



## **Using Film and Literature to examine The Great black Migration: An Analysis of "A Raisin in the Sun" through poetic voices**

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### **Introduction**

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As an eighth grade teacher in the Chicago Public School system my main goal is to empower students academically through knowledge of historical issues and events. Examining conflicts and themes that arise from these events provides students with opportunities to make personal connections, to form a sense of identity and better understand the world around them. Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" sets the stage for this type of academic infusion to take place. Almost fifty years ago a young African American woman wrote the play "Raisin in the Sun" describing some of the conflicts faced by a family struggling to achieve the American Dream.

Have the Dreams of African American's dried up like a Raisin in the Sun? The poet Langston Hughes asks this very compelling question: "what happens to a dream deferred?" As a writer Lorraine Hansberry uses the plot of her play to explore the overarching theme of fulfilling one's dreams which reverberates in each of her characters. The character Walter Lee poses the question to mama: "why did you leave the South? Why did you move here to Chicago forty years ago?" Mama's response was, "I guess I came here to make a better life for me and my family."<sup>1</sup> Forty years prior to Lorraine Hansberry writing this poignant play, "Raisin in the Sun" (1959), the Great Black Migration of blacks moving from the south to northern cities such as Chicago looking for jobs, housing and quality education will be examined. Collectively, students will work to identify the goals and aspirations of African American families during the Great Black Migration. The Younger Family: Walter Lee, Mama, Ruth, Beneatha and Travis will be used as an instructional symbol of this hope and as a catalyst for this analytical journey and hopefully each destination will lead my students to uncovering their own dreams.

"Does a play or film reflect society's cultural, social or political views or visa-versa?" In this unit students will examine, identify, interpret, and constructively critique recurring themes throughout the play and film. As a Nationally Board Certified Teacher in the field of Middle Childhood Generalist, I have the richness of integrating curriculum across content areas. This current unit provides me with the opportunity to introduce film analysis in the classroom in a powerful and creative way.

However, in order for students to grasp the overarching theme—getting the "Big Idea"— particular analytical skills have to be acquired. Excerpts from the play and poetry will be used to emphasize various themes that will help students make real life connections. Before we are able to make connections and answer these

questions I feel it important to dig into the psychological mindset of the playwright as well as the social and political climate that literally set the stage for such a compelling drama. It is also imperative that you get a glimpse of life from my students' perspective so that you will better understand the significance of the format and structure of this unit.

The Plot for "Raisin in the Sun" originates in Lorraine Hansberry's backyard as a child growing up in the 1930s. Her father's personal quest to own property on Chicago's South Side was unfortunately in defiance of the "restrictive covenants" that confined blacks to the ghetto, and so her family moved into a hostile white neighborhood. Whites surrounded their house and as they cursed and spat; someone threw a huge chunk of concrete through their window which nearly struck Lorraine as an eight year old. Their family was eventually evicted by the Illinois courts. Hansberry vs. Lee was her father's response to this decision which was taken all the way to the Supreme Court. Although the Supreme Court outlawed the restricted covenant legislation, enforcement did not follow. Her father eventually gave up and emigrated to Mexico where he died in 1946.

Here we can pause to ask students how far are you willing to go to accomplish your dreams? Mr. Hansberry went all the way to the Supreme Court and we can infer that this case deferred his American Dream of home ownership. In the play Mama says, "Walter Lee, it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to him." Mr. Hansberry watched his dreams of walking on floors that belonged to him dry up like a raisin in the sun. In Act two: scene one Walter Lee asks George the question: "Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? I'm a volcano erupting in bitterness."

Today throughout the South Side of Chicago within the Englewood community where my students live, volcanoes erupt daily leaving debris of bitterness in their lives. They cannot see the stars gleaming and this short-sightedness echoes throughout inner cities across America. The vast majority of the students in my class and throughout the Englewood community of Chicago are inundated with negative images of black culture and life in general. Walking to school from single parent homes, students pass vacant lots where job opportunities were once vibrant. Many of the housing developments that tied family lineage have been demolished for condominiums and unaffordable upscale housing. The West African Proverb says "It takes a village to raise a child"; well, the village has been replaced with camera surveillances on each corner. They see classmates and peers shot down on the streets while playing. Being immersed psychologically and emotionally in films and video games that promote violence and degradation of a people desensitizes them from the hope of achieving success or daring to dream in America.

Guiding students to hold up the mirror of hope and view themselves through the challenges and sacrifices of their grand parents and great grand parents helps them to make personal and relevant connections. Using the script from "Raisin in the Sun" to explore the morals and values used to overcome or endure these historical, political, economic, and social challenges is essential to students' personal and academic development as human beings.

Mama says:

"I come from five generations of people who was slaves and share croppers, ain't nobody every took nothing from nobody telling us we weren't fit to walk this earth. We ain't never been that poor. We ain't never been that dead inside."

Walter's response:

"What the matter with everyone! I didn't make this world! Hell yes I want some yachts some day! Yes, I want

to hang some real pearls around my wife's neck! Ain't she suppose to wear pearls? I am a MAN so somebody tell me who is it decides which woman is suppose to wear pearls in this world?" (*Raisin*, Act III, Scene 1 pg. 143)

Analyzing and comparing the point of view of both Walter and Mama can help students understand how values change from generation to generation. Does Walter's position make him dead inside because he desires material wealth? Is mama's view old fashioned and outdated because she would rather be poor with pride than wealthy with a spiritless soul? Whose point of view can students identify with and whose point of view would their grand parents endorse?

