

*Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun:*

A Curriculum Guide



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## Introduction

### Literary Analysis Prompt for 11<sup>th</sup> grade:

Choose one of the themes from the American Experience: the immigrant experience, money and morality, race and social justice, and cultural identity in America. Write an analytical essay examining how that theme is developed through the experiences of one of the primary characters in a literary work. Refer to the social or historical context of the work, and use specific and relevant evidence from the text to support your interpretation.

There is no dearth of materials and curricula for teaching *A Raisin in the Sun*. A quick Google search will reveal the many (often very good) websites devoted to exploring the play and its historical context(s). Our purpose was not to reinvent the wheel on this play, but rather to shape the lessons and activities around the common assignment for the Literary Analysis in the eleventh grade. This assignment asks students to examine a theme related to the “American Experience” as it is developed through a primary character in a work of literature. We saw *A Raisin in the Sun* as a text full of possibilities for student success with this writing prompt. A family drama exploring cultural and racial identity, aspirations, inter-generational conflicts, and compromised and renewed morals, *A Raisin in the Sun* has stood the test of time since it was first produced in 1959. In fact, the play was recently revived on Broadway (2004) and won a number of Tony awards. The play also inherently poses questions not just about the civil rights era from which it was born, but also about our own times and the failed promises of the civil rights movements. As such, the play is in and of itself interesting as a reflection of its social, cultural, and historical context, but it can also be a jumping off point for readers to explore our own social, cultural, and historical context. The play critiques and hesitantly embraces the very concept of “the American Dream.”

The play raises a number of essential questions for readers, including some of the following:

- How do one’s race, class, and/or gender influence an individual’s goals or aspirations?
- How do stereotypes of one’s race, class, and/or gender influence an individual’s goals or aspirations?
- How do individuals determine or understand their place in society?
- What is the role of money in attaining the American Dream?
- When does pragmatism outweigh pride?

Students will have the opportunity to explore these questions in relationship to the play and to themselves. The literary analysis prompt provides students with an opportunity for students to explore these essential questions and to possibly come to some conclusions about what it means to live in our society. They will have the opportunity to grapple with some of the most perplexing and important questions in contemporary American society.

In reading/viewing both the play and related documents, articles, videos, and poetry, students will be asked to consider essential questions. In writing the literary analysis, students will be asked to analyze

and articulate how a work of literature conveys meaning and reflects the society in which it is placed. Additionally, we hope that students will come away from this unit with some enduring understandings, including understanding that:

- Achieving individual goals often requires overcoming barriers
- Stereotypes can be limiting and should be confronted and questioned
- The American Dream represents an often unfulfilled promise that nonetheless should and can be struggled for
- Money creates many opportunities and conflicts in the pursuit of the American Dream

The activities and craft lessons in this unit have been adapted from our colleagues (with much appreciation) who have worked tirelessly on creating curriculum guides for Portland Public Schools. We have borrowed heavily, as well, from Linda Christensen—without whom none of the excellent teaching guides and lessons from the past eight years would exist. We offer a number of reading strategies directed towards the final writing outcome (the literary analysis) and we tried to focus our writing craft lessons on the types of difficulties students typically have in terms of organization, thesis statements, and use of textual examples. We were not exhaustive in providing such lessons, however, and we direct teachers towards the curriculum guide addendums created in 2006 (again with the amazing leadership of Linda Christensen) for craft lessons that we have not included here. We have also not been exhaustive in providing activities geared toward teaching the historical context of the play; we have provided some materials and suggested resources, but we believe teachers can access this material more readily than the craft lessons on writing literary analyses.

Likewise, we have not focused this guide on teaching about racism and stereotyping per se, but have provided a limited list of resources for exploring these issues in the context of the play. Our focus has been on helping students and teachers build skills towards successfully writing the 11<sup>th</sup> grade literary analysis. We apologize for any shortcomings or oversights in this guide and we hope that students and teachers will find this guide useful.

**Calendar for *A Raisin in the Sun* Reading and Writing Unit**

<p><b>Pre-reading 1</b>  <u>Paraphrasing/Summarizing activity</u> using <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> – practice skills, scaffold understanding of historical/social context</p>	<p><b>Pre-reading 2</b>  <u>Introduce Free Writing Activity</u> (see first prompt)  <u>Read and discuss “A Dream Deferred”</u>            Build a personal connection, understand Hansberry’s reference</p>	<p><b>Pre-reading/Reading 3</b>  <u>Free write</u>  <u>Intro Retrieval Chart 1</u>  <u>Begin reading play</u>            Start to collect and interpret data on a variety of characters</p>	<p><b>Reading – Act 1 4</b>  <u>Free write</u>  <u>Read &amp; Discuss</u>  <u>Continue to work on retrieval chart</u></p>
<p><b>Reading – Act 1 5</b>  <u>Free Write</u>  <u>Act 1 Activity – Character Silhouette</u>            Collaboratively access, interpret, synthesize information collected on retrieval charts and free writes to begin to analyze character</p>	<p><b>Reading/Viewing 6</b>  <b>Discussion</b>  <u>Free Write</u>  <u>Watch <i>Eyes on the Prize</i></u>            Take notes, answer questions on video covering important aspects of the American Civil Rights movement</p>	<p><b>Reading – Act 2 7</b>  <u>Free Write</u>  <u>Introduce Retrieval Chart #2</u>            Students begin to focus on a single character’s experiences, dreams, challenges</p>	<p><b>Reading – Act 2 8</b>  <u>Free Write</u>  <u>Read &amp; Discuss</u>  <u>Work on Retrieval Chart #2</u></p>
<p><b>Reading/Prewriting 9</b>  <u>Free Writing</u>  <u>Connecting Characters to Themes Poster</u>            Collaboratively access, interpret, synthesize information collected on retrieval charts and free writes moving to deeper (inferential) understanding of relationship between character and theme</p>	<p><b>Reading – Act 2/3 10</b>  <u>Free Write</u>  <u>Read &amp; Discuss</u></p>	<p><b>Reading – Act 3 11</b>  <u>Free Write</u>  <u>Read &amp; Discuss</u></p>	<p><b>Reading/Viewing 12</b>  <b>Discussion</b>  <u>Free Write</u>  <u>Watch <i>All in the Family</i></u>            Compare treatment of civil rights/housing issues in drama and comedy; compare television content from early 1970’s to contemporary</p>
<p><b>Prewriting 13</b>  <u>Introduce Common Assignment/Literary Analysis Essay</u>   <u>Hand out “Literary Analysis Criteria Sheet”</u></p>	<p><b>Writing 14</b>  <u>Craft Lessons: Developing a Working Thesis or Thesis Statements for Literary Analysis</u>            Students to develop and assess <i>working</i> thesis statements</p>	<p><b>Writing 15</b>  <u>Craft Lesson: Writing Introductions</u>            Students see and practice a variety of possible openings/introductory paragraphs</p>	<p><b>Writing 16</b>  <u>Craft Lesson: Embedding and Analyzing Quotations</u></p>
<p><b>Writing 17</b>  <u>Craft Lesson – Using Transitions #1</u>            Students practice using transitions throughout essay</p>	<p><b>Writing 18</b>  <u>Craft Lesson – Using Transitions #2</u>            Students continue practice</p>	<p><b>Writing 19</b>  <u>Handout: Expository Essay Revision</u>            Students work together on revision</p>	<p><b>Writing 20</b>            Students peer edit each other’s work, revisit handout “Literary Analysis Criteris</p>

