

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 1



Key Paragraph

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. Its furnishings are typical and undistinguished and their primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years – and they are tired. Still, we can see that at some time, a time probably no longer remembered by the family (except perhaps for MAMA), the furnishings of this room were actually selected with care and love and even hope – and brought to this apartment and arranged with taste and pride (23.)

Writing Task

In the first paragraph of Act I, Scene One, Hansberry's setting becomes a character in itself. The apartment that houses the Younger family reflects the state of their lives, and exemplifies the hopelessness that some of the characters have started to feel about life.

How does a home reflect a family? What can we learn about a person by examining where he or she lives?

In a paragraph respond to this statement: “The Youngers are a happy, middle-class family; all members of the family get along with one-another.” In your response, argue in favor of your personal opinion, while keeping in mind that we haven't seen two of the main characters, MAMA and BENEATHA. What can we discern from the characters' environment before we meet them?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 2



Key Passage

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 – its 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 – (*Under breath, dropping into a chair*) – and I for one say, God bless Mama for that! (38.)

Writing Task

Walter and Beneatha disagree about how their father's life insurance money should be spent. Walter thinks his mother should invest in a liquor store. Beneatha says that her mother should spend it however she wants, but hopes that her mother will spend some of it on her medical education. Walter thinks that kind of education is wasted on a woman.

Pretend you are *either* Walter or Beneatha. Write a short letter that provides an argument as to why your mother should help you with your plan. Be sure to outline your plan, and explain how your idea will benefit everyone in the family. Appeal to Mama's love for her family and provide concrete reasons to show her why your idea is the best. Use the Internet and various other resources to research the success, pros, and cons of the two options, and use that information to support your argument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 3



Key Paragraph

MAMA I ain't rightly decided. (*Thinking. She speaks now with emphasis*) Some of it got to be put away for Beneatha and her schoolin' – and ain't nothing going to touch that part of it. Nothing. (*She waits several seconds, trying to make up her mind about something, and looks at RUTH a little tentatively before going on*) Been thinking that we maybe could meet the notes on a little old two-story somewhere, with a yard where Travis could play in the summertime, if we use part of the insurance for a down payment and everybody kind of pitch in . I could maybe take on a little day work again, few days a week –

Writing Task

For the first time, Mama shares her plan for the ten thousand dollars she is about to receive. She plans to save for Beneatha's education, and put the rest toward buying a home for the family.

Pretend you are Mama. Write an argumentative note to Walter that claims that by supporting Beneatha and working towards a family home, your plan for the money is the best, and most just use of the inheritance. Tell your son that your plan is better than his, and will be best for the family. Use logic or commonly accepted belief to back up your assertions.

Also, research the idea of the common good by using Internet or authoritative print sources and use this concept in your argument. How will a home and a doctor in the family help the Younger family?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 4



Key Paragraph

BENEATHA Get over it? What are you talking about, Ruth? Listen, I'm going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet – if I ever get married.

MAMA *and* RUTH *If!*

MAMA Now, Bennie –

BENEATHA Oh, I probably will... but first I'm going to be a doctor, and George, for one, still thinks that's pretty funny. I couldn't be bothered with that. I am going to be a doctor and everybody around here better understand that! (50.)

Writing Task

This play, set sometime between the end of WWII and 1958, was written in a time when most middle-class women didn't pursue professional careers. Both Mama and Ruth work, but they are still shocked by the idea that twenty-year-old Beneatha is choosing to focus on a professional goal rather than marriage and a family.

As Beneatha, write a paragraph arguing in defense of your decision to pursue a career as a doctor. Why, as a woman do you have the right to be a doctor? Why do you want to do it? Why is it more important to you than being a wife or mother? Draw on research (conducted through reliable internet and/or authoritative print sources) concerning the gender norms of the time and explain how you plan to challenge them. Upload your finished product to an online forum (blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 5



Key Paragraph

BENEATHA Did you plan it, Ruth?

RUTH Mind your own business.

BENEATHA It is my business – where is he going to live, on the roof? (*There is silence following the remark as the three women react to the sense of it*)
Gee – I didn't mean that, Ruth, honest. Gee, I don't feel like that at all. I – I think it is wonderful.

Writing Task

When Ruth announces she is pregnant, the three women react in different ways. Mama sees a new life as a blessing, and congratulates her. Beneatha is more practical, and worried about how the family is going to house yet another person. Ruth is clearly upset, and the audience isn't sure how she feels about the news.