Does a student's individual goal conflict with the goals of their family? Walter Lee's goal of owning a liquor store conflicted with Mama's goal of owning a house and Beneatha's goal of becoming a doctor. What compromises and sacrifices were needed and accomplished once the decision was made to move into the house in the all white neighborhood of Clyborne Park?

## Social/Political Climate

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"And we have decided to move into our house because my father, my father, he earned it for us, brick by brick." Walter Lee

When Walter Lee presents the question to mama "why did you move here to Chicago forty years ago from the south?" mama explains, "I guess I came here to make a better life for me and my family." This will serve as the springboard for introducing the Great Black Migration with an integration of poetry. Since my students live in Chicago we will examine jobs, housing, and educational opportunities, organizational support systems and poetic protest. Poetry excerpts are used to keep students focused and enthusiastic about the thematic challenges faced during the migration. Let's look at these lines from African American Poet titled "The tired worker" by Claude McKay:

Weary my veins, my brain, my life, — have pity! No! Once again, the hard, the ugly city.

The viewpoint of the black migrant has become distorted. Once the move to the north was thought to be a beautiful promise of hope. Finally, an opportunity to achieve the American dream. After living there for awhile the northern city is viewed as hard and ugly because the black worker is only hired for the most unskilled and hazardous jobs.

We'll look at causes and effects of the Great Black Migration. I will guide students to understand that over one million African Americans moved out of the rural south of the United States to escape problems of racism, unemployment, and poor education and to seek a better way of life. Students will read the section on leaving the south in *Seeds of Change in American History*, and grapple with the fact that life in the south was very challenging for African American after the Civil War ended in 1865. The Thirteenth Amendment<sup>3</sup> abolished slavery but freedom was only the first step on the long journey towards a better life.

Students may ask: "Slavery is over so why leave the South?" Most African Americans still living in the south worked as farmers deceived into thinking they would own their own land. Being poor provided very little options so they lived in small frayed cabins and their children had little chance for education.

Students need to understand the concept of reconstruction and how Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau<sup>4</sup> to help freed African Americans. The Bureau provided clothing, food, passed laws giving African Americans the right to vote, hold office, and own land. From 1865 until 1877 African Americans sampled a bit of the American pie. The pie was snatched away very quickly when most southern states passed laws called "Black codes" which limited African Americans right to own land and to work and live where they desired.

By 1877 Reconstruction was over and African Americans had lost many of the rights they gained. Some states required voters to be able to read and understand various sections of the constitution. Some states required poor blacks to pay a poll tax<sup>5</sup> in order to vote and some states required blacks to own property in order to vote. These requirements weakened voting rights for African Americans leaving them disconnected once again.

At this point students can use a Venn diagram to compare the challenges of African Americans during reconstruction to present day challenges.

The departure of thousands of African Americans changed the landscape of the South. North was the destination. The train fare from New Orleans to Chicago was about \$20.00, a month's pay for most workers. Migrants wrote slogans on the side of the trains expressing their feelings, "Farewell We're Good and Gone," and "bound for the Land of Hope" said it all. Richard Wright, a successful and well-known African American writer moved north from Mississippi as a young man and wrote about his train trip "We look around the train and we do not see the old familiar signs: 'For Colored and For Whites'."

The language of slogans finds its way into everyday speech too. In "Raisin in the Sun" the wife, Ruth, finds out that mama has placed a down payment on a new house; she looks around the cramped apartment and exclaims "Halleluyah! And Goodbye Misery - Don't Never want to see your Ugly face again."

Some other examples of slogans were prominent throughout the Civil Rights Movement such as: "We Shall Overcome", "Keep your Eyes on the Prize" "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around," and "Oh Freedom over me and before I'd be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be Free."

Students will create their own phrases or slogans as if they were moving into a new house. They could also revisit history and create slogans that express the feelings of those who were leaving the south for Chicago.

However, once families arrived they had many problems to solve and students will be asked to brainstorm some of those problems which may range from housing, jobs, schools for their children, and a church to attend for worship within a welcoming community. Cities in the north like Chicago saw some of the biggest increases in black population. Meanwhile the Great black Migration continued, going from 299,000 in 1940 to 500,000 in 1950.

Voices from America:

"Once on the farms I've labored hard,

And never missed a day;

With wife and children by my side

We journeyed on our way.

(from *National Geographic, The Great Black Migration*)

## Employment

After World War I immigration from Europe was at a standstill, Chicago's manufactured goods were in demand. Employers needed a new labor source, therefore factories opened doors to black workers, providing opportunities for blacks to claim full citizenship through their role in industrial economy. For black women the doors were barely opened but domestic work in Chicago offered higher wages and more personal independence than in the south.

Chicago workers labored in industries including meatpacking, clothing production, iron and steel, the manufacturing of foundry, machine and agricultural implements, beer and liquor processing, furniture manufacture, and printing. To insure students have a clearer image of how life was for black laborers explain to them that white industrial workers, were supported by a community network. They lived near their jobs, within neighborhood that offered institutions like saloons with offers of fellowship.

Carl Sandburg, the Poet Laureate of Illinois, expresses this pride and companionship formed by white industrial workers in Chicago during this time:

Hog Butcher for the world

Tool maker, stacker of Wheat.