**Criteria and Standards for *A Raisin in the Sun***

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Activities and Strategies</b>	<b>Writing Craft Lessons</b>	<b>Literacy Standard</b>
<b>Reading Comprehension</b>	Daily Free Write (Journals) Retrieval Charts – Acts 1 & 2 Silhouette Poster Connecting Character to Theme Poster Supplementary Discussion Questions Reading from Summarizing and Paraphrasing Activity		<b>Standard 2</b> – Listening to and Reading Informational, Narrative and Literary Texts  <b>Standard 8</b> – Literary Text – Literal Comprehension: Demonstrate General Understanding 11.8.1  (Also 11.9, 11.10 as outlined below)
<b>Speaking, Listening and Viewing</b>	Watching, responding to <i>Eyes on the Prize</i>  Watching, analyzing, and responding to <i>All in the Family</i>		<b>Standard 18</b> – Speaking, Listening and Viewing 11.18.2,3,4,6,9 – identify, analyze, discuss, compare, contrast, evaluate, take notes
<b>Literature</b>	Read, write about, and discuss <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> Daily Free Writes Silhouette Poster Character/Theme Poster		<b>Standard 8</b> – Literary Text – Literal Comprehension: Demonstrate General Understanding 11.8.1 <b>Standard 9</b> – Literary Text - Inferential Comprehension Develop an interpretation 11.9.1-9 <b>Standard 10</b> – Literary Text – Examine Content and Structure 11.10.4,15,16,17
<b>Writing</b>	Write a formal literary analysis using 11 <sup>th</sup> grade common assignment prompt Daily Free Write Expository Essay Revisions Literary Analysis Criteria	Paraphrasing and Summarizing Developing a Thesis Thesis Statements for Literary Analysis Writing an Introduction Embedding and Analyzing Quotations Using Transitions 1 Using Transitions 2	<b>Standard 10-</b> Literary Text- Analyze evidence in writing <b>Standard 11</b> - Using Writing Process <b>Standard 12</b> – Communicate supported ideas 11.12.1-6 <b>Standard 13</b> – Write...Expository Texts 11.13.2 Expository Writing 11.13.3 Summarize 11.13.4 Practice Correct Citations 11.13..5 Response to Literature

## **A Raisin in the Sun Supplemental Discussion / Quiz Questions**

Use these questions for discussions, quizzes, free-writes, or some other student activities while reading the play.

### Act I—Scene I

- What is the setting of the play?
- Who, in your opinion, makes all the major decisions in the family?
- What kind of person is Walter and what are his ambitions in life?
- What important event is the whole Younger family looking forward to?
- What plans for the \$10,000 does each member of the family have in mind?

### Act I—Scene II

- In this scene Ruth has discovered that she is pregnant. She is considering an abortion. In your opinion, why does she want to do this? Do you feel that this is a solution to her problems?
- What is revealed about the character of Beneatha in this scene?
- How does her African friend view American Blacks?
- The \$10,000 check finally arrives in the mail. What impact does this event have on each member of the family?

### Act II—Scene I

- Compare the personalities of Walter and George Murchison. How are they different?
- Do you think Lena was right in spending the money the way she wanted to? Should she have considered the wishes of Walter?
- As a Black person or member of some other ethnic group, how would you feel about moving into a neighborhood where you are not welcome?
- What are some of the causes of racial prejudice?

### Act II—Scene II

- Ruth finds out that Walter has not been reporting to his job as a chauffeur. What caused this rebellious attitude in Walter?
- Lena has a change of heart and turns over to Walter the \$6,500 she has left after making a deposit on a house. What causes her to make this decision?
- Describe the change in Walter after he gets his hands on the money.
- What would you do if you suddenly fell heir to \$10,000?
- Do you think that money is all that you need to be happy?

### Act II—Scene III

- Can you imagine some of the feelings the Younger family had when they found out why Mr. Lindner paid them a visit?
- What kind of person was Mr. Lindner?
- Can you picture the kind of neighborhood the Youngers are planning to move into?
- What are some of the problems they will face?
- How do you think Walter feels after hearing from Bobo that Willy has disappeared with the money?
- How do you think Lena feels after having trusted Walter with the money?

### Act III

- With the loss of the money Beneatha will not be able to go to medical school. Describe her reaction to her brother and the change in her attitude toward life itself.
- How has Walter changed since he lost the money?
- What is his plan to rectify his mistake?
- Why does Lena disapprove of his plan?
- The play ends as the Younger family is leaving their old house. What kind of reception do you think is in store for them when they arrive at their new residence?



## **Craft Lesson: Summarizing and Paraphrasing**

**Standards:** 11.12.1 (ideas and content); 11.12.2 (organization); 11.13.2 (expository writing)

**Objectives:** Students will practice how to summarize a larger work as well as being exposed to some of the historical context, specifically the civil rights movement, surrounding Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*.

**Materials:** A classroom set of *Write Source: Grade 11*, a classroom set of copies of *Plessey v. Ferguson*, highlighters (preferably at least three different colors).

**Time:** 1-2 class periods.

**Activity:** *Additional information:* This lesson can have at least two possible applications to *Raisin in the Sun*, depending on when in the unit it is taught. If used early in the unit, this activity will begin to provide historical context for the play as a scaffold to understanding, as well as helping to teach summarizing and paraphrasing. Used later in the unit, it can instruct on how to summarize and paraphrase by using an applicable text that will reinforce the cultural/historical context. Use it whenever/however it will best support your needs.

**Steps/Pre-Planning:** In *Write Source* for grade 11, beginning on page 543, you will find a section titled "Summarizing and Paraphrasing," followed by brief descriptions of each term. On page 544 is a sample reading for summarizing, titled "The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," followed by a reinforcement of how to identify the topic sentence, body, and closing sentence. Read and familiarize yourself with these pages.

Using the internet or another source find a reading, roughly 1-2 pages in length, for *Plessey v. Ferguson* that gives an overview of the case and make a classroom set of copies of the reading.

- Lead students through the March on Washington reading on page 544, as well as the sample summary. Discuss/clarify their understanding of topic sentences, the body of the reading, and the closing sentence.
- Upon completion of the discussion, hand out the copies of "Plessey vs. Ferguson" and explain that each of them will be creating a summary of the reading, using the same criteria laid out in *Write Source* for their summaries. \*

*\*Accommodations: For students whose skills are emerging, you may choose to have students try their own summary of the "March on Washington" reading versus introducing a new text. You may also find it helpful to use the "5 W's and H" chart from the teacher's edition, p.834, and have students fill in the chart in small groups prior to writing the summary. The summary could be done collaboratively or individually.*

- Have students color mark each paragraph in the reading you copied of "Plessey vs. Ferguson" for three things: the topic sentence, the body sentences, and the closing sentence. On the top of the handout should be a "legend" for what each color represents.
- Next, instruct the students to take out a separate piece of paper, and open to page 546 in *Write Source*. Following the book's guidelines for summarizing using prewriting, writing, revising and editing, ask them to summarize the reading selection. Remind them to follow the order the book sets up and not to miss a step in the process. You may choose to either assign this as homework, or take them to a computer lab, so that the summary can be word processed.
- Once the summary is complete, students should trade with another student. First, the reader should color mark the summary for its topic sentence, body sentences, and closing sentence.

