A play that changed American theatre forever.
— THE NEW YORK TIMES

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

BY LORRAINE HANSBERRY

DIRECTED BY LIESL TOMMY

CURRICULUM GUIDE

TIMELESS FAMILY STORY

HUNTINGTON THEATRE COMPANY AVENUE OF THE ARTS & SOUTH END
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## AUTHOR CREDITS

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Student Matinee performances and pre-show workshops provide unique opportunities for experiential learning and support various combinations of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. They may also support standards in other subject areas such as Social Studies and History, depending on the individual play’s subject matter. Activities are also included in this Curriculum Guide and in our pre-show workshops that support several of the Massachusetts state standards in Theatre. Other arts areas may also be addressed depending on the individual play’s subject matter.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details 3

• Grade 7: Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

• Grade 8: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

• Grades 9-10: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the themes.

• Grades 11-12: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop related elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 5

• Grade 7: Analyze how a drama’s or poem’s form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.

• Grade 8: Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

• Grades 9-10: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks), create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

• Grades 11-12: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Reading Literature: Craft and Structure 6

• Grade 7: Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

• Grade 8: Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

• Grades 9-10: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

• Grades 11-12: Analyze a case in which grasping point of view required distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7

• Grade 7: Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).

• Grade 8: Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

• Grades 9-12: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist).
MASSACHUSETTS STANDARDS IN THEATRE

Acting

• 1.7 — Create and sustain a believable character throughout a scripted or improvised scene (By the end of Grade 8).

• 1.12 — Describe and analyze, in written and oral form, characters’ wants, needs, objectives, and personality characteristics (By the end of Grade 8).

• 1.13 — In rehearsal and performance situations, perform as a productive and responsible member of an acting ensemble (i.e., demonstrate personal responsibility and commitment to a collaborative process) (By the end of Grade 8).

• 1.14 — Create complex and believable characters through the integration of physical, vocal, and emotional choices (Grades 9-12).

• 1.15 — Demonstrate an understanding of a dramatic work by developing a character analysis (Grades 9-12).

• 1.17 — Demonstrate increased ability to work effectively alone and collaboratively with a partner or in an ensemble (Grades 9-12).

Reading and Writing Scripts

• 2.7 — Read plays and stories from a variety of cultures and historical periods and identify the characters, setting, plot, theme, and conflict (By the end of Grade 8).

• 2.8 — Improvise characters, dialogue, and actions that focus on the development and resolution of dramatic conflicts (By the end of Grade 8).

• 2.11 — Read plays from a variety of genres and styles; compare and contrast the structure of plays to the structures of other forms of literature (Grades 9-12).

Technical Theatre

• 4.6 — Draw renderings, floor plans, and/or build models of sets for a dramatic work and explain choices in using visual elements (line, shape/form, texture, color, space) and visual principals (unity, variety, harmony, balance, rhythm) (By the end of Grade 8).

• 4.13 — Conduct research to inform the design of sets, costumes, sound, and lighting for a dramatic production (Grades 9-12).

Connections

• Strand 6: Purposes and Meanings in the Arts — Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings (Grades PreK-12).

• Strand 10: Interdisciplinary Connections — Students will apply their knowledge of the arts to the study of English language arts, foreign languages, health, history and social science, mathematics, and science and technology/engineering (Grades PreK-12).

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Attending live theatre is a unique experience with many valuable educational and social benefits. To ensure that all audience members are able to enjoy the performance, please take a few minutes to discuss the following audience etiquette topics with your students before you come to the Huntington Theatre Company.

• How is attending the theatre similar to and different from going to the movies? What behaviors are and are not appropriate when seeing a play? Why?

• Remind students that because the performance is live, the audience will affect the actors’ performance. No two audiences are exactly the same and no two performances are exactly the same — this is part of what makes theatre so special! Students’ behavior should reflect the level of performance they wish to see.

• Theatre should be an enjoyable experience for the audience. It is absolutely all right to applaud when appropriate and laugh at the funny moments. Talking and calling out during the performance, however, are not allowed. Why might this be? Be sure to mention that not only would the people seated around them be able to hear their conversation, but the actors on stage could hear them, too. Theatres are constructed to carry sound efficiently!

• Any noise or light can be a distraction, so please remind students to make sure their cell phones are turned off (or better yet, left at home or at school!). Texting, photography, and video recording are prohibited. Food and gum should not be brought into the theatre.