Player with railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler. . .

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Sweating proud to be Hog butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

(Excerpt) "Chicago"

However, racial segregation kept the relatively few black factory workers in remote parts of the city, forcing them to search for daily transportation to and from work. This also blocked vessels of social interaction that could have reduced racial barriers. Until 1916 black factory workers were very few and those that worked in the factories found jobs on the killing floors of the stockyards or in the steel mills. Black men mostly worked as unskilled laborers, restaurant waiters, Pullman Porters, bootblacks and hotel redcaps while black women filled the laundry trades and other forms of domestic service.

Black employees of hotels, restaurants and the railroads found themselves employed in places which would not service their families as customers.

O WHISPER, O my soul! — the afternoon To rest thy tired hands and aching feet. O dawn! O dreaded dawn! O let me rest! "The Tired Worker" by Claude McKay (1890-1948)

This poem, "The Tired Worker," by Claude McKay may represent the sentiments of a great many black unskilled laborers. To help gain the sense of fellowship white workers experienced, the Pullman Porters established one such organization titled the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids.

## Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids

The International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids was the first African American labor union chartered by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). This organization is important to the economic and political skyline of African Americans in Chicago. The Pullman porters were in an uproar about their treatment from the Chicago-based Pullman Company and sought the assistance of A. Phillip Randolph (Civil Rights Pioneer) in organizing their own union. Founded in New York in 1925, the newly established union assigned Milton P. Webster to organize Chicago's branch which was home to the largest number of Pullman's 15,000 porters.

The wives of the porters assumed an important role in the decade long struggle for union recognition. Their auxiliary functions and support were significant to the union efforts.

When supplemented with tips the porter and maid jobs paid better than many other jobs offered to African Americans. Segregation continued in the North and these jobs still kept black subservient to white passengers. Ultimately, the Brotherhood was an important factor in the civil rights movement.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool

He played that sad raggedy tune like a musical fool

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man's soul,

O Blues

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

"Weary Blues" (excerpt) by Langston Hughes

## Chicago Defender

The first issue of the *Chicago Defender* was distributed on May 6, 1905. What began as a four page brochure quickly became the most important black metropolitan newspaper in America. The paper's producer Robert Sengstacke Abbott called that "American Race Prejudice must be destroyed" led the *Defender* to fight against racial, economic, and social discrimination, boldly reporting on lynching, rape, mob violence, and black disenfranchisement. The paper challenged fair housing and equal employment.

*The Chicago Defender* remains most noted for its active role in the Great Black Migration. Southern Migrants received their first glance of life in Chicago in the pages of the *Defender*. Fueling the enthusiasm for migration across the south, articles in the newspaper urged African Americans to move north, showing pictures of the best schools, parks and houses in Chicago next to pictures of the worst conditions in the South.

The *Chicago Defender* took on an advisory role to the southern migrants, by providing details on how to behave in the Northern cities. For Example:

"Be clean. . . . Water is cheap. . . . Avoid loud talking, and boisterous laughter on the streetcars and in public places; . . . In the south they don't care how they dress; here they make it a practice to look as well in the week as they do on Sunday."

Students can analyze this advice in small groups or as a class to determine the tone and mood expressed.

As more African Americans decided to move north, they relied on the newspaper for assistance. Migrants wrote hundreds of letters to the *Defender* seeking information about jobs, housing, education and transportation. Here is an example of one such letter: Students can also research other letters through the *Defender's* archive (still located on South Side) and write letters themselves based on personal concerns they may have if migrating to Chicago or present concerns of regentrification. The letter is kept in its original form and mechanics to maintain its authenticity for teaching purposes.

Dear Sir:

Please give me some information about coming north I can do any kind of work from a truck garden to farming I would like to leave here and I can't make no money to leave I just make enough to live one please let me hear from you at once I want to get where I can put my children in school. (*National Geographic*)

The Chicago Pullman Porters distributed the *Chicago Defender* to southern migrants but the paper was eventually banned from mail distribution in many southern States which enforced harsh penalties towards anyone found distributing or reading the paper.

## Housing

"I too sing America"

I am the darker brother

They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes

But

Tomorrow

Nobody will dare say to me

Eat in the Kitchen

"I Too Sing America" (excerpt) by Langston Hughes

African American migrants were not allowed to live in many areas due to segregation and very little money. The South side of Chicago was the major section of town where blacks resided. However as more and more migrants arrived adequate housing was scarce and became overcrowded and rents skyrocketed.

"We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes and we will try to be good neighbors." Walter Lee

The Great Black Migration was the basis which tempted some whites to use mortgage discrimination and

redlining in inner cities like Chicago. Restricted covenant<sup>6</sup> followed the Great Black Migration in the 1920's, which prohibited the purchase, lease or occupation by blacks in more desirable sections of the city. These laws restricted blacks from moving into neighborhoods occupied by whites. Residential segregation extended its big shoulders into Chicago suburbs as well. For example, Skokie, Park Ridge, and Evanston wrote racial residential restrictions into the deeds on 1926-27 subdivisions. Restrictive Covenants secured white status and produced a depressing effect on black homeowners. We will also refer to Hansberry vs. Lee, 1940.

Redlining<sup>7</sup> is the practice of denying financial services to specific neighborhoods, usually because its residents are poor minorities. Affluent housing areas received green lines, while black neighborhoods were assigned red lines labeling them undesirable. Redlining's negative effect presently resonates in sections of Chicago particularly the Englewood community where my students live.