- Next, in the left margin, students should star or make check marks for information they too had in their summary. In the right margin, students should star/check information the writer included that they the reader did not include. Under all stars/checks readers are encouraged to write comments (Why did the writer select something the reader did not? What made a sentence so important that both felt the need to include it? Et cetera.).
- Once the peer edit has been completed, have pairs conference and explain/rationalize their markings and any other appropriate feedback. All summaries should be turned in to the instructor once the conference is completed.

This can be extended to paraphrasing as well, by using the book's strategies for paraphrasing on page 548. In addition, a research assignment could be given on *Brown v. Board of Education*, either researching how it overturned *Plessey v. Ferguson*, or how *Brown v. Board of Education* is seen in today's legal light.

## Daily Free Write: Guided response to characters, themes and issues - Activity

### Standards:

11.8.1 – Literary Text - Literal Comprehension

11.9.2, 4, 5,6,7,9 – Literary Text – Inferential Comprehension, Developing Interpretations

11.10.4, 11,15,16,17 – Literary Text – Examining Content and Structure

**Objective:** Daily responses to their reading will help students collect their ideas about the play. These reflective responses will also guide students into thoughtful discussion and help generate topic and thesis ideas for the final paper. While we suggest these as class openers, they can also be used as part of an in-class or homework response journal. They will support work students are doing with Retrieval Charts.

### Journal Prompts – Motifs, themes, big ideas

#### Opening Free Write

*To start the journal and the unit, ask the students to write to the following prompt:*

What are your dreams and ambitions? How will you achieve them? How would you feel and what would you do if something or someone got in your way?

#### Dreams/The American Dream

- What is the American Dream? Do different people have different dreams? Who? Why?
- What are your American Dreams? How are they different from your parents'? Those of your grandparents?
- What limits dreams? Are the limits more external or internal?
- How do race, gender, and class affect dreams?
- Do all Americans have access to the same dream?
- Does everyone have an equal right to the dream?
- What role does money have in the acquisition of the American dream?
- Are there positive and negative consequences of having dreams?
- Should dreams be tied more to what we are or what we want?
- What is a dream deferred? Have you ever experienced this? What was your reaction?

#### Money

- Is money *really* the “root of all evil?” If you agree, explain why. If you disagree, explain how the expression became so well known.
- Another saying claims that “every man has his price,” which is no more or less true for women. Do you agree? What does it mean?
- What good can money do?
- What would you do for \$1,000,000? \$500,000? \$1000? \$50?
- How many songs can you think of that are about money? Love?

## Journal Prompts – Scene Specific

### Act 1, Scene 1

Choose one of the characters that has a challenge or problem you can identify with. Who is the character and what is the problem? What do you see as the possible outcomes or solutions to these problems?

### Act2, Scene 2

Thinking about the scene with the rat, what effect does it have on different characters? What does this scene reveal about these characters and their struggles?

After the scene where Asagai is introduced, how would you compare him to George Murchison? Which would be a better fit for Beneatha? Why?

### Act 2, Scene 1

This scene shows many sides of Walter. What do you see or learn about him that is new to you? Does this scene change your view of him in any way?

Why do Walter and Beneatha get along better in this scene?

What does this scene show about Walter and Ruth's relationship? What do you predict will happen?

### Act 2, Scene 2

In this scene, Beneatha says, "there are two things [black Americans] have got to overcome, one is the Klu Klux Klan – and the other is Mrs. Johnson" (104). What does she mean?

How and why does Mama make her decision about the money?

### Act 2, Scene 3

Comparing Mr. Linder and the Youngers, which common desires or goals do they have? What differences are there?

Is Mr. Linder an evil or bad person? Explain.

Why does Mama hit Walter?

### Act 3

In this act, many of the characters come to important new understandings. Pick one character, explain his or her new insight and discuss who or what brings this about.





**A Raisin in the Sun Evidence Retrieval Chart—Act I SAMPLE**

**Instructions:**

1. For each of the characters listed, find at least one passage from Act One of the play in which this character's aspirations or ambitions are stated or referred to. The speaker does not necessarily have to be the same as the character. For instance, Walter might make a statement about his sister, Beneatha, and her ambitions.
2. Make sure to note the speaker and the page number on which the passage appears.
3. After copying the passage, write your own thoughts about the passage. Aim to address the following issues in your response:
  - What do you think of the character and his/her ambitions?
  - Given the historical/social context, is the aspiration or ambition realistic?  
Why/why not?
    - What might be some obstacles for this character?
    - What might be some strengths that this character has that would help him/her overcome any obstacle.

<p><b>Walter</b></p> <p><i>“Yeah. You see, this little liquor store we got in mind cost seventy-five thousand and we figured the initial investment on the place be ‘bout thirty thousand, see. That be ten thousand each.”</i></p> <p>Speaker: <u>Walter</u> Page: <u>33</u></p>	<p><i>Your Response:</i></p> <p><b>I think Walter wants to be his own boss and he sees Mama’s insurance check as a way to get started in his own liquor business with his friends. It seems like it should be realistic for Walter to open a liquor store. It’s not like he’s thinking about becoming a stockbroker on Wall Street. One obstacle that seems clear already is that his wife, Ruth, doesn’t seem to support him on this. She thinks he might be getting involved with some shady business partners. Walter seems to know his own mind, though, so maybe he will be successful.</b></p>
<p><b>Mama</b></p> <p><i>“We was going to set away, little by little, don’t you know, and buy a little place out in Morgan Park. We even picked out the house. Looks right dumpy today. But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had ‘bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back. And didn’t none of it happen.”</i></p> <p>Speaker: <u>Mama</u> Page: <u>45</u></p>	<p><i>Your Response:</i></p> <p><b>Mama’s dream seems pretty simple—she wants a house with a little garden. I think most people would want that. Her dream doesn’t seem outrageous. I guess it might be hard for African Americans to find a house to buy during this time, especially if they want to move out of the city and into the suburbs. But it seems like if you have enough money, you should be able to buy a house wherever you want. Money talks, right? Mama’s insurance money is just as green as the next person’s...</b></p>

**Character Silhouettes - Act 1 – Activity**

**Standards:**

- 11.8.1 – Literary Text, Develop General Understanding
- 11.9.1, 2, 5, 9 – Literary Text, Develop Interpretation

**Objective:** the end of Act 1 will have introduced the major characters and their conflicts. This activity will help students clearly identify these concepts. Done as a group, character charts allow collaborative learning, helping students access and share their understanding of characters while identifying ideas and support for later writing. This activity addresses diverse learning styles, since students are physically active, create visual representations, and present orally.

**Materials Needed:** Butcher paper, markers, copies of *Raisin in the Sun*



**Time: 1 Block, 2 regular class periods**

**Activities:** Put students in groups of up to four. The “Character Silhouettes” activity, as outlined in the PPS’s *Reading and Writing Strategies, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (RSW2) has detailed instructions on creating one type of character chart. A copy follows. You may wish to make some adjustments for your class.

