Langston Hughes poems, “Mother to Son,” and “Harlem” for the title of her play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Ultimately she chose a line from “Harlem,” but it is interesting to note the subtle differences in tone and optimism between the two poems (*Lorraine Hansberry: A Brief Biography*). We will take individual lines from each poem and find examples from the play that fit them. Afterwards, we will discuss how these lines and examples reflected the themes time period that we are studying.

After scrutinizing the text in this manner, we will now have the background needed for our exploration into the production elements of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

The Production of *A Raisin in the Sun*

Following this intensive study, my students will be asked to get into the mindset of a director, actor, or designer who would be producing this play and make some accurate production decisions. For example, a student who is interested in the fashion of the 1950s could research what people in south-side Chicago wore. Beyond the everyday clothing for the characters such as Lena and Walter Lee is the challenge of researching Beneatha and Joseph's African costuming. Also, since the play gives a very detailed picture of the setting, a student interested in design could read the description and draw out a representation of the set, making sure to research what family's decades-old furniture might look like. Students who are interested in acting could add more to their in-depth character analysis and act out a scene from the play. All of this study would focus on the students' finding of significant artifacts from the play in order to enhance their production interpretation.

UNIT PROJECT

For culmination of the unit, each student will be charged with finding one piece of literature or art from the time period not previously mentioned in the unit. Each student will then make a presentation, discussing the themes and significance that he or she found in the art or literature. At the end of our journey, the students will have an appreciation for the African American masters of art and literature and a better understanding of the historical and cultural struggles and triumphs during the first half of the 20th century.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Is *A Raisin in the Sun* an exploration of “a dream deferred” or does it tell people to “keep on climbin’?”

In this lesson, students will examine the two poems that influenced Lorraine Hansberry's title for *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry states in her autobiography that she considered lines from two of Langston Hughes poems for the title of her play. The poems are “Harlem” and “Mother to Son” (*Hansberry Biography*).

The two titles Hansberry considered for her play were “The Crystal Stair” and “A Raisin in the Sun.” The corresponding lines from the poems are, “What happens to a dream deferred / does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?” and “Life for me ain't been no crystal stair / it has tacks / and splinters / . . . but keep on climbin'” (*Hansberry Biography*).

The lines from “Harlem” depict people who are frustrated with putting off their dreams but unable to do anything about them. It feels like a call to action. On the other hand, the lines from “Mother to Son” are far more optimistic. They acknowledge that there is a bad side to life, but encourage people to keep on persevering (*Hansberry Biography*).

For this lesson I will provide my students with copies of these two poems. We will listen to them first and then do a close reading to find the nuances of meaning within the text. We will start our analysis using Advanced Placement’s TP-CASTT strategy.

TP-CASTT of Langston Hughes Harlem and Mother to Son

TP-CASTT is Advanced Placement’s acronym for title, paraphrase, connotation, attitude, shift, title again, and tone.

Title

We will begin our discussion of the poems with their respective titles. First, we will look at “Harlem.” Since we have studied the area of Harlem during the beginning of this unit, students will be able to connect with the title and find some possible interpretations of how the title fits the first text. They might discuss the problems that African Americans were having with not being able to fulfill their dreams due to prejudice and racism.

The second title, “Mother to Son,” will probably evoke memories of the students’ interactions with their own parental figures. After we read it, the students should notice the loving relationship between this mother and her son and compare it to the interactions that Lena Younger has with her son Walter Lee in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Paraphrase

We will then pull the poems apart by paraphrasing each line aloud. We will discuss both the literal and symbolic meaning within the poems. For example, the images in “Harlem” of dreams being deferred include “drying up, sagging like a heavy load, and exploding.” We will discuss what connotations each of these images have in deferring one’s dream.

In “Mother to Son” we will look at the images of “climbing to the top, tacks, and splinters” and see the advice and optimism in this poem. Again we will look for both denotative and connotative meanings of the words.

Connotation

In this step, we will look at the poetic devices such as simile, metaphor, symbolism, sound devices, and diction to see how they contribute to the greater meaning of the poem. For example, what connotation does a dream have that “sags like a heavy load” versus one that “explodes?” In the other poem, what connotations arise when the mother suggest to her son that he “keep on climbin’” a stair that is crooked and filled with tacks?

Attitude

Figuring out the author's attitude toward his or her subject matter is vital towards finding the true meaning. We will look through both poems and find evidence of Hughes's attitude towards blacks that put off their dreams and those who keep on climbin'. We will also reflect back to "The Negro and the Racial Mountain" to see if Hughes is taking his own advice in these poems.