Englewood was once a thriving community of German, Scottish and Irish immigrants. . Sears developed a 1.5 million dollar store establishing Englewood as the second busiest shopping district in the city. The 1940s real-estate values began to decline with the increase of blacks moving into the area. The practice of redlining and disinvestment sealed Englewood's future as a low-income community. Bankers' response to lending in the Englewood area was "The rate of the loan is determined by risk, the Negro has to pay a higher rate because he is not secure in his job."

After receiving all of this background knowledge, my students are now able to research and interview business and home developers, city planners and elected officials about the future plans for rebuilding their community which is affectionately known as "The Wood."

## Artistic Expressions

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### Poetry Analysis

Poetry was the response to challenges presented to African Americans. Poetry became the voice, the outcry to the political, social and economic burdens that continued to defer dreams. Poetry is an ideal tool to teach student how to identify the implied meaning of figurative language. We must help students feel the emotional tone of verse which helps them understand the thematic connections. The terrible plight of inner city blacks has been directly expressed by an entire range of poets, and it has been dramatized by playwrights like Lorraine Hansberry.

In class we will stop at certain points while studying "Raisin in the Sun" to highlight poetry that expresses the situation more powerfully. Here is an example:

#### *Act 1: Scene 1*

Travis: "This is the morning we're suppose to bring fifty cents to school; our teacher says we have to bring it."

Ruth: "Well I don't care what your teacher says; I ain't got no fifty cents this morning."

Travis gets quite irritated with his mother's response while Ruth is frustrated with her son because of her inability to provide for her son. This poem by Langston Hughes may capture Ruth's frustration.



Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair

It's had tacks in it

And splinters

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor

Bare,

"Mother to Son" (excerpt) Langston Hughes

### **Act 1: Scene 2**

The check finally shows up and Mama says: "I don't know what we all around here so excited about. We know it was coming for months. Now be quiet it's just a check. Don't act silly, we ain't never been no people to act silly 'bout no money."

Ruth: "We ain't never had none before."

Mama opens the check and asks Travis to help her read the amount of zeroes for clarification. Travis counts the zeroes and exclaims "Gaa lee Grandmama you're rich." Mama's mood changes and she sadly questions "Ten-thousand dollars that's all they give you." Travis turns to his mother Ruth and asks, "don't grandma want to be rich?"

A strong poem by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) expresses the mood or tone in the Younger household. In "A New Reality Is Better Than a New Movie!" Baraka writes:

How will it reach you, getting up, sitting on the side of the bed, getting ready to go to work. Hypnotized by the machine, and the cement floor, the jungle treachery of

Trying

To survive with no money in a money world, of making the boss

100,000 for every 200

dollars

you get, and then having his brother get you for the rent. . .

Baraka concludes about the falsity of Hollywood movies:

They can't even show you thinking or demanding the new socialist reality, it's the ultimate

Tidal wave

When all over the planet, men and women, with heat in their hands, demand that

Society

Be planned to include the lives and self determination of all the people ever to live.

Analyzing the figurative language in small groups will assist students eventually in creating original poems. Ruth: "Well, Lord knows, we've put enough rent into this here rat trap to pay for four houses by now." Listen to Ruth and her use of the word

"RAT TRAP," or hear mama in a sudden reflective mood: "I remember just as well the day me and big Walter moved in here though. Hadn't been married but two weeks and wasn't planning on living here more than a year. We was going to set away, little by little don't you know, and buy a little place out there in Morgan Park. Even picked out the house, looks right dumpy today after all these years. Well our dreams just never came true."

"Kitchenette Building" by Gwendolyn Brooks describes the design of the Chicago Housing Developments/Projects. The kitchen combined with the living room and bedroom was considered a rat trap or closet apartment. The bathroom was shared with other tenants on the same floor. Mama speaks to Ruth about how she and Big Walter were controlled by the hours of the day. Working day in and day out with every hand ticking to reach what they thought would be their plans. Involuntary demands steered them away from their dreams. Turning gray as quickly as each hand turns around the clock, you can never catch up to the minute hand because you have to stop and pay the rent.

The apartments were so cramped you could smell your neighbor's trash. By the time you got into the bathroom, you prayed the hot water did not run out. Can you imagine a cold shower after working an eighteen hour shift?

Kitchenette Building

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan, Grayed in and gray. "Dream" mate a giddy sound, not strong "Like rent", "feeding a wife", "satisfying a man". But could a dream sent up through onion fumes Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall, Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms, Even if we were willing to let it in, Had time to warm it, keep it very clean, Anticipate a message, let it begin? We wonder. But not well! Not for a minute! Since Number five is out of the bathroom now. We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it. Gwendolyn Brooks.

### **Play/Film Analysis**

Realism is the depiction of subjects on stage as they appear in everyday life. Films have plots that follow what is known as "classic narrative realism."<sup>8</sup> A situation is presented, then disrupted and is changed or resolved by the end of the film. Examples can be found in science fiction, horror, romance or adventure, set in the past or present, but the structure of the story seems to remain the same. The truth of what we see intersects the unfolding of the story.