• Students should sit with their group as seated by the Front of House staff and should not leave their seats once the performance has begun.
Lorraine Hansberry was born on May 19, 1930 in Chicago, Illinois. On her birth certificate, the hospital printed “Negro” but Lorraine’s parents, Carl and Nannie Perry, crossed out the hospital’s label and over it wrote “Black.” Challenging the system was a way of life for the Hansberry family, and Lorraine, as time would tell, would be no exception.

Lorraine was the youngest of four children, separated by seven years from her siblings. Her father was a successful real estate broker, her mother was a schoolteacher, and her uncle was a college professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C. So the Hansberrys were atypical residents of South Side of Chicago where the family lived for the first eight years of Lorraine’s childhood. Her parents were active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League (NUL) and were close friends with the African-American actor Paul Robeson and Civil Rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois.

In 1938, the Hansberry family moved to a Chicago suburb that excluded African-Americans through a so-called “restrictive covenant,” a provision prohibiting black buyers from purchasing houses in the neighborhood. Though they were threatened and even attacked, the Hansberrys refused to leave until a court ordered them to do so. Carl Hansberry appealed, and in 1940 the United States Supreme Court decided *Hansberry v. Lee* in Hansberry’s favor. Though the decision did little to affect the practice of segregated housing in Chicago, it deeply affected the young Lorraine. Twenty years later she would channel her memories of the struggle into the remarkable play, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Lorraine was interested in writing and theater during her high school years in Chicago. From 1948 to 1950, she attended the University of Wisconsin but struggled with the required science courses and so transferred to the Art Institute of Chicago, and then to Chicago’s Roosevelt University. In 1950, Lorraine left college altogether and moved to New York City to pursue her interest in writing. Living on the Lower West Side, she began to explore the life of Harlem and Greenwich Village and to participate in the civil rights movement. She took a class at the New School for Social Research taught by W. E. B. Du Bois and met the famous Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes who would later have such a strong influence on her work.

Her first job was at *Freedom*, a progressive African-American newspaper founded by Paul Robeson, where she began as a secretary and was eventually promoted to positions of writer and editor. As a member of the *Freedom* staff, Hansberry wrote some of her first essays on the state of blacks in America and argued against the media’s representation of the black community as ignorant and inferior.
In June of 1952, Lorraine met a young man named Robert Nemiroff at a rally protesting segregated sports teams at New York University. Nemiroff, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, was a graduate student in history and literature at New York University and a songwriter who shared Hansberry’s views on social and political issues. The couple married in June 1953, spending the night before their wedding protesting the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for espionage. While Nemiroff finished graduate school, Lorraine worked odd jobs to support them. But when Nemiroff’s song “Cindy, O Cindy” became a hit in 1956, the financial windfall allowed Lorraine to fully devote her time to writing.

She began work on a play about a struggling black family in Chicago, originally titling it The Crystal Stair based on a line from Langston Hughes’s poem, Mother to Son. When the play opened on Broadway on March 11, 1959, she had changed its name to A Raisin in the Sun — also inspired by a line from a poem by Langston Hughes. Producers had spent more than a year raising enough money to produce this play in pre-Civil Rights America, with its black writer, black director, and almost entirely black cast. But Hansberry’s brilliant writing and penetrating portrait of a black working-class family carried the opening night and the many performances that followed. A Raisin in the Sun won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award in 1959, was nominated for four Tony Awards and became a classic of American theatre. During the play’s two-year run on Broadway, the accolades flowed in for Hansberry, and it was made into a popular film in 1961.

Hansberry’s next play, The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window, was set in Greenwich Village, New York. The play, which opened and closed in 1964, examined some of the complexities of prejudice and discrimination among whites, blacks, and gays. Despite being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer that same year, she continued to write. At the time of her death on January 12, 1965 at the age of 34, Hansberry had several unfinished works and many unpublished essays. Near the end of her illness, she left her hospital bed to address the winners of the United Negro College Fund writing contest. In this talk, she used the phrase “To be young, gifted, and black” which became the title of the autobiography that Nemiroff compiled from her writings after her death. Though the couple had divorced several years before, they remained friends and collaborators, and To Be Young, Gifted, and Black opened off-Broadway in 1969 due largely to Nemiroff’s efforts. It was published as a book in 1970.

Though Lorraine Hansberry is most famously remembered today for A Raisin in the Sun, the words on her tombstone come from the play that closed after a short run on the night she died — The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window.

I care. I care about it all. It takes too much energy not to care...The why of why we are here is an intrigue for adolescents; the how is what must command the living. Which is why I have lately become an insurgent again.
Q&A WITH JOI GRESHAM, DIRECTOR OF THE LORRAINE HANSBERRY TRUST

Q: Tell us about your connection to Lorraine Hansberry.