## Character Silhouettes *A Reading and Writing Strategy*

### **Description:**

This strategy is a culminating exercise on character exploration and analysis that reinforces the lessons of point of view. In groups students identify key character traits and concerns. Using descriptors and passages from the reading material, both by the character and about the character, students use the text to support their conclusions. This activity supports the writing of character analysis essays.

### **Advance Preparations:**

- Sheets of butcher paper approximately 2-3' wide and 6' long.
- Markers, pens, crayons, etc.

**Timeline:** Two class periods for finding quotes, passages, drawing, writing and sharing

### **Steps:**

- 1) Students divide into groups that focus on a single character.
  - If students have been following a single character throughout the text, students will divide into groups of four or five, combining with other students who have the same character.
  - If students did not trace a single character through the novel, students divide into groups of four or five. The teacher assigns the character for each group, or groups volunteer for characters.
- 2) Students pick up a piece of butcher paper and markers for their group.
- 3) Instructions to the student groups:
  - Review DIALOGUE JOURNALS (or other strategies used in the study of this novel/play).
  - Identify key character traits (how you'd describe the character).
  - Find important quotations said by the character that provide evidence of traits, goals, values.
  - Identify key influences on character (other characters, past experiences that are either personal or historical).
  - Find important passages within the text about the character. These can be quotes stated directly by other characters. They can also be passages from the text that reveal information about the character.
  - Draw a silhouette or an outline of a person on the butcher paper. Leave enough room outside the outline so that you can write there.
  - Discuss your findings from the text with your group.
  - Write inside the body the key traits and quotes by your character.
  - Write outside the body the major influences, quotes by others and passages from the text about your character.
- 4) At conclusion of activity, groups tape silhouettes on walls, and each group shares highlights from their writing. If two groups are doing one character, make sure the first group doesn't tell all. An interesting discussion might occur if both groups have varying takes on the character. Encourage students to ask questions of each other about their silhouettes.

### **Variations, Other Activities and CIM Spinoffs:**

- 1) Discuss point of view. Look at declarations the character makes about her/himself and quotations of others about her/him. Do actions and words coincide, or does the character say one thing and do another? Do the other characters recognize this? Do the other characters not understand how the character is truly feeling or what s/he is thinking?
- 2) Use the silhouettes as an outline for an expository or persuasive essay on a particular character or as a pre-writing activity on a character metaphor essay.

**Activity – Viewing/Discussion Questions for *Eyes on the Prize* “Episode #1: Awakenings” (1954-1956)**

Before we watch the video, describe, in the space below, what you know about Civil Rights and the Civil Rights Movement in this country. If you can, also provide a definition of “Civil Rights.”

Take notes on the following questions as you watch the video “Eyes on the Prize.”

Emmett Till:

1. What was Brown vs. the Board of Education?
2. How many lynchings were there in Mississippi from 1884-1954?
3. Why was Emmett Till Killed?
4. What was the seating in the courthouse like?
5. What did the defense attorney say at the end of the trial?
6. What was the verdict at the end of the trial?
7. What did the two brothers admit to a reporter later?

## Montgomery Bus Boycott

1. Why did Rosa Parks not give up her seat?
2. What did the people of Montgomery decide to do?
3. What was the role of church and faith in the boycott?
4. Who was elected to lead the boycott?
5. How long did the boycott last?
6. How was it ended?

What did you learn from the video that you were unaware of before? What is your reaction to the video? What is your understanding of “Civil Rights” now?

**A Raisin in the Sun Evidence Retrieval Chart—Acts II and III**

**Instructions:**

1. While you read these two acts, you will narrow your focus so that you are following and collecting evidence on just one character. Choose a character that you like or that you think will be interesting to write about in your essay. Again, find passages from the play in which this character's aspirations or ambitions are stated, referred to or shown. The speaker does not necessarily have to be the same as the character. For instance, Walter might make a statement about his sister, Beneatha, and her ambitions.
2. Make sure to note the speaker and the page number on which the passage appears.
3. After copying the passage, write your own thoughts about the passage. Aim to address the following issues in your response:
  - What do you think of the character and his/her ambitions?
  - Given the historical/social context, is the aspiration or ambition realistic? Why/why not?
  - What or who might be some obstacles for this character?
  - What might be some strengths that this character has that would help him/her overcome any obstacles?

<p><b>Speaker:</b> _____ <b>Page:</b> _____</p>	<p><b>Your Response:</b></p>
	<p><b>Your Response:</b></p>

<b>Speaker:</b> _____ <b>Page:</b> _____	
<b>Speaker:</b> _____ <b>Page:</b> _____	<b>Your Response:</b>
<b>Speaker:</b> _____ <b>Page:</b> _____	<b>Your Response:</b>
<b>Speaker:</b> _____ <b>Page:</b> _____	<b>Your Response</b>

## Connecting Character with Theme Posters – Act 2 – Activity

### Standards:

11.8.1 – Literary Text, Literal Comprehension

11.9.1-9 – Literary Text, Developing Interpretation

11.10.11 – Literary Text, Examine Content and Structure

**Objective:** Students will interpret, relate, and hypothesize about various characters in the play. This activity has students use their retrieval charts and journals to work first individually then in groups to come to a better understanding of characters and to continue to make inferences about the deeper meanings of the play. Students often miss the “so what” aspect of literary analysis, and this activity can help students see how individual characters can represent or embody ideas that are important outside of the context of the work itself. In addition to serving a variety of learning styles, this activity will continue to lay a foundation for the final essay.

**Materials:** Copies of the play, completed retrieval charts, personal free write journals, markers in multiple colors (every group will need at least three), Connecting Character to Theme Worksheet and Connecting Character to Theme Poster handouts. (Following pages)

**Time:** One – two class periods

**Activities:** Your class discussions and pre-reading activities have helped students identify and address some of the important motifs and themes of this play. Remind students that in drama there is rarely direct narration and that anything a writer wants an audience to know or understand often comes through a characters’ dialogue and actions. By looking closely at these and making informed, logical inferences, we can begin to perceive what important ideas the work is meant to convey.

Before they meet in groups, have students use their own journals and retrieval charts to make notes on the Connecting Character to Theme Worksheet. This should take 10 – 20 minutes.

When ready, put students into character groups and have them make posters with the elements detailed on the Connecting Character to Theme Poster handout. Groups should be small enough so that each student can contribute at least one want, need, or desire.

Note: *If students follow directions and use separate colors for the individual categories of Wants, Challenges, and What This Means, their presentations will offer more visual impact and clarity to their audience.* Students will need about 10-15 minutes to decide what should go on their poster and another 20-30 to create it. Have groups present their final posters.

As groups present, help students see connections between big ideas or themes that different characters share.

Connecting Character to Theme

We come to understand individual characters through what we see them see and do and by noting what others say about them. But characters are also important in helping readers or viewers understand some of the important themes of a literary work. You will work with a group to create and present a poster that shows how your character’s challenges help present some of this work’s deeper meanings. Before you work with the group, fill out this chart. Be sure to have at least four items in each column.