The camera helps confirm this idea of what we see as real or true. Social Realism<sup>9</sup> is used to describe visual and other realistic works that chronicle the everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor. This style

is critical of the social environment that causes these conditions. In viewing the film *Raisin in the Sun* students will look for examples of realism and as a class we will confirm this idea of realism through discussion and analysis. The playwright Lorraine Hansberry explains to an interviewer why her play is considered genuine realism.<sup>10</sup>

Interview with Lorraine Hansberry

Interview: Would you call your play naturalistic?

Lorraine: I would not

Interviewer: And what would you call it? If you had to put into words.

Lorraine: I hope that my work is genuine realism.

Interviewer: What is the difference?

Lorraine: It's enormously different. Well, naturalism tends to take the world and say: this is what it is, this is how it happened, and it is true because we see it everyday in life that way. You know you simply photograph the garbage can. But in realism, I think the artist who is creating the realistic work imposes on it not only what is, but what is possible.....Because that is part of reality too. So that you get a much larger potential of what man can do. And it requires a much greater selectivity you don't just put everything that seems you put what you believe is.....(Interview in *Raisin in the Sun, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition*; Samuel French Inc. 1987)

## Strategies/ Classroom Activities

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### Extension Research Activity/Adaptations

Inquiry based research can also assist in students understanding adaptations and its implications. I will present some excerpts of the various adaptations of *Raisin* that students will view, research, and analyze as well as critiques of both film productions (1961) and (1989) and the Broadway productions (1959) and (2004) including the musical (1973). Som of the critics' reactions are given in an appendix. There are examples of what students may locate via webbased and microfilm sources.

Students will examine and discuss and even debate the critics in a talk show format. Oprah Winfrey is also a role model here in Chicago and is linked to the 2004 Broadway production of *Raisin*. We will set up the classroom as if it was the Oprah studio and of course we would have to have a student play the role of Oprah. The talk show host would invite actors and various critics such as Ruby Dee, Danny Glover, Sydney Poitier and Sean Puffy Combs or James Baldwin, Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* or even Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun Times*.

As a culminating activity students will create and share their own criticism and post to our class activity web site.

## Scenes&Themes

Themes are popular instructional utensils; themes often focus on a single topic that draws students into a subject area. Themes may provide the nucleus for class activities and lessons, scaffolding students' prior knowledge and helping them to make text to text, text to world and text to self connections. "Themes in many cases become the foundation for an analysis because they point to the main idea in a movie." They are not necessarily the moral or message of the movie. They are the large and the small ideas that help to explain the actions and events. In this interdisciplinary unit students will read selected text that will correspond to scenes from the 1961 film *Raisin in the Sun*. However, the Great Black Migration and family challenges will only be used as a resource for viewing. Students will brainstorm themes throughout the unit and build upon these themes through discussions. In this section some of the scenes are outlined to provide examples of how selected scenes will be used as a focal point for analysis.

### Lesson in Themes

Helping students identify major themes of "Raisin in the Sun" will help them develop a sense of analysis. Learning how to question and take notes should lead to more discussion and more questions. The answers provided below will only be used for model responses. Students will be encouraged to give their personal responses and provide textual evidence.

For example:

- Who are the central characters?

Some students may identify Mama and Travis, while others may disagree and identify Mama and Walter Lee. Do the central characters change from scene to scene? Or are student basing their response on the characters that were most dominant throughout the film?

- what do they represent in themselves and in relation to each other? The importance of individuality or society? Human strength or compassion?

If we decide to follow the initial response of Mama and Travis, then Travis might represent a sense of hope for Mama and for the future. Travis shows a great sense of respect and love for his grand mother.

- How do their actions create a story with meaning or constellation of meaning?

When mama came to Chicago with Big Walter they wanted to provide a better life for their family. Now her grandson would literally reap from the harvest they planted fifty years ago.

- Does the story emphasize the benefits of change or endurance?

The film shows that challenges may change from generation to generation but values such as pride and hard work transcends generations.

- What kind of life or what actions does the film wish you to value or criticize, and why?

Lorraine Hansberry the playwright wrote this play based on her personal experiences and knowledge and I think the film brings her values of family support, compassion and work ethics to life in the film starring the same cast that opened the play in 1959.

- If there is not a coherent message or theme, why not?

The coherent message in the story is that open and honest communication is the key to family unity and growth.

- How does the movie make you feel at the end? Happy? Sad? Upset? Proud Depressed? Confused? Why?

The end of the movie made me feel sad because Mr. Linder did not understand or accept the fact that the Younger family had a right to pursue the American dream. Unfortunately, Mr. Linder represented an entire community of residents that did not want blacks to move into their neighborhood.

## Poetry Strategies

Have students select lines from the play that suggest that someone is trying to achieve a goal or a dream and then have them analyze those lines using the play's title poem, "What happens to a dream deferred?"

Other poems can also be used to help students improve their analytical skills.

Mama quotes Big Walter: "Seems like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams, but he did give us children to make our dreams seem worthwhile."

Walter: This morning, I was looking in the mirror and thinking, I'm thirty five years old; I've been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living-room and all I got to give him is nothing. Nothing but stories about how rich white people live!

Did Walters dream fester like a sore?

Can Travis dreams be compared to rotten meat or a syrupy sweet? Why or why not?

Did Ruth's dream just sag like a heavy load?

What happens in the play or movie that makes mama explode?

*What happens to a dream deferred?*

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat

Or crust and sugar over

Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

Like a heavy load

Or does it Explode?