My connection with Lorraine is multifaceted and special. My father, Robert Nemiroff, married Lorraine in 1953. They had an extraordinary relationship on many levels. Like Lorraine, he was a creative artist, a writer, and a political activist. He was a significant support to her development as a writer, financially supporting her through a period during which she was fully able to devote herself to writing *A Raisin in the Sun*. Bob was also an editor, producer, music publisher, and songwriter. They formed a unique trust and partnership, and though their marriage ended in 1964, they remained collaborative partners. He was named as her Literary Executor at her death in 1965. Shortly after, he met and soon married my mother, Jewell Handy Gresham, also a writer and English professor, and we moved to Lorraine's and his home in Croton-on-Hudson, NY. I was nine or ten years old when Bob came into my life and went on to spend my late childhood and adolescence in their Croton home. Here, Lorraine's books, writings, and belongings surrounded me. Suffice it to say, I grew up with Lorraine all around me, embracing me on many levels. In addition to the incredible people my parents were, it was an extraordinary environment in which to thrive.

Q: You have quite a unique background in the arts, how did growing up in the midst of Lorraine Hansberry’s work shape your life?

When I was young, my mother recognized that I loved to dance and saw persistence in me. Very early on, she sought out teachers and mentors to help shape my talent. By the time that we moved to Croton, I had begun to describe myself as a choreographer or someone who created dances. I think this identity emerged because I lived in the home of writers and practitioners. When I was around thirteen, my father compiled and adapted Lorraine’s writings into a stage production, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*. I was included in the book dedication. Not only was this a heady honor for a 13 year-old African American female, but it was also an affirmation in my own maturation and development as an artist. Lorraine is deeply present in my values and principles as an artist in terms of directing me toward thinking about the purpose of art and the role of artists in community and society.

Q: 50 years have gone by and the play continues to be seen across the country and still talked about to this day, why is that?

*A Raisin in the Sun* is a play that asks us to examine the human condition and what it means to be human in mid-1950’s America. How much can we distance a man or a woman from their dreams and aspirations — for themselves, for their children — and still expect them to maintain their dignity and humanity? It’s a play about identity and acting on what is essential to our humanity. It is meant to engage all of us. These questions presaged the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the African liberation events of the 1960s, and the Women’s Movement of the 1970s. These social revolutions are all foreshadowed in the play. The questions of authenticity and humanity are addressed throughout Lorraine’s writing. The power of this inquiry continues to speak to us, as Americans and as global citizens.

*A Raisin in the Sun* has been in continuous production since its Broadway debut in 1959. The
play is performed in schools, churches, social clubs and community stages and in stock, amateur, and professional productions across the United States and abroad. It has been translated into close to 40 languages. It has been placed in the core curriculum and been included in the required reading in schools in this country and internationally. This is now a play that the past two generations of Americans have come to know through school. Kids are talking about it in the context of history, economics, law, American culture, and race relations. It has become a cultural trope for how we think about the American Dream.

Q: What is your role as executive director of the Trust?

My father Robert Nemiroff devoted his career to championing the work and contributions of Lorraine Hansberry. I grew up influenced by his humble and devoted example of conviction and dedication. When he passed away in 1991, my mother assumed his work in promoting and offering critical background to Hansberry’s work, for which she particularly well suited as an educator and literary scholar. After my mother’s death in 2005, I took on this work and commitment. My current role involves licensing the stage, print, broadcasting, and media rights to the Hansberry catalogue. I work directly with the Schomburg Center of Research in Black Culture in Harlem, part of the New York Public Library, consulting and supporting the work of writers, artists, scholars, and students. This is where the Lorraine Hansberry Papers are located. This archival collection contains manuscripts of her plays and poems, short stories, essays, journalism, personal writings, and correspondence, published as well as unpublished works. I also consult and participate in regional, national, and international productions of Lorraine’s plays. Working from my father’s records, notes, and writings, I supply production histories and act as a biographical link to ongoing productions of Lorraine’s works. I am also a producer.

Q: What do you hope most people will take away from either viewing a production of A Raisin in the Sun or reading the play or her other notable works.

I am always excited to see more people introduced to A Raisin in the Sun as audience members and as readers. I love it when their curiosity leads them beyond that play to seek out her other writings and appreciate how her talents and vision developed in her other plays. Lorraine began to write the play when she was in her mid-twenties. Within an astoundingly short period of time — a mere ten years — she produced a prolific range and body of work as an artist and public intellectual.