Imagine you are Ruth. **In a diary entry, write a few paragraphs arguing why you should/should not keep the baby.** Take a definite stance regarding how you feel about the pregnancy. In your entry, provide a counter-argument to your claim. Consider the financial costs and spatial obstacles involved. Conversely, how could a baby bring renewed life and joy to the Younger family?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 6



Key Paragraph

WALTER (*Intently, almost quietly, between the teeth, glaring at the boy*) And you – ain't you bitter, man? Ain't you just about had it yet? Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? You happy? – You contented son-of-a-bitch – you happy? You got it made? Bitter? Man, I'm a volcano. Bitter? Here I am a giant – surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what it is the giant is talking about (85.)

Writing Task

Walter is a bitter, angry man. Instead of being happy with what he has, he obsesses over what he wants and cannot have. When his mother refuses to give him money for a liquor store, he goes out and gets drunk. He won't talk about his wife's pregnancy, or take any responsibility with making a decision about the baby. He lashes out at everyone around him, even Beneatha's date.

Write a typed, argumentative letter to Walter, claiming that his behavior must change in order for it to promote justice in the Younger home. Taking a stance on the situation and construct a plan he can follow in order to act justly. Why should he follow your advice? What would you advise Walter to do? Provide reasons you believe your plan is the most effective option. Remember: Justice Requires Restraint. How can Walter treat his wife, his family, and himself with Justice in this situation? What would be the best course for the family to pursue at this time?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 7



Key Paragraph

MAMA Four o six Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park.

RUTH Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain't no colored people living in Clybourne Park.

MAMA (*Almost idiotically*) Well, I guess there's gonna be some now.

WALTER (*Bitterly*) So that's the peace and comfort you went out and bought for us today!

MAMA (*Raising her eyes to meet his finally*) Son – I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family.

RUTH (*Trying to recover from the shock*) Well – well – 'course I ain't one never been 'fraid of no crackers, mind you – but – well, wasn't there no other houses nowhere?

MAMA Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could.

Writing Task

Ruth and Walter are shocked and concerned that the house Mama bought is in a white neighborhood, but Mama seems content: she bought it because it is the nicest house she could afford. What might the repercussions of her choice be?

Pretend you are Mama. Write a word-processed letter to the citizens of Clybourne Park, arguing that your family will be a positive influence in the neighborhood. What can you do to make sure you are treated with justice? How can you combat the deeply entrenched social, economic and racial prejudices that existed at the time the play was written? Demographic and historical research from authoritative print and reliable Internet sources may be appropriate to further your argument. Try to maintain a formal tone in your letter, and when you're done, upload your letter to an online forum (i.e. Google docs, blog, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 8



Key Paragraph

JOHNSON Ain't it something how bad these here white folks is getting here in Chicago! Lord, getting so you think you right down in Mississippi! (*With a tremendous and rather insincere sense of melodrama*) 'Course I thinks it's wonderful how our folks keeps on pushing out. You hear some of these Negroes 'round here talking 'bout how they don't go where they ain't wanted and all that – but not me, honey! (*This is a lie*) Wilhelmina Othella Johnson goes anywhere, any time she feels like it! (*With head movement from emphasis*) Yes I do! Why if we left it up to these here crackers, the poor niggers wouldn't have nothing – (*She clasps her hand over her mouth*) Oh, I always forgets you don't 'low that word in your house (101.)

Writing Task

Mrs. Johnson, too insecure to share her real thoughts, couches her opinion by repeating the words of others. She disapproves of the Youngers' plan to move to Clybourne Park, but doesn't want to tell them. Instead, she gossips about what people in the neighborhood are saying behind their backs. Mama and Ruth treat her with politeness, though they'd obviously like to say more.