Langston Hughes

"Open Mic" is also a poetry strategy that students enjoy, providing students an opportunity to create their own poetry around a central theme or topic. The following poem is the kind that serves as an example to students as they create their own voices about what they have learned throughout this unit. This poem reflects the childhood innocence of Travis Younger and takes a walk down the block to observe today's youth. This poem was created with the spirit of inner city dreams; the innocence is snapped from our children by gun violence, drugs, and neglect. Growing up on the South Side of Chicago you could not become captivated by the aroma of fried chicken or catfish. My mother's golden fried chicken was the inspiration for the title.

### ***Dreams Deep-Fried***

Children playing

90-degree sun

The ice cream truck hums

A tune

Kool-Aid freezes into an ice cup by noon

Momma's praying

Daddy's saying

"Children get out of the streets"

Juking to the beats

Running through the alley

Jumping double dutch

Shooting hoops

Completing homework on the stoops

Shuffled cards for bid wis

An argument ensues

A drug dealer was dissed

Shoots ring out

The intended target, missed

Dreams are scattered

Grandma shouts

Who raped my baby?

Ryan Harris had a dream

Starkeisha Reed

Our children continue to bleed

Grown Folks filled with selfish greed

Nobody knows Vincent Gordon

He took a shot

Not like Jordon

His was in the back

Are the Bradley sisters somewhere dreaming?

Hopes are shattered

Boarded windows and doors

Who comes out for laughter anymore?

By Sharon Ponder

### **Readers Theater**

"I called him to come on over to the show, gonna put on a show for the Man."

Walter Lee

The film is shown to students to assist with their understanding of the play, especially the setting, the position of the actors, characters' dialogue, mannerisms and point of view of the characters. At this point in the unit students understand that the film was adapted after its Broadway run in New York. In small groups students will act out selected scenes and audience members will conduct peer assessments based on the group's ability to creatively invigorate and demonstrate full comprehension.

Time: Early 1950's

Place: Chicago Southside

Act I Scene I

Its 7:30 in the morning and Ruth tries to get Travis into the common bathroom used by others in the

apartment building. Ruth knows that if Travis doesn't get in the bathroom others may get in causing them to run behind schedule. Travis is tired and barely moving but finally drags himself into the bathroom with Ruth's persistence.

Walter wakes up minutes after Travis gets into the bathroom and demands that Ruth gets Travis up sooner so that he doesn't have to wait for his turn. Ruth rejects that idea with a resounding no and reminds Walter of the fact that he and his friends are up all night talking and playing on what is Travis' bed. How is he expected to get up any earlier when he goes to bed late?

Walter Lee diverts his attention to the insurance check and asks Ruth "don't the check come today?" Ruth appeals to Walter not to get up asking her about money that doesn't belong to her. Walter exclaims "I'm thirty five years old, married eleven years and has a son that sleeps in the living room. I've got nothing to give him but stories on how rich white folks live."

Mama enters the Kitchen as Ruth is ironing and they began talking about possible plans for the insurance money. Ruth suggests that Mama travels like rich white women but Mama realizes that she ain't no rich white woman and decides to put a down payment on a house. Ruth exclaims "I'm so glad to be moving because we sure did put enough money into this Rat Trap." Mama looks disappointed at Ruth's description of the apartment she's grown to love but goes on to explain how the apartment was a gold mine when she and big Walter moved in forty years ago.

### *Act I Scene 2*

Travis bursts in the door to his family's apartment delicately holding an envelope with such enthusiasm and curiosity. He hands the envelope to his grandma and his mother Ruth huddles along and says "I wish Walter Lee was here for this." Mama opens the envelope and pulls out the check, examines it carefully and then asks Travis to count the number of zeros. Travis proudly counts all the zeros and exclaims "Grandmama you're rich!"

### *Act II Scene 3*

Beneatha, Ruth and Walter Lee are celebrating the big move to the new house when a knock on the door interrupts the mood. The gentleman introduces himself as Mr. Linder from the White Citizens Group of Clyborn Park. It appears as if his visit is sincere and that he has the best interest of the Younger Family in mind. Suddenly all three family members' change their expressions to humiliation as Mr. Linder offers to buy the home from them double the price. Walter Lee asks Mr. Linder to leave as everyone appears to be in shock or disbelief at the outcome of the visit.

Bobo visits the Younger family to inform Walter Lee that they have been scammed. Walter Lee expresses utter disbelief and in a rage slaps Bobo in the face as Ruth, Beneatha and Mama observe. Walter Lee falls to the ground begging Willie not to betray him, but Willie is long gone. "Man I trusted you that money is made out of my father's flesh." Mama approaches Walter Lee and says in a mighty voice "I seen him grow thin and old before he was forty, working and working like somebody's old horse. You give it all away in one day."



## Notes

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- 1 This question appears in the 1961 film adaptation but not in the original play.
- 2 Restrictive covenants was a housing law that confined blacks to low income areas and Mr. Hansberry challenged this law and practice at the local and Supreme Courts (Hansberry vs Lee)
- 3 Thirteenth Amendment according to the United States Constitution abolished slavery
- 4 Freedmen's Bureau was established by the government 1865 - 1877 to assist African Americans in improving quality of life.
- 5 Poll tax was implemented by some southern states to prevent or discourage blacks from voting, state officials realized that many blacks could not afford the tax so they would not be capable of voting under this law.
- 6 Restricted Covenant prohibited the purchase, lease or occupation by blacks in more desirable sections of the city.
- 7 Redlining is the practice of denying financial services to poor minority neighborhoods.
- 8 Classic narrative realism refers to a style of film making which narratives are centered on one or more central character. When a plot is presented it is usually disrupted and is changed and resolved by the end of the film.
- 9 Social Realism is used to describe visual and other realistic work that highlights everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor.
- 10 Genuine Realism is what technique Lorraine Hansberry uses to describe her play *Raisin in the Sun*, her goal was to depict life from a realistic perspective.