So I encourage people to keep digging into Lorraine Hansberry and discover what I did, even as a young girl. She was and remains an amazing personality, talent and voice that continue to challenge and captivate us.
A DREAM DEFERRED

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

DREAMS DEFERRED

In his 1951 poem, Harlem, Langston Hughes questioned, “What happens to a dream deferred?” Eight years later, playwright Lorraine Hansberry offered one answer with her play, A Raisin in the Sun, the story of an African-American family living in 1950s South Side Chicago. The play, based on Hansberry’s family’s own experiences with being the only non-white family in their Chicago neighborhood, explores the fictional Younger family’s pursuit of their dreams in the face of racism and economic strain.

For matriarch Lena “Mama” Younger, the concept of “dreams deferred” is all too familiar. When her husband Big Walter was alive, they worked hard and saved money, dreaming of buying a small house that in reality was never meant to be theirs. “Lord, child,” she tells her daughter-in-law Ruth in Act I, Scene 1, “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.” With her husband gone and the family still living in a rundown, too-small apartment, Mama’s only hope is to do her best to ensure that her children do not have to struggle as their parents did. Mama recalls: “Big Walter used to say, he’d get right wet in the eyes sometimes, lean his head back with the water standing in his eyes and say, ‘Seem like God didn’t
see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams — but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worth while” (I.1).

Mama’s daughter Beneatha, dreams of becoming a doctor, but medical school is expensive. The family’s financial state puts pressure on her to marry a wealthy African-American man named George Murchison, who she likes well-enough but in whom she has no romantic interest. Son Walter’s dreams are difficult for his family to understand. As a chauffeur for a wealthy white man, his job reminds him that he has very little autonomy or authority in his daily life. He and two friends have concocted a plan to open a liquor store, but he lacks the funds for the initial investment. His mother, wife, and sister all think it would be a foolish venture and, much to his dismay, dismiss his vision. “That’s it. There you are,” he says to his wife, Ruth. “Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. Man say: I got to change my life, I’m choking to death, baby! And his woman say — Your eggs is getting cold!” (I.1). Yet despite her reservations, Ruth deeply understands that if Walter were to be denied the opportunity to pursue his dream, he may never recover. “I don’t know what it is,” she confides to Mama, “but he needs something — something I can’t give him any more. He needs this chance, Lena” (I.1).

A $10,000 check from Big Walter’s life insurance policy has the potential to change everything for the Youngers. For a short while, it appears that all three dreams — a family home, medical school, and the business venture — are all within reach. But before long, the Youngers’ fortunes are drastically shifted and nothing is certain any more. The loss of her school money is a literal deferment of Beneatha’s
dream and the resulting destruction of her optimism and idealism seems like more than she can bear. “I sound like a human being who just had her future taken right out of her hands,” she struggles to explain in Act III, Scene 1. “While I was sleeping in my bed in there, things were happening in this world that directly concerned me—and nobody asked me, consulted me — they just went out and did things —and changed my life.” When an unexpected visitor from what is to be the Youngers’ new neighborhood arrives, the family’s fate is placed in Walter’s hands — Will he reach out and grasp the future or will he step back as their dreams are deferred once again?

Questions:

• What does the word deferred mean? In what circumstances would someone make the choice to defer a dream? What circumstances would cause some one to involuntarily defer a dream?

• The American building boom that followed World War II made home ownership a more affordable reality and the G.I. Bill made a college education possible for the first time for a generation of Americans. Home ownership and college became symbols of the American Dream. How have neighborhoods and home ownership costs changed since the 1950s? How is buying a home today different from when the Youngers try to buy one in the 1950s? How common is the dream of home ownership today? In the play, why is this dream so important to the Youngers? What challenges does Beneatha face as an African American woman pursuing higher education? What are the obstacles students face today?

• George Murchison and his family seem to have much that the Youngers dream of. Describe Beneatha and Walter’s feelings towards George and his family. Would their opinions about their own family change if the Youngers’ circumstances were more like the Murchisons’?

• What dreams do you have for your own future? What obstacles or challenges could you face as you pursue these dreams?

HOME AND FAMILY

The Younger family’s South Side Chicago apartment was once a place of optimism and joy. But much has changed since the days when Lena “Mama” Younger and her husband, Walter, made their home there. As the opening stage directions to Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun describe:

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 . . . That was a long time ago . . . Weariness has, in fact, won in this room . . . All pretenses but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room.
This room, the only location depicted in the play, was intended to provide comfort and facilitate family bonding. Instead, it has been overtaken by the conflicts and frustrations the Youngers bring home with them from the outside world.