Pretend you are Mama. Write a 3-paragraph argumentative note to Mrs. Johnson. In one paragraph, tell her what you really think of her manners. Remember the incident with the cleaning powder, how felt when she used bad language in your house, and her opinion that you shouldn't try to move to Clybourne Park. In a second paragraph present a counterargument in which you address some of the cons associated with moving. In a third paragraph, **argue against her plea for your family to stay instead of moving.** Why do you have a right to move? What opportunities could you – and your family - gain from having your own house? Use language that Mama would use – and remember, she is a proud and noble lady.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 9



Key Paragraph

MAMA Listen to me, now. I say I been wrong, son. That I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you. *(She turns off the radio)*

Walter – *(She stops and he looks up slowly at her and she meets his eyes pleadingly)* What you ain't never understood is that I ain't got nothing, don't own nothing, ain't never really wanted nothing that wasn't for you. There ain't nothing as precious to me... There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, nothing else – if it means – if it means it's going to destroy my boy. *(She takes an envelope out of her handbag and puts it in front of him and he watches her without speaking or moving)* I paid the man thirty-five hundred dollars down on the house. That leaves sixty-five hundred dollars. Monday morning I want you to take this money and take three thousand dollars and put it in a savings account for Beneatha's medical schooling. The rest you put in a checking account – with your name on it. And from now on any penny that comes out if it or that go in it is for you to look after. For you to decide. *(She drops her hands a little helplessly)* It ain't much, but it's all I got in the world and I'm putting it in your hands. I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be (106-7.)

Writing Task

Walter finally has what he wants – some of Mama's money to spend as he sees fit. His dream is to open a liquor store.

Write a paragraph arguing either in favor of or in opposition against Walter's plan. Do you think that opening a liquor store is the best and most just use of the inheritance money? How would this choice impact the rest of the Younger family? If you were in Walter's shoes, what would you chose to do with the money?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 10



Key Paragraph

LINDNER Well – you see our community is made up of people who’ve worked hard as the dickens for years to build up that little community. They’re not rich and fancy people; just hard-working, honest people who don’t really have much but those little homes and a dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in. Now, I don’t say we are perfect and there is a lot wrong in some of the things they want. But you’ve got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of a common interest in the life of the community, when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn’t enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities (117-8.)

Writing Task

Mr. Lindner, in the paragraph above, describes what he believes is an ideal community. He believes that his community is good because people are hard-working, have dreams for their children, and have a common background. Oddly enough, this describes the Youngers. Like Mr. Lindner, the Youngers are hard working, have dreams for their children, and have a middle-class educational background; however, they still don’t fit into this particular picture of an ideal community.

What is your ideal community? **Type an argumentative paragraph that describes what your idea of an ideal community is, using a word processing program.** Why is it the perfect place to live? Who would live there? What would it look like? What community services would be available? Authoritative print and/or digital online sources may be used to research the idea of a ‘Utopia’. Try to incorporate the concept of a utopia to introduce your argument. Finally, publish your finished product in an online forum (i.e. blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 11



Key Paragraph

LINDNER (*Looking around at the hostile faces and reaching and assembling his hat and briefcase*) Well – I don't understand why you people are reacting this way. What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighborhood where you just aren't wanted, and where some elements – well – people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened.

WALTER Get out.

LINDNER (*Almost sadly regarding WALTER*) you just can't force people to change their hearts, son.

Writing Task

Mr. Lindner appears to truly believe that he is acting in the best interest of everyone, including the Youngers. He is concerned that some of his neighbors might lash out at the Youngers, and he doesn't want to see conflict in his community. He is sympathetic with Walter, and tries to give him advice, even though it is somewhat misguided.

Are Mr. Lindner's words - motivated by the suspicions of the residents of Clybourne Park - just or unjust? **Write an argumentative letter, claiming that Mr. Lindner is/is not acting with justice.** Do his words and actions visit 'uphold the rights of all?' Should he have refrained from visiting the Youngers with his offer? Publish your letter on an online forum (i.e. blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 12



Key Paragraph

MAMA I seen... him... night after night... come in... and look at that rug... and then look at me... the red showing in his eyes... the veins moving in his head... I seen him grow thin and old before he was forty... working and working and working like somebody's old horse... killing himself... and you – you give it all away in a day – *(She raises her arms to strike him again)*

Writing Task

In three pages, the Youngers go from jubilant to defeated. By giving his money to an untrustworthy friend, Walter has killed not only his dreams, but the dreams of his mother, wife, sister, and son. What should be the punishment for killing someone's dream?

In an argumentative letter, describe and justify a punishment for Walter. Why should Walter be punished? Should he be forgiven? Keep in mind that justice requires restraint. How could Walter's decisions and actions jeopardize the well being of the entire family? Is this just behavior? What should be the punishment for killing someone's dream?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 13



Key Paragraph

ASAGAI Then isn't there something wrong in a house – in a world – where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man? I never thought to see *you* like this, Alaiyo. You! Your brother made a mistake and you are grateful to him so that now you can give up the ailing human race on account of it! You talk about what good is struggle, what good is anything! Where are we all going and why are we bothering! (135.)