Character: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Want/Need/Desire</b> Page # (Specific Evidence)	<b>Conflict/Challenge/Obstacle</b> Page # (Specific Evidence)	Big Idea/What This Could Mean – (Your <i>general</i> idea)
<i>Example for Walter: Wants to show his son that he can support him – gives him \$ for school/taxi/fruit p.31</i>	<i>Ruth is worried about money, - doesn't seem to trust Walter p.31-34</i>	<b><i>Men have lots of financial pressures</i></b> <b><i>It's important to look like you have \$\$\$</i></b>



### **Connecting Character to Theme Poster**

Your group will create and present a poster that will show how your character's dreams and challenges work together to show some of the play's important ideas, underscoring the themes of the work. Use the handouts you've already filled in to discuss and decide what should go on your poster. Use the sample on the reverse as a model and be sure to include the following:

- A visual for your character
- Three to five Dreams/Desires/Ambitions that help drive your character (use one color marker to show each of these)
- Conflicts/Challenges/Obstacles that stand between your character and what he or she wants (use a second color for all of these)
- The general idea, opinion or theme that this combination of Dreams and Challenges suggests

You will have from 20 – 30 minutes to complete these before presenting.

### **Connecting Character to Theme Poster**

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You will have from 20 – 30 minutes to complete these before presenting

**Watching and Responding to *All in the Family***

**Video Notes on *All in the Family* Episode #8 “Lionel Moves into the Neighborhood” 3/2/1971**

Use the chart below to take notes on instances where you see racism being expressed and instances where you see humor or comedy. Afterwards we will discuss these moments and the differences between racism and comedy.

<b>Racism</b>	<b>Comedy or Humor</b>

1. What is your reaction to this show? Have you ever watched “All in the Family” before?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Compare how this episode and *A Raisin in the Sun* deal with the same issues. What differences and similarities do you see?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are some advantages that comedy has for dealing with serious issues like racism? What are some disadvantages?

## Literary Analysis Criteria Sheet

Assignment: Choose one of the themes from the American Experience: the immigrant experience, money and morality, race and social justice, and cultural identity in America. Write an analytical essay examining how that theme is developed through the experiences of one of the primary characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Use specific and relevant evidence from both the text and the historical context to support your interpretation.

**ATTACH THIS SHEET TO YOUR ESSAY. MAKE SURE YO HAVE USED THIS CHECKLIST TO REVISE YOUR ESSAY.**

### Criteria:

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. **Thesis statement:** Stated or implied. Use the unit's essential questions to help you formulate your ideas.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. **Introduction:**

What kind of introduction did you use?

Your thesis statement is integrated into your introduction. This is the BEST possible introduction for your essay.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. **Evidence: On your draft, mark your evidence with a colored pencil or highlighter.**

You have used *A Raisin in the Sun* and appropriate historical context sources. You have used quotations that support your thesis.

Quotations are introduced and analyzed.

You have cited your sources.

Embedded quotations?

Blocked quotations?

Paraphrasing of text?

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. **Conclusion:**

What kind of conclusion did you use? Summary

Circle back to the beginning possible solution

Restate and emphasize thesis Further questions to think about

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. **Strong Writing:** Active Verbs

Lean Language

Sentence Variety

Word Choice!

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. **Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling checked and corrected.**

**Standards: 11.13.2, 5 – Writing Expository Texts**

**Objectives:** Students will understand the elements of a good thesis and complete three or four possible thesis ideas for their own papers. They will be able to generate thesis ideas that connect specific characters with key ideas or motifs. Students will practice recognizing and developing focused clear thesis statements with the understanding that these are the foundation to a strong essay. At the end of the lesson, there will be several possible theses for students to use.

**Materials:** Individual copies of *A Raisin in the Sun*, access to completed Connecting Character to Theme posters, journals, retrieval charts, and Thesis Feedback handout.

**Time:** 1 hour

**Activities:**

- 1) Explain that a good thesis statement is essential for writing a good essay because:
  - It provides a simple and concise *embedded question or clear idea* in *one sentence* that will then be answered or addressed concisely with proof throughout the essay.
  - It is *arguable*
  - It forces the writer to think *before* writing the essay exactly what the essay will include and seek to prove.
  - It allows the writing of topic sentences that fully respond to and explain the thesis.
- 2) Explain the parts of a good (at least for this type of essay) thesis statement include in One or two sentences:
  - The author's name
  - The title of the work in italics or underlined
  - A simple, yet meaningful, statement about the connection between a major character and one aspect of the American Experience as evidenced by the play. You must be able to have a good answer to the question about the thesis, "So What?"
- 3) Provide examples of thesis statements and explain why they are good or bad.
  - **Bad:** In Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha wants to be a doctor, but her brother wants her to be a nurse. (This is a fact easily found in the play and doesn't clearly connect Beneatha with any of the big ideas)
  - **Good:** In Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha is the perfect example of a character who struggles against racism and sexism as she attempts to fulfill her ambitions. (This is a well-written thesis statement because it connects Beneatha with idea of race and social justice, one of the parts of the American Experience.)
  - **Bad:** In Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Walter is obsessed with money. (This is broad, general, and overly obvious; it does not lead to a bigger idea or an answer of the "so what" question.)
  - **Good:** In Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Walter's obsession with money often causes him to act unkindly to those he loves. (This gives you a chance to show numerous relationships while addressing the impact of money on morality, one of the aspects of the American Experience.)

- 4) After the discussion of good and bad theses, instruct students to write on the handout three or four thesis statements that address a connection between a character and an aspect of the American Experience in *A Raisin in the Sun*, using the above elements of a good thesis statement.
- 5) Divide students into groups of four students to peer edit. For each thesis statement, the following questions should be addressed to:
  - Does the thesis statement include the necessary three elements?
  - Does the thesis statement suggest a theory about a connection between a character and some aspect of the American Experience?
  - How could you improve the thesis statement?
  - So what? Why is the thesis important?
- 6) Ask each group to choose their two or three “best” thesis statements, copy them so they are clearly legible, and post them for others to see and share.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Thesis Feedback Handout

Each thesis should:

- Include the necessary three elements
- Suggest a theory about a connection between a character and some aspect of the American Experience

Peers:

- How could this writer improve the thesis statement?
- Does it address the “So What” question? Why is the thesis important?

Thesis \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Response \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thesis \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Response \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Craft Lesson: Thesis Statements for Literary Analysis

### Objective:

- Students will choose one of the themes from the American Experience: the immigrant experience, money and morality, race and social justice, and cultural identity in America. Write an analytical essay examining how that theme is developed through the experiences of one of the primary characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Use specific and relevant evidence from both the text and the historical context to support your interpretation.
- PPS standard 11.12.1 (explore a topic and develop a thesis)

### Materials:

- Overhead or flip chart for web
- Students should have their Evidence Retrieval charts
- Journals or paper
- Literary Analysis Criteria Sheet

**Time:** 45-50 minutes

### Procedure:

1. Explain that students will be writing a literary analysis in which they will analyzing how one of the themes from the American Experience is developed through the experiences of one of the primary characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*.
2. Hand out Literary Analysis Criteria Sheet (teacher note: this is the same criteria sheet students will use to color-mark their essays in the revision phase)
3. Model the construction of a potential thesis using a web. At the center of the web, write "barriers." Branching off of the center, brainstorm types of barriers: race, gender, historical, parental, socioeconomic, etc. Branching off of each type, brainstorm examples from *Fences* and the other texts that exemplify each type.
4. Using the essential questions of the unit (What are the roles/effects of barriers in our lives and in society? How do barriers change or remain the same over time? How do people change as a result of confronting barriers?), construct a working thesis around one of the types of barriers.
5. Give students five minutes to write a sample thesis.
6. Have students share examples.
7. Discuss what is working in each statement.
8. Have students continue to work on thesis statements. By the next class, all students need to have a working thesis, so if they don't finish in class, they will need to create a thesis for homework.