Shift

Most poems have a "shift" in which the poem changes from one objective to another. It is important to look at these shifts to find deeper meaning in a poem. Shifts may answer a question asked. For example, in "Harlem" the speaker asks the question, "what happens to a dream deferred?" Students would look to the text to find the answer. Shifts may also change the tone or mood of the poem like in "Mother to Son" when the mother switches from lecturing her son to challenging him to "keep on climbin'."

Title Again

We will revisit the title to see if we find any additional meaning. Depending on the class discussion, there may or may not be.

Theme

Theme is the most important part of the exercise. We will look for universal truth suggested by the plot of the poem. It is from this point that we will begin or discussion of how these poems fit *A Raisin in the Sun*. We will go line-by-line, looking for examples from the text to fit each line (Advanced Placement).

We will then discuss the nuances of each poem and attempt to find the subtle differences between the two poems. We will judge if Lorraine Hansberry chose the correct line for her title and possibly suggest new lines if appropriate.

Lesson Plan 2: Production Elements from *A Raisin in the Sun*

It is important for students to understand how drama differs from all other literature. However, by just looking at words on a page, drama looks remarkably like all other stories except that it has character names in the margins. By exploring some of the technical aspects of theater production, the students will be better able to appreciate the craft of the play.

First, we will discuss the roles of some of the major players in theater including the playwright, actor, director, and designers. Students will then choose one "role" and write up a production plan for that position.

The Playwright

These students will become our Lorraine Hansberrys. They will be directed to write a new scene for the play or to re-write an original scene with a different outcome. For

example, a student could rewrite the ending and have Karl Linder buy the family out. He or she could also write about the family's first day in the new home. Additionally, the playwrights will need to write additional stage directions, scenery descriptions, or director's notes modeled after the introduction to the play. For instance, a student might want to describe Lena and Beneatha's bedroom. Playwrights will model Hansberry's style in their descriptions. It is important that the playwrights follow the conventions of play writing when drafting their final pieces.

The Director

These students will write up a director's book that discusses the blocking (actor movement on stage) for one full scene, a production concept that describes how they would style the show, and a cast list for the show using movie stars.

Directors will also work with a designer to fulfill their production concept and actually direct the actors in a short, two- to five-minute scene. They would be required to document their directing experience in the director's book.

The Designers: The Set Designer

Set designers will create a set design for the show. Utilizing the text and Hansberry's detailed descriptions, each student will be required to submit a floor plan, a sketch, or a model of the furniture with a short paper discussing the justifications for their choices. If the designers work with a director, they will need to describe this experience in their paper. If they did not work with a director, then they will need to describe from where they got their inspiration for their concept.

The Designers: The Costume Designer

The costume designer will either work with a director or alone. He or she will be assigned to research the clothes needed for each role in the play, looking to the script for inspiration. The costume designer will need to create or find each character at least one outfit. Beneatha, however, will need two – her contemporary outfit and her African outfit. Costume designers will be required to bring in pictures or sketches of the clothing they chose with a written explanation about how and why they chose the outfits they did.

The Actor

Actors will be required to find monologues or scenes with a partner and present them to the class. They can either work with a director or work by themselves. The actors will be required to write a character analysis in which they write a short background for their character, the characters' main objective (what he or she wants from the scene), and a description about how they prepared for the scenes. Monologues or scenes must be memorized and acted full out.

Lesson Plan 3: The Unit Project

After this intensive study, we will spend a day in the library so that students can find a piece of artwork or literature that fits the time period we studied that they will present to the class. I will give each of them a handout with questions on it to guide their research. The questions will be as follows: What is the title of your piece? Who created it? When did they create it? Into what literary or artistic movement does it fit? Students will be required to secure a copy of the artwork or literature for display and discussion.

After leaving the library, I will give the students another question sheet with more probing questions. These questions will require them to delve deeper into the art or literature and look for both historical evidence within the text as well as themes, symbols, and motifs. The students will have one week to complete their projects.

For the presentation, students will need to create a PowerPoint or poster with at least five key discussion points. Three discussion points will be mandatory for all students; they all must discuss the history of the piece and its creator, at least three themes, and the historical climate in which the piece was created. They may also tie it to the art and literature that we studied together. Additionally, they must include two discussion points of their own. We will spend two to three days presenting our findings. The oral presentation will be graded with a rubric giving points for accuracy of information, thought and planning, execution of the presentation, and completeness. The student will be required to submit five test questions based on his or her presentation. I will compile the information and give my students a quiz over the material presented.

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