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## Poetry Sources

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History of Fight for Housing Project Told A.L. Foster/ Chicago Defender <http://www.public.asu.edu/~wplotkin/DeedsWeb/wells.html>

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Poetry Glossary <http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/130/133428/glossary.html>

Reading and Teaching Poetry Constructivist Approach  
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Spark Notes: *A Raisin in the Sun* <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/raisin/analysis.html>

*Teaching A Raisin in the Sun Literature and Life* <http://FirstSearchoclc.org>

Teaching Literature Grade 9: Integrating the Communication Arts, Drama, Experimental <http://FirstSearchoclc.org>

Techniques of Teaching Lorraine Hanserry: Liberation from Boredom <http://FirstSearchoclc.org>

When Public Housing was Paradise/Mitch Kahn <http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/138/kahnreview.html>

**Other Resources:**

Center for Inner City Studies/700 East Oakwood/Chicago 60653

Chicago Defender 200 South Michigan/Suite 1700/Chicago 60604

Chicago Historical Society/1601 N. Clark Chicago, 60614

Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Branch/ 400 South State/Chicago 60606

Dusable Museum of African American History 740 E. 56th Place/Chicago 60637

Goodman Theater/170 N. Dearborn/Chicago IL 60601

Pullman Guided Tours 11141 S. Cottage Grove/ Chicago 60653

National Geographic Society 1145 17th Street N. W. Washington D.C. 20036-4688

## Appendix A: Assessment Rubric "Raisin in the Sun"

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### Film Elements: Themes

4

- Addresses all important aspects of the question
- Demonstrates in-depth understanding of important information
- Relates information to prior knowledge in a relevant manner
- Offers interpretations, evaluations, or extensions (generalizations, applications, analogies, drawings)
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

3

- Addresses most important aspects of the question
- Demonstrates understanding of important information; less important ideas or details may be overlooked or misunderstood
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

2

- Addresses some aspects of the question
- Understands some important information, gaps are evident
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

1

- Totally irrelevant or totally wrong
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

0

- Blank/No response
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

### Readers Theater Rubric

4

- Addresses all important aspects of the scene
- Demonstrates in-depth understanding of important information
- Relates information to prior knowledge in a relevant creative manner
- Offers interpretations, evaluations, or extensions (generalizations, applications, analogies, drawings)
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

3

- Addresses most important aspects of the scene

- Demonstrates understanding of important information; less important ideas or details may be overlooked or misunderstood
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

2

- Addresses some aspects of the scene
- Understands some important information, gaps are evident
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

1

- Totally irrelevant or totally wrong
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

0

- Blank/No response
- **Modifications made for special needs students**

### Film Analysis Rubric

**Paragraph 1:** Offer your overall impression of the film while mentioning the movie's title, director, and key actors.

**Paragraph 2:** Summarize the plot of the film

**Paragraph 3:** How did the actors portray key character roles? Did they fulfill your expectations given your knowledge of the original novel or play (if one exists)?

**Paragraph 4:** Were any particular film techniques used in key scenes? How did the film techniques and music enhance the setting and themes of the film? You may need two paragraphs to explain this information.

**Paragraph 5:** Address how well the film represents the novel or play. Offer evidence for your opinion. Remember to mention use of symbols and literary devices. Do they "transfer" from the novel/play into the movie well?

**Paragraph 6:** Ending paragraph—your last opportunity to guide the reader. Offer a clincher that tells the reader to attend the film or not.

1. Assignment exhibits excellent skill/mastery in understanding of film analysis technique used to express creative ideas. **Modifications made for special needs students.**
2. Assignment exhibits proficiency in manipulation of film analysis technique used to express creative idea. **Modifications made for special needs students.**
3. Assignment exhibits some degree of skill in manipulating film analysis technique used to express creative ideas. **Modifications made for special needs students.**
4. Assignment exhibits less than average ability or skill in manipulation of film analysis techniques used to express creative ideas. **Modifications made for special needs students.**
5. Assignment exhibits less than average ability in manipulation of film analysis technique used to express

creative ideas. **Modifications made for special needs students.**

## Appendix B:Goals/Illinois Standards

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The goal of this three (3) part unit is to enhance student's knowledge of the "Great Black Migration", Raisin in the Sun and explore some film elements through the analysis of the film (1961) and play (1959) in preparing students to more formerly dialogue and write about films. Students will examine the values or themes portrayed by the Younger family and look for trends that can be connected to other films and literature forms.

The **Illinois Learning Standard for Social Science** is to provide students with an understanding of events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois the United States and other nations. Students will identify the origins of migration and analyze the consequences of events.

This Film analysis unit will be chunked into various components with the **Standards Based Curriculum guidelines recommended for Chicago Public School Students**. Students will be introduced to film terms and analysis techniques. Understanding explicit and implicit meaning in literature is a very significant literacy goal in the state of Illinois. Guiding students to respond to significant works of fiction and nonfiction by advancing a judgment that is interpretive, reflective, and evaluative and supporting that judgment through references to text, authors or personal experiences is required.