Despite the challenges her family faces, Mama still has hope. She prioritizes her family’s needs above her own personal satisfaction, and when her daughter-in-law, Ruth, suggests she use the insurance money to take a vacation, Mama responds that she has other plans that put the family first. “Been thinking that we maybe could meet the notes on a little old two-story somewhere,” she tells Ruth, imagining that there could even be a “yard where [Ruth and Walter’s son] Travis could play in the summertime, if we use part of the insurance for a down payment and everybody kind of pitch in” (I.1). When she finally puts in the down payment on a house, Mama is certain that the others will understand why her decision is so necessary for repairing the strain that is destroying their family culture. “I just seen my family falling apart . . . just falling to pieces in front of my eyes . . . We couldn’t of gone on like we was . . . We was going backwards ‘stead of forwards . . . When it gets like that in life — you just got to do something different, push on out and do something bigger” (II.2).

Mama sees buying a home as the best use for the money because it will benefit the entire family, but that doesn’t mean that other family members don’t have their own ideas. Walter wants to invest the money in a liquor store and begrudges Mama’s intent to use some of it to cover Beneatha’s medical school tuition. Beneatha maintains that it’s Mama’s choice to do with the money whatever she pleases and if her choice is to help pay for Beneatha’s education then Mama’s wishes should be respected. Beneatha is willing to accept whatever help is offered to her. But as Walter struggles to assert himself as the head of his household, he believes that his dream is more worthy and resentment of his sister creeps in and threatens to unravel the close family ties that have sustained them until this point:

WALTER:  (Bitterly) Now ain’t that fine! You just got your mother’s interest at heart, ain’t you girl? You such a nice girl — but if Mama got that money she can always take a few
thousand and help you through school too —
can’t she?

BENEATHA: I have never asked anyone
around here to do anything for me!

WALTER: No! And the line between asking
and just accepting when the time comes is
big and wide — ain’t it!

BENEATHA: What do you want from me,
Brother — that I quit school or just drop dead,
which!

WALTER: I don’t want nothing but for you to
stop acting holy ’round here. Me and Ruth
done made some sacrifices for you—why
can’t you do something for the family? (I, 1)

While Walter admonishes Beneatha for being selfish,
hes refusesc to compromise when it comes to his own
goals. Yet with no resources with which to accomplish
them, Walter’s bitterness begins to consume him.
Mama sees her son’s suffering and cannot bear to let it
continue. She needs Walter to understand that every
action she takes is intended to improve her children’s
lives and that she is willing to sacrifice to provide for
the entire family. “Walter,” she tells him in Act II, Scene
2, “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.” Mama entrusts
him with $6,500 to take to the bank, $3,000 of which
is to be set aside for Beneatha’s medical schooling.
The other $2,500, however, is for Walter to use as he
wishes.

Mama believes she can alleviate her family’s strife
by simultaneously satisfying their collective need for
a new home and funding her children’s individual
ambitions. But when Walter makes a decision that
throws his and Beneatha’s futures into question, the
house Mama pursued so relentlessly is all they have
left to cling to. The new home is more than roof
over their heads. It is a step up out of their life-long
strife, symbolized by the worn furniture and infested
walls, in which they have lived for so long. Yet even
this opportunity is not a foregone conclusion. When

Questions:

• In what ways are the Youngers like any other family?

In what ways are they different? How does each
family member contribute to its sustenance? How do
the three generations of Youngers differ?

• What does the saying, “The state of your room
reflects the state of your mind” mean? How does
the state of the Youngers’ living room reflect the
characters’ mental states?

• How do you predict the new home will change the
Youngers’ lives in terms of both their relationships
with each other and their socio-economic
opportunities? What will change when they move?
What does the location of a house or apartment say
about the people who live in it?

• For some people, the word “family” refers to blood
relatives. For others, it means a group of people with
whom they feel a sense of care and belonging. How
do the Youngers seem to define family? How do you
define it?
Identity: (n) the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another

Assimilation: (n) the merging of cultural traits from previously distinct cultural groups

—RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY

Twenty-year-old Beneatha Younger is a medical student striving to become a doctor someday — of this she is sure. Everything beyond that is uncertain. She constantly tries new hobbies, not to satisfy an adventurous spirit, but in hopes that she will discover a special talent or ability that will help her understand who she really is. Her endeavors, including participation in a theatre group, horseback riding, photography, and her newest distraction, guitar lessons, baffle her mother and sister-in-law, Ruth. “Why you got to flit so from one thing to another, baby,” Mama asks her in Act I, Scene 1. “I don’t flit,” Beneatha explains. “I — I experiment with different forms of expression — people have to express themselves on way or another.” Mama, still confused, questions her daughter further. “What is it you want to express?” she asks. Beneatha angrily fires back: “Me!”