Writing Task

At least temporarily, Beneatha has given up on the human race. Her brother's selfish actions have made her lose faith that good things are possible. Now, she sees everyone around her as corrupt and dangerous, except for Asagai. Still, she is lost, and isn't sure what her future has in store for her after this devastating loss.

Write an argumentative paragraph taking an idealist stance about Beneatha's future. Although the situation is less than favorable, what are other feasible options Beneatha has? Remember: Justice Requires Restraint, not only in how we treat others, but in how we treat ourselves. How can Beneatha overcome this setback, and still help promote Justice in the world? Publish your paragraph using an online forum (blog, Google docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 14



Key Paragraph

MAMA Son – I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers – but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. (*Raising her eyes and looking at him*) We ain't never been that – dead inside.

Writing Task

After the loss of their savings, Mama decides not to move to the house, thinking they can no longer afford it. Walter calls Mr. Lindner to accept his deal. Even though she isn't planning to move to the house now, Mama is against the plan. In her mind, accepting the money is admitting that her family isn't good enough to live in Clybourne Park.

In this situation, who do you think is right? Should the Younger family accept the money? **Take a side and write an argumentative paragraph providing reasons why the Younger family should or should not take the money.** Remember: Justice Requires Restraint. Is it right to accept money not to move into Clybourne Park if you're not going to move there anyway? What implications are tied with taking the money? Do you agree with Mama that taking the money would mean the Youngers are 'dead inside?'

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Day 15



Key Passage

WALTER *(Really like a small boy, looking down at his shoes and then up at the man)* and – uh – well, my father, well, he was a laborer most of his life...

WALTER *(A beat; staring at him)* and my father – *(With sudden intensity)* my father almost *beat a man to death* once because this man called him a bad name or something, you know what I mean?...

WALTER *(A beat. The tension hangs; then Walter steps back from it)* Yeah. Well – what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of *pride*. I mean – we are very proud people. And that's my sister over there and she's going to be a doctor – and we are very proud – ...

WALTER What I am telling you is that we called you over here to tell you that we are very proud and that this – *(Signaling to TRAVIS)* Travis, come here. *(TRAVIS crosses and WALTER draws him before him facing the man)* This is my son, and he makes the sixth generation our family in this country. And we have all thought about your offer –

WALTER And we have decided to move into our house because my father – my father – he earned it for us brick by brick. *(MAMA has her eyes closed and is rocking back and forth as though she were in church, with her head nodding the Amen yes)* We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors. And that's *all* we got to say about that. *(He looks the man absolutely in the eyes)* We don't want your money. *(He turns and walks away)*

Writing Task

To the surprise of his family and Mr. Lindner, Walter refuses to accept the money from Mr. Lindner, and decides the family will move to Clybourne Park. He decides that his father's sacrifice and his family's pride are more important than his personal dreams. What happens to a dream deferred?

Read Langston Hugh's poem 'A Raisin in the Sun.' **Write a paragraph arguing either in favor of or opposition against this title for the play.** Are the Younger family's dreams withered like a 'raisin in the sun,' or do they live on? What do you think this family has gained from the events of this play? Cooperation?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

A Raisin in the Sun, Final Writing Task



As the Younger family embarks on a new, hopeful journey in their lives, they face huge obstacles. They are moving to Clybourne Park fully aware that the community does not welcome their presence. There is a distinct possibility that they will be met with violence and opposition. However, this move also marks a new start, filled with exciting opportunities for the family.

What do you think happens next? Using authoritative print or digital sources, research the racial and political tensions, as well as the economic and social movements underway at the time the play was written. Drawing on this information, and information provided in the text, **create a summary of an additional scene or epilogue of the play**. If the Younger family is faced with opposition, how do they plan to overcome it? How can their family be a beacon of justice in the new neighborhood? What does Beneatha decide to do? Is Ruth's baby born? How are Mama, Walter and the rest of the family coping with the new house and environment? Upload your complete scene summary to an online forum of your choice (blog, Google Docs, etc.). Present the link to your teacher and classmates so your work can be shared.