**Why This Goal Is Important:** Literature transmits ideas, reflects societies and eras and expresses the human imagination. It brings understanding, enrichment and joy. Appreciating literature and recognizing its many forms enable students to learn and respond to ideas, issues, perspectives and actions of others. Literature study includes understanding the structure and intent of a short poem or a long, complex book. By exploring the techniques that authors use to convey messages and evoke responses, students are more capable of connecting literature to their own lives and daily experiences.

Illinois State Goal 5 requires that language arts are used to acquire, assess and communicate information.

Illinois Learning Standard 5C requires that acquired information, concepts and ideas are used to communicate in a variety of formats.

Benchmark 5C:3b requires students to prepare and orally present original work (e.g. poems, monologues, reports, plays, stories) supported by research analysis

Performance Descriptor/Stage 1 requires critique of an individual or group project (e.g., written, oral, video, multimedia).

## Appendix C: Reviews and Criticism of *Raisin in the Sun*

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Critics Corner: *Raisin* gained huge success although the producer, Phil Rose never produced a play. Large investors were not interested in the play; therefore the production was taken out of New York and played in New Haven, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Audiences loved the play in all venues, eventually it opened at Ethel Barrymore Theater in New York March 11, 1959. It ran for 530 performances to harsh criticism from both black and white audiences.

### Awards

In 1973, Neminoff (Hansberry's former husband) and Charlotte Zaltberg adapted Hansberry's first play into a musical, entitled "*Raisin*", Music was composed by Judd Woldin and won the Tony Award for best musical and ran on Broadway for nearly three years. *Raisin* was also revived in 1981 when Claudia McNeil, Lena in the original 1959 production recreated the role in the musical adaptation. The royal theater hosted a 5-day run of the play in 2004 which featured Tony Award winning performances from Phylicia Rashad and Audra McDonald. A Tony Award nomination performance from Sanaa Lathan, and the well publicized Broadway acting debut of Sean "Diddy" Combs as Walter Younger. Rashad is the first African American to win the category of Best Lead Actress in a Play. This show recouped quickly and became the second highest grossing play in Broadway history.

In 1989 the movie was adapted into a made for TV movie starring Danny Glover as "Walter Lee", Ester Rolle as "Mama", Starletta DuPois as "Ruth" and Kim Yancey as "Beneatha." Bill Duke directed this production which received three Emmy Award nominations.

### Critics

"... in order for a person to bear his life, he needs a valid re-creation of that life, which is why, as Ray Charles might put it, blacks chose to sing the blues. This is why *Raisin in the Sun* meant so much to black people - on the stage: the film is another matter. In the theater, a current flowed back and forth between the audience and the actors, flesh and blood corroborating flesh and blood - as we say, testifying... The root argument of the play is really far more subtle than either its detractors or the bulk of its admirers were able to see. **James Baldwin (1976)**

Sidney Poitier stated in his autobiography "*The Measure of a Man*" (2000) that he has trouble with the author in the 1959 production. Poitier criticized Hansberry's idea that the play should evolve from the mother's point of view and wished that his character of Walter Lee was stronger. **Sidney Poitier, 2000**

The New York Times: *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Caroline, or Change* present an unusual moment: a moment when political and theatrical interests mesh, producing something that is artistically satisfying and politically inspiring. Seen together, these works — one set partly in the basement of a middle-class Jewish household near a swamp in Louisiana in 1963, the other in a rundown apartment on the South Side of Chicago in the 1950's — offer a new and refreshing lens on our history and on the theater's potential...

New York Post" Let's cut to the chase: Sean Combs is damn good! Audra McDonald is glorious, Phylicia Rashad is brilliant and Sanaa Lathan is Magnificent. Here is an American document of time, place and relevance." — *Clive Barnes, New York Post*

Daily News "Few plays have crystallized American history as pungently as 'A Raisin in the Sun.' And Kenny Leon's production captures Lorraine Hansberry's vision powerfully. Sean Combs exudes charm. Phylicia Rashad brings galvanizing strength and dignity to her role. Audra McDonald is rousing. Sanaa Lathan has joyful exuberance and sassiness. Alexander Mitchell could not be better. Teagle F. Bougere gives a marvelous performance. Bill Nunn has deep poignancy. And David Aaron Baker is splendid. As solid a piece of theater as has ever been written." — *Howard Kissel, Daily News*

Time "The revival of 'A Raisin in the Sun' that opened last week on Broadway is groundbreaking. Nearly every detail seems exactly right in Kenny Leon's finely wrought production. Audra McDonald is startling. Sean Combs has an easy naturalism. Sanaa Lathan is winning and funny. Phylicia Rashad creates an unsentimental portrait of moral strength. It remains a tough and truthful drama." — *Richard Zoglin, Time*

A RAISIN IN THE SUN, 1959 - film 1961, dir. by Daniel Petrie, starring Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, Ruby Dee, Diana Sands, Ivan Dixon, John Fiedler, Louis Gossett. **"The filmed play, which is all, alas, that Raisin is on film, simply stayed up there, on that screen. The unimaginative rigidity of the film locked the audience out of it. Furthermore, the people in Raisin are not the people one goes to the movies to see."** (James Baldwin in *the Devil Finds Work*) - Remade for TV in 1991.

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