Although Beneatha does not know who she is, there is some one at school who she thinks can help her find out — Joseph Asagai, a Nigerian student who comes to visit her in Act I, Scene 2. “Do you remember the first time you met me at school,” he reminisces. “You came up to me and you said — and I thought you were the most serious little thing I had ever seen — you said: “Mr. Asagai — I want very much to talk with you. About Africa. You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity” (I.2). As Beneatha and Asagai grow closer, their cultural differences begin to dominate their conversation. When Asagai brings her Nigerian robes and music to help Beneatha feel a stronger connection to her heritage, he observes that her straightened hair does not seem cohesive with the image she presents. “You wear [the robes] well . . very well . . . mutilated hair and all,” he jokes (I.2). When Beneatha takes offense to his comment, Asagai dismisses her objection as a byproduct of being born and raised in America. “What does it matter? Assimilationism is so popular in your country,” he remarks (I.2). Asagai’s words affect Beneatha deeply. When she enters in Act II, Scene 1, she is in full-embrace of Afrocentrism, dressed in the Nigerian robes and switching Ruth’s blues record for her own African one, declaring that she’s had “enough of this assimilationist junk” (II.1).

While Beneatha embarks on a journey of self-discovery, her brother, Walter, is also trying to figure out who he really is. But while Beneatha is in search of her place in the wider world, Walter struggles to define his role within his own family. As the oldest male in his household, Walter desperately wants to prove himself as a provider and leader. That role, however, is currently held by Mama, a strong matriarch who asserts authority in governing her family’s thoughts and actions.
When Beneatha makes statements Mama considers blasphemous, Mama reminds her: “There are some ideas we ain’t going to have in this house. Not long as I am the head of this family” (I.1). Similarly, when Walter expresses his desire to become a businessman, Mama shoots it down because she simply believes that he wants them to be something they are not. “We ain’t no business people . . . We just plain working folks” (I.1).

Walter is convinced that no one hears him, let alone understands him. His mother reminds him in Act I, Scene 2 to count his blessings. “You a good-looking boy. You got a job, a nice wife, a fine boy,” she tells him. But for Walter, who feels there is greatness inside him, it is not enough. When George Murchison arrives to take Beneatha out to the theatre, Walter seizes the opportunity to grab George’s ear. “I got some plans that could turn this city upside down,” Walter explains. “I mean I think like [your father] does. Big. Invest big, gamble big, hell, lose big if you have to, you know what I mean. It’s hard to find a man on this whole South Side who understands my way of thinking . . . Here I am a giant — surround by ants! Ants who can’t even understand what it is the giant is talking about” (II.1). When he discovers that Mama has used the insurance money for a down-payment on a house, Walter sees his chance to fulfill his potential as the successful head of his family die. “What you need me to say you done right for,” he asks Mama. “You the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to” (II.1).

It is not until the family is faced with a decision that could change the rest of their lives that Walter finally finds a way to step up, not for his own future, but for his family’s. Karl Lindner, a representative from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, proposes to buy the Youngers out in order to prevent them from moving into the house Mama purchased in the all-white neighborhood. Unsure of who is in charge when he arrives for the Youngers’ final answer late in the play, Lindner inquires, “Well — with whom do I negotiate? You, Mrs. Younger, or your son here?” Walter provides the answer: “Well — we are very plain people . . . Well, what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride. I mean — we are very proud people . . . What I am telling you is that we called you over here to tell you that we are very proud and that this is— this is my son, who makes the sixth generation of our family in this country, and that we have all thought about your offer and we have decided to move into our house because my father — my father — he earned it” (III).

Questions:

- Beneatha has two suitors: George Murchison and Joseph Asagai. How do each of these men represent different aspects of Beneatha’s experience as an African-American?
- Karl Lindner repeatedly addresses the Youngers as “you people,” a phrase that has had a racially charged connotation throughout American history. What does his use of this phrase indicate about how Lindner sees the Youngers?
- What point does Walter make about who he and his family are in his final speech to Lindner? Shortly thereafter, Mama remarks to Ruth that Walter “finally come into his manhood.” What does she mean? What are the implications for how the family sees Walter and for how he defines himself?
- How do you define your identity? Have you ever changed something about yourself in order to fit in? If so, why?

THE POWER OF MONEY

Read the following quotes from A Raisin in the Sun and then answer the questions that follow.