## **Craft Lesson: Writing the Introduction**

**Standards:** 11.12.2 (Organization) 11.13.2 (Expository Writing)

**Objective:** To teach students to write an effective introduction to the American Experience in Literature essay

**Materials:** Essays, copies of *A Raisin in the Sun*, copies of handouts on introductions

**Time:** Throughout the essay writing process

**Activity:** Read the following with your class, especially the examples. Have students divide into groups in which they read and critique each others' introductions and experiment with rewriting them according to the given examples.

### **Writing the Introduction**

The purpose of writing a good introduction to your essay is to grab your reader's attention and to begin to layout what you have to say about an aspect of the American Experience as it is developed through your character in an organized, succinct—and above all, engaging—manner.

How will you introduce your character and his/her aspirations and ambitions to your reader?

How will you introduce the role or theme of the American Experience and its relationship to your character?

How will you maximize the chances of your reader's acceptance of your analysis of your character with your introduction?

If you're writing an expository essay, your introduction should have within it, in microcosm, what you'll be explaining to your reader about your character at greater length, using supportive evidence, in the body of your essay.

One way to write an introduction is to open or close your introductory paragraph with your thesis statement. In the following examples the thesis statement is highlighted.

Example #1: Opening with thesis statement

**In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha is the perfect example of a character who struggles against racism and sexism as she attempts to fulfill her ambitions.** When this play was written (1959), American society was on the brink of major cultural and historical upheavals as the civil rights and women's movements began to gain momentum. African Americans began fighting for civil rights and women began questioning their roles as second-class citizens. In many ways, the civil rights and women's movements exposed how the so-called "American Dream" was not open to all people equally. Stereotypes about what African Americans and women were capable of often kept Blacks and women from pursuing and achieving their ambitions to rise above being menial servants or housekeepers.

Example #2: Closing with thesis statement

When *A Raisin in the Sun* was written (1959), American society was on the brink of major cultural and historical upheavals as the civil rights and women's movements began to gain momentum. African Americans began fighting for civil rights and women began questioning their roles as second-class citizens. In many ways, the civil rights and women's movements exposed how the so-called "American Dream" was not open to all people equally. Stereotypes about what African Americans and women were capable of often kept Blacks and women from pursuing and achieving their ambitions to rise above being menial servants or housekeepers. **In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha is the perfect example of a character who struggles against racism and sexism as she attempts to fulfill her ambitions.**

Another way to introduce what you have to say is to ask your reader one or more provocative questions about your character, perhaps relating him/her to someone the reader knows or has known.

Example #3: Provocative lead-in question(s)

Have you ever known someone who goes after whatever they want? Is this person someone who doesn't care what society says is appropriate or acceptable for them to be or do? Sometimes stereotypes about what certain races or genders are capable of can limit what people attempt to achieve. However, other times, stereotypes can be challenged. **In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha is the perfect example of a character who struggles against racism and sexism as she attempts to fulfill her ambitions.**

Finally, here are some other ways to begin your essay:

- Lead off with a quotation from the play or from an authority which leads into your thesis statement. "In his Introduction to *A Raisin in the Sun*, Robert Nemiroff (Lorraine Hansberry's husband) says, "the play presaged the revolution in black and women's consciousness."
- Make a provocative statement: "It is often the role of young people to question authority and the status quo."
- Begin with a metaphor: "Imagine a well cared-for plant that has been nurtured and loved, but is actually being threatened from blossoming because of weeds and worms that are eating away at its roots. Beneatha's ambitions for the future are similar to this threatened plant"
- Begin with an anecdote: "For years my sister has refused to conform to what my parents and the rest of society think she should be and do..."

## Embedding and Analyzing Quotes in a Literary Analysis Essay

### Objectives:

- Students will practice correct citation of textual passages in a literary analysis essay (11.13.4)
- Students will develop support for their literary analysis essay (11.9.3, 11.13.5)
- Students will write body paragraphs for a literary analysis essay (11.13 .5)
- Students will analyze evidence, in writing, for a literary analysis essay (11.10.1, 11.10.8,11.10.11,11.13.5)

### Materials:

- "Quoting Textual Passages in a Literary Essay" handout for students
- "Quoting Textual Passages in a Literary Essay" overhead transparency
- Student quick-writes on *A Raisin in the Sun* (from previous lessons)
- Students' introductions/rough drafts of literary analysis essays
- Students' *A Raisin in the Sun* Evidence Retrieval Charts
- *A Raisin in the Sun* text

**Time:** 1 day (based on 45 - 50 minute periods)

### Procedures:

#### Pre-Writing

1. Students will take out their introductions (or rough drafts) for their literary analysis essays.
2. Pass out "Quoting Textual Passages in a Literary Essay" handout to students.
3. Using the overhead transparency, guide students through the three main ways to cite textual passages in a literary essay: Embedding, Blocking, and Paraphrasing.
  - a. Highlight the differences in placement of parenthetical citations.
  - b. Emphasize when to use each type of citation.
  - c. Explain the formatting of each type of citation.
4. Discuss the importance of actually analyzing a cited passage, rather than "dropping" it in the essay without further explanation or analysis.
5. Using the blank lines in the first box (the embedded quote example), ask students to "complete" the paragraph by adding some analysis of the cited passage, as well as a conclusion. Students should do this on their own.
6. Ask students to popcorn-share their "analysis and conclusion" of the paragraph, and as a class, decide on the "best" sample. Write that sample in the lines available in the second box (the block quote example).
7. If students are drawing from a variety of sources for historical context (videos, articles, etc) for their literary analysis, teacher should be prepared to teach students how properly to cite these different sources.

### Writing

8. Tell students that they are now going to work on a body paragraph for their essay.
9. Students should now look at their own introductions/rough drafts, and think about the type of textual evidence they need to support their ideas/arguments.
10. Point students to their Evidence Retrieval Charts and the text to locate the textual passage they intend to use. Encourage them to find the "best" support for or illustration of their ideas, not just any old passage that they can find.
11. Ask students to write (or revise, if they have a pre-existing one) a body paragraph so that it includes correctly quoted textual passages, as well as analysis of the passage. Ask students to refer to the handout (Quoting Textual Passages in a Literary Essay).
12. When students are finished writing one paragraph, have them pair-share. Students should be double-checking each other's paragraphs for:
  - a. Correctly quoted passages
  - b. Analysis of passage
  - c. How well does the textual passage illustrate/support the ideas in the paragraph?
13. After pair sharing, debrief the difficulties encountered and any questions students may have about embedding and analyzing quotes.
14. Assign as class work or homework: Students will finish writing the "body" of their essay, complete with correctly quoted textual passages and analysis of the passages.

# Quoting Textual Passages in a Literary Essay

**Directions:** For each example paragraph, analyze each quote and then write a concluding sentence.

1. **EMBEDDED QUOTES:** Introduce the passage with a sentence or a phrase and blend it into your own writing so that it flows smoothly together and makes sense.