- “Check coming tomorrow, huh?” –Travis, Act I, Scene 1
- “Somebody would of thought my children done all but starved to death the way they talk about money here late.” –Mama, Act I, Scene 1
• “Ain’t nobody business people till they go into business. Walter Lee say colored people ain’t never going to start getting ahead till they start gambling on some different kinds of things in the world — investments and things.” –Ruth, Act I, Scene 1

• BENEATHA: Oh, Mama — the Murchisons are honest-to-God-real-live-rich colored people, and the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people are rich colored people...

MAMA: You must not dislike people ‘cause they well off, honey.

BENEATHA: Why not? It makes just as much sense as disliking people ‘cause they are poor, and lots of people do that.

Act I, Scene 1

• WALTER: Mama — sometimes when I’m downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking ‘bout things . . . sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars... sometimes I see guys don’t look much older than me —

MAMA: Son — how come you talk so much ‘bout money?

WALTER: *(With immense passion)* Because it is life, Mama!

MAMA: *(Quietly)* Oh — *(Very quietly)* So now it’s life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life — now it’s money. I guess the world really do change . . .

WALTER: No — it was always money, Mama. We just didn’t know about it.

Act I, Scene 2

• “You wouldn’t understand yet, son, but your daddy’s gonna make a transaction . . . a business transaction that’s going to change our lives.” –Walter, Act II, Scene 2

• “Willy! . . . Willy . . . don’t do it . . . Please don’t do it . . . Man, not with that money . . . Man, please, not with that money . . . Oh, God . . . Don’t let it be true . . . Man . . . I trusted you . . . Man, I put my life in your hands.” –Walter, Act II, Scene 3

• “I sound like a human being who just had her future taken right out of her hands!” –Beneatha, Act III

• “I have worked as a chauffeur most of my life— and my wife here, she does domestic work in people’s kitchens. So does my mother . . . We don’t want to make no trouble or fight no causes—but we will try to be good neighbors. That’s all we got to say. We don’t want your money.” –Walter, Act III

Questions:

• In *A Raisin in the Sun’s* first scene, all of the family members, including ten-year-old Travis, are eagerly awaiting the arrival of a $10,000 check from deceased patriarch Big Walter’s life insurance policy. What does Travis’s fixation on the money indicate about how the adults may have been discussing it before the play begins?

• For many who experience a financial windfall, the sudden influx of money is a mixed blessing. In what ways does the $10,000 insurance check positively impact the Youngers’ lives? How does it negatively impact them? When people receive a large sum of money, such as by winning the lottery, how do their lives and relationships change for the better and for the worse? Has money ever impacted your relationship with someone in your life?

• Money is often cited as a source of tension within friendships and family relationships. How does Walter view money? How is his view different from Mama’s? From his sister, Beneatha’s? From his wife, Ruth’s? How do financial conflicts help drive the plot of *A Raisin in the Sun*?

• Compare and contrast the male characters in the play: Walter Younger, George Murchison, and Joseph Asagai. How does money, and by extension, their ability to afford an education, shape how they view themselves and each other?
| **Act I : Scene 1** | 1. Who is Travis and where does he sleep? |
| | 2. What does the family expect will come in the mail tomorrow? |
| | 3. For what does Travis ask Ruth? How does she respond? How does Walter respond? |
| | 4. What does Walter plan to do with his friends, Willy and Bobo? |
| | 5. What career has Beneatha decided to pursue? |
| | 6. How much money is the family waiting for? Where did it come from? |
| | 7. How does Mama plan to use the money? |
| | 8. What explanation does Beneatha give to Mama and Ruth for the frequent changes in her interests? |
| | 9. Why does Beneatha say she will never marry George Murchison? |
| | 10. How does Beneatha view God? |
| **Act I : Scene 2** | 11. Who is the man coming over to see Beneatha? How does she know him? |
| | 12. Where is Ruth at the beginning of the scene? |
| | 13. When Ruth arrives home, what news have Mama and Beneatha already guessed? |
| | 14. What does Asagai give to Beneatha? |
| | 15. According to Asagai, why does Beneatha straighten her hair? |
| | 16. What is Walter's job? Why is he so unhappy? |
| | 17. What information about Ruth does Mama reveal to Walter? What does Mama suspect Ruth plans to do? |
| | 18. How does Walter respond when Ruth confirms that Mama’s suspicion is correct? |
| **Act II : Scene 1** | 1. What is Beneatha wearing that shocks her sister-in-law Ruth? |
| | 2. How does Walter react to his sister’s appearance? |
| **Act II : Scene 2** | 3. What does Beneatha claim to hate? Why? |
| | 4. Why is Walter eager to talk with George Murchison? |
| | 5. When Mama returns home, what does she reveal she has done? |
| | 6. Why is Ruth apprehensive about the location of the family’s new house? |
| | 7. How does Walter react to Mama’s decision? |
| **Act II : Scene 2** | 8. What do Beneatha and George argue about? |
| | 9. Why is Walter in danger of losing his job? |
| | 10. What does Mama tell Walter to do with the remaining $6500 of insurance money? Why? |
| **Act II : Scene 3** | 11. Who is the Youngers’ unexpected visitor? |
| | 12. How does Karl Lindner describe the kind of community that he and his neighbors want? |
| | 13. What offer does Lindner make to the Youngers? How do they respond? |
| | 14. Why do Walter, Beneatha, and Ruth choose garden tools as a present for Mama? |
| | 15. What news does Bobo bring to Walter? |
| **Act III** | 1. How does Asagai respond when Beneatha tells him about lost money? |
| | 2. What does Asagai ask Beneatha to do? |
| | 3. When Walter says he’s going to “put on a show” for Lindner, what does he mean? |
| | 4. When Lindner arrives, what does Walter tell him? |
| | 5. What makes Walter change his mind about accepting money from Lindner? |