Hansberry tackles the issue of how stereotypes can sometimes interfere with a person's ambitions through the sibling rivalry between Beneatha and Walter. Although Beneatha would like to go to medical school, many people at the time believed that women couldn't or shouldn't pursue careers as doctors. Walter's chauvinistic expectations about what women can or ought to achieve is clear at the beginning of the play when he tells Beneatha "to go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet" (38).

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Note: The quoted material is integrated into the sentence. The citation (page number) comes after the quoted material but immediately **BEFORE** the period.

2. **BLOCK QUOTES:** For long passages (more than 4 typed lines), special rules apply. Introduce the quote with a sentence and use a colon as your mark of punctuation before the passage. Indent about ten spaces or one inch (TAB twice) and write the passage out to the right margin. Maintain double spacing in Block Quotes. The citation (page number) goes **AFTER** the final punctuation.

The role of the American Dream is explored through the character of Mama, who has always wanted to own her own home. Hansberry shows how this dream of owning a home is a powerful one that many people have. Not achieving the American Dream of owning a home can cause regret and a crushed spirit. Mama shows this crushing disappointment when she tells Ruth about how she and Big Walter once planned on buying a home:

We as going to set away, little by little, don't you know, and buy a little place out in Morgan Park. We had even picked out the house. *(Chuckling a little)* Looks right dumpy today. But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had 'bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back—*(she waits and stops smiling)* And didn't none of it happen. *(Dropping her hands in a futile gesture)* (44-45)

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3. **PARAPHRASED CITATIONS:** This type of citation is used if you just tell what the writer said in your own words.

Hansberry tackles the issue of how stereotypes can sometimes interfere with a person's ambitions through the sibling rivalry between Beneatha and Walter. Although Beneatha would like to go to medical school, many people at the time believed that women couldn't or shouldn't pursue careers as doctors. Walter's chauvinistic expectations about what women can or ought to achieve is clear at the beginning of the play when he tells Beneatha that she should become a nurse or get married instead of becoming a doctor (38). Walter's attitude reflects the sexism that was common in 1959 when this play was first produced. Hansberry is clearly trying to suggest that women have the same dreams and aspirations that men have, but society's attitudes can keep women from pursuing these dreams.

#### 4. QUOTING PASSAGES IN A PLAY (DRAMA)

- When quoting dialogue between two characters in a play:
- Indent the beginning of the quotation 10 spaces (or indent 2 times)
- Begin each part of the dialogue with the character's name followed by a period. Indent all following lines in that character's speech an additional quarter of an inch (or 3 spaces)
- When the dialogue switches to a new character, repeat the pattern as listed earlier.

Throughout the play, Walter and Beneatha conflict over Mama's insurance money. Walter's dream of owning a liquor store clashes with Beneatha's dream of going to medical school. Both of their dreams depend on whether or not Mama will give them any of her insurance money or not. They argue over who deserves the money the most:

Walter. Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round with sick people—then go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet...

Beneatha. Well—you finally got it said...It took you three years but you finally got it said. Walter give up; leave me alone—it's Mama's money.

Walter. *He was my father, too!*

Beneatha. So what? He was mine too—and Travis' grandfather—but the insurance money belongs to Mama. Picking on me is not going to make her give it to you to invest in any liquor stores—(*Underneath, dropping into a chair*)—and I for one say, God bless Mama for that! (38)

**In this conversation, it is obvious that Walter feels resentful towards Beneatha for her (in his mind) outrageous ambitions. He feels like his dream of owning a liquor store should be more important than her dream of becoming a doctor. At the same time, Beneatha undermines Walter's ambitions when she sides with Mama and her view that selling liquor is immoral.**

## **Craft Lesson: Using Transitions Part One**

**Standard:** 11.12.2 Provide transitions to link paragraphs

**Objective:** Teach students to use transitions effectively throughout their essays.

**Materials:** As many sets as you need of five paragraphs cut out from different Magazine articles, glue, and butcher paper. Also, it would be good to include a handout of transitions (there is a good one in *Write ForCollege* and *Writer's Inc.*).

**Time:** 1-2 class periods.

### **Activity:**

(Tell your students)

Think of writing an essay as though you are guiding the reader across a river of your thoughts. In order to make sure your reader does not fall in, you need to lay down stones upon which they can walk. These stones are called transitions. Transitions are the words and phrases that connect your ideas and paragraphs. Without them, your reader might drown. More specifically, good writers use transitions when they are showing time or place, giving examples, clarifying, summarizing, adding information, showing cause and effect, and comparing or contrasting. As a result, transitions should show up throughout an essay.

However, the following assignment is designed to help you use transitions to move from one paragraph to another. For this assignment, you will be given five paragraphs from different magazine articles. You need to do two things with these paragraphs.

1. Make a list of the transitions you see in these paragraphs and write a brief explanation of the specific purpose of each transition.
2. On a piece of butcher paper, glue the paragraphs in any order you choose. Be sure to leave space in between each paragraph. In this space, write a sentence to end each paragraph and another to begin the next. In these sentences, use transitions to make the paragraphs flow smoothly from one to the next.

We will share the list of transitions and read the new articles out loud.

## Craft Lesson: Using Transitions Part Two

**Objective:** Help students revise their essays for transitions.

**Standard:** 11.12.2 Provide transitions to link paragraphs

**Materials:** Students need to bring in a copy of their essay cut up paragraph by paragraph. Also, you need to make copies of the sample essay titled, "From Rat's to Riches: Travis' Lessons in Life" and cut it up by paragraphs.

**Time:** One class period

**Activity:**

1. Each student should receive a copy of the sample essay cut up by paragraphs.
2. Have them shuffle the paragraphs so they are out of order.
3. Reading only the first and last sentence of each paragraph put the essay back in its original order.
4. Go over the order and discuss the excellent use of transitions in the sample essay.
5. Next, students should take out their own essays cut up by paragraph. Students shuffle their paragraphs and trade them with a partner. Without getting help, they should try to put their partner's essay in its original order by only reading the first and last sentence of each paragraph.
6. If there are any difficulties, students should tell their partner where they had trouble. What paragraphs didn't seem to connect? Chances are good that these are the paragraphs that need better transitions.
7. Students should trade with another partner and repeat.

When finished, have students read some of the better transitions to the class



### **Sample essay for a Raisin in the Sun: Rats to Riches: Travis' Lessons in Life**

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” As Americans, we are asked at a young age this very question time and time again. You can guess that not many people say, “A bus driver”, but in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, that is exactly how Travis Younger responds. Like many young men, he wants to be like his dad when he too becomes an adult. It’s all part of the American experience: work hard, put in your time, pay your dues and you can be anything you want to be. But Travis is a child, and he learns an important lesson in *A Raisin in the Sun*: Everyone has dreams, but there are many factors in our daily life that will determine which dreams will be realized, and which will be deferred.

The limitations of dreams are shown at the outset of the play where Hansberry is specific in her description of the apartment. We learn that “The Younger living room would be a comfortable and well-ordered room if it were not for a number of indestructible contradictions to this state of being” (23). These contradictions become evident in Travis’ life: he is a young school boy, and like any young person is beginning to establish hopes and aspirations for himself based on his environment and the world to which he is exposed. But that world is tenuous. There is an active stagnancy around him—a sense of “don’t give up, but don’t be too optimistic.” Coupled with this is the fact that he is not alone in having needs; there are many others with needs of their own. The first thing said to him, by his mother, is “Come on now, boy, it’s seven thirty! I say hurry up, Travis! You ain’t the only person in the world go to use a bathroom!” (25). It is the first of many reminders for him that you must keep the needs of others in mind when you work to meet your own needs.

Travis’ own needs are modest, but still seem to be too much for the family to accommodate. Travis reminds his mother, Ruth, that he needs to bring fifty cents to school. Ruth in turn reminds him they don’t have the fifty cents. This is a source of tension throughout the play; the Youngers have more needs than they have resources. Travis is willing to work for the money at a local grocery store, but the working world is a place Ruth is not yet ready for Travis to enter. Instead, his father, Walter, gives him the fifty cents, as he wants to show Travis that the man of the family is a provider.

Travis' family is well aware of the lessons he is passively being taught by example. As Walter says in Act 1, "I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room—and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live" (34). This disconnect between black families in mid-century America and financial security reminds us of the play's historical context-- "the good old days" before the civil war when the black people were passive and "happy". After the civil war blacks were seen as aggressive, unkempt, even animal-like. It was the beginning of warping the American fabric to show that there were clear rules for how blacks would live and be perceived, and how whites were entitled to live. The stereotype was reinforced by blacks allegedly taking jobs from whites, and upsetting the status quo. The fears of many whites worked to keep blacks in the same subservient place they had always been, perpetuating an overt and casual racism.

Laws and customs separate the Youngers not only from the world of man, but seemingly from the natural world as well. Travis has a need to interact with nature, but his exposure to nature is skewed at best. He longs to play downstairs when he finishes his chores and chastises Beneatha's spraying of insecticide. "Leave them cockroaches alone, they ain't bothering you none!" (55). When speaking of the roach spray, Mama says "Well, little boys' hides ain't as tough as Southside roaches" (55). There's more wisdom in this statement than she realizes, as Travis will learn. Later, Ruth is appalled that Travis was playing with a rat in the streets:

"Mama, you should of seen the rat... Big as a cat, honest! Gaalee, that rat was really cuttin' and Bubber caught him with his heel and the gamitory, Mr. Barnett, got him with a stick—and then they got him in a corner and – BAM, BAM, BAM!—and he was still jumping around and bleeding like everything too—there's rat blood all over the street—" (59).

Like any child, Travis dreams of playing with friends but in Travis' world this means hitting rats in the street with a stick. So much for respecting life.

Travis, like the other Youngers, believes the money from the insurance check will help his family achieve their dreams. But Mama helps Travis understand the price of money. Travis is surprised that Mama doesn't appear to want to be rich. All around him has been a constant reminder that a perfectly valid dream for yourself is to have a lot of money. But he does not fully realize that the \$10,000 check that has been the center of attention for all the play's characters came about because of his grandfather's death and therefore the newfound abundance is bittersweet. It's yet another lesson that is slowly making itself known: everything has a price. When Mama says that she has put some of her money toward a house, he responds that he has always wanted to live in a house. She says to Travis, "Now when you say your prayers tonight, you thank God and your grandfather—'cause it was him who give you the house—in his way" (91). Everything has a price.

Through the example of Walter, it is now time for Travis to start to crystallize his own dreams. His father is a passionate man, himself always dreaming of a better life. But this has lead Walter to drinking at times, as life does not always allow us to realize our dreams. Now, with the money and Mama's trust, Walter feels ready to become the man of the family and help them all achieve their dreams. Travis mistakes his father's optimism for being drunk at first, but through their late-night conversation, Travis says initially that his dream is to be a bus driver. No doubt, when looking at the historical context of the play, this is a job that Travis sees is an option for a black man to aspire toward. But Walter tells Travis that the dream should be bigger. Perhaps this is the first time that Travis has heard from his father that you don't have to put off all of your dreams—some dreams, with hard work, can be attained. Even if you're a black man in Chicago in the middle of the century. Travis later admits that he dreams of being like his dad. And Travis does, like so many young men, want to be like his father. And his father perhaps realizes that the model he has set forth thus far, a man with little power who drinks too much and talks of dreams but takes no action, just perpetuates this history of his people.

We learn by example. Just as Walter has learned from his father's example, Travis learns from Walter. Whether it is Travis formulating dreams based on his father's life, or giving his grandmother a hat as a gift because it's "Like the ladies always have on in the magazines when they work in their gardens" (124), these are models to be followed in Travis' eye—and examples become some of the factors that will determine our dreams. Travis dreams of being like his father. When the family believes that Walter intends to accept Lindner's offer to buy them out of the house, Ruth tells Travis to go downstairs. Mama, however, tells Travis to stay, so that Walter can make Travis understand what Walter is doing; this is an example of where their five generations have come to—it is a moment in history that will influence yet the next moment. Just as Walter's father almost beat a man to death once because this man called him "a bad name or something" (147), there are certain things a man must do to keep his pride, and how he will be viewed in his son's eyes. And Walter calls Travis over to his side as he says, "This is my son, and he makes the sixth generation our family in this country. And we have all thought about your offer...And we have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it for us brick by brick" (148).

Work hard, put in your time, pay your dues and you can be anything you want to be. Travis has learned by example that this is still an option for him. Many things in his life will appear as opportunities to defer his dreams: lack of money, social mores, or even betrayal by friends. Perhaps he will become a bus driver—there's no shame in that. But if he does, he will do so because it was a choice he made for himself, not because society decided that was the best option for him.

### Expository Revision

Read over the rough draft. Using a different color for each item, underline or highlight the essay for these items. Use the table below to make sure your essay contains all of the requirements.

Element	Color	Do these items match up with the thesis statement and the focus of the essay? Circle one
Thesis Statement		Not applicable
Author's name and Book Title		Not applicable
Intro with general summary of topics/issues/texts related to the thesis		Yes      No
Topic Sentences for Body Paragraphs		Yes      No
Examples from the book (quoted properly)		Yes      No
Analysis of Examples- 1-3 sentences explaining how the example illustrates the point being argued in the body paragraph.		Yes      No
Transitions between paragraphs that help move the reader through the main ideas of the paper.		Yes      No
A Conclusion paragraph that summarizes the main ideas of the paper ... and makes a point in the last sentence.		Yes      No

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2. When you are done with #1, make a list of the elements missing from your essay. Begin adding those missing elements in. You may use Post-Its for this step, or write directly on the rough draft.

## Additional Resources for Teaching

The following videos are available through the Portland Public Schools multi-media library. You may find them helpful in teaching this play:

- Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement (VHS)
- The Dream Keepers (VHS)
- A Raisin in the Sun (DVD)
- To Be Young, Gifted and Black (VHS)
- Ethnic Notions (VHS)
- A Walk Through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Second American Revolution I (VHS)
- Eyes on the Prize

Four other titles we like, but you would have to Google to possibly find a copy, as we have our own personal copies, are:

- Portraits of Prejudice
- Africans in America
- 4 Little Girls (Spike Lee)
- Local Color

A helpful website for lesson plans and other links for historical context can be found below:

[http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=449](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=449)

Naturally you can supplement with media you find will support the way you teach this play and not stick to just this list.