Oh—So now it’s life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it’s money. I guess the world really do change . . .

— LENA YOUNGER, ACT I SCENE 2
FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

TIMELINE: THE GREAT MIGRATION

*A Raisin in the Sun’s* setting, 1950s Chicago, was a major destination for African-Americans moving from the South to the North in the early 20th century. Family matriarch Lena Younger and her husband, Walter, would have arrived in Chicago as part of the Great Migration, the movement of around seven million African American from the South to the North, Midwest, and West between 1915-1970. Some historians divide the movement into two parts: the Great Migration from 1910 to 1940 and the Second Great Migration from 1940 to 1970.

Background

- 1863 — Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln. The executive order proclaims that “all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious states “are, and henceforth shall be free.” Despite its importance as a turning point in the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation applied only to states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states and in states that had already come under Union control.

- 1896 — In *Plessy v. Ferguson* the Supreme Court upholds the constitutionally of state laws that required racial segregation in public facilities under the doctrine of “separate but equal.” The decision enables segregation to pervade many aspects of daily life including schools, restaurants, hotels, theaters, and public transportation, and to become an institution throughout the South.

- 1900 — 90% of all African Americans reside in former slave-holding states, most of them sharecroppers, tenant farmer or farm laborers, barely subsiding from year to year.

- Late 1910 — Boll weevil infestation of cotton fields and increased mechanization of farming leads to loss of many jobs in the South. Five million American men leave the North to serve in World War I. New factories and industrial centers create huge demand for labor in the Northeast and Midwest.

- 1917 — The United States enters World War I.
However, many migrants soon discovered that their previous rural lifestyle had not prepared them for life in a crowded city and that the open discrimination of the South was manifested in a more subtle form in the North. The sudden influx of black labor into northern cities caused resentment among many white working-class people who suddenly feared that their ability to negotiate salaries or even to secure employment was threatened. Laws were passed barring blacks from restaurants, stores, hotels, and theaters, and mortgage discrimination made it difficult for them to buy or even get a fair price on a house. Many of the migrants retained their Southern speech and cultural practices, creating a sense of “difference” or “otherness” within the communities where they lived and worked.

• 1921 — The musical *Shuffle Along* marks the unofficial beginning of New York City’s Harlem Renaissance, encouraging black artists to develop works in art, music, and literature.

• 1924 — The Immigration Act halts the flow of European immigrants to America, causing a shortage of workers in the factories of the industrial North and Midwest.

• 1927 — The Great Mississippi Flood displaces hundreds of thousands of African-American farm workers.

• 1929 — The Great Depression begins.

• 1934 — The National Housing Act allows the Home Owners Loan Corporation to identify areas that are “high risk” for mortgage loans, a practice known as “mortgage discrimination.” Many urban, minority neighborhoods are included in the high-risk category. As a result, banks deny loans for buying and repairing homes to the families living there and the neighborhoods deteriorate.

### 1915-1940 Great Migration

Two million black migrants moved from the South primarily to large Northern and Midwestern cities in search of work and better opportunities for their families. Traveling as individuals or in small groups, migrants from the Eastern states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida tended to move north along the Atlantic coast, following the railroad lines to cities such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Blacks from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas followed the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Chicago. The northern demand for workers was a result of the loss of five million men who left to serve in World War I, as well the restriction of foreign immigration by the Immigration Act of 1924. Some employers, such as the steel mills, factories, and tanneries, were so desperate for workers that they dispatched labor agents to the South to hire cheap workers and provided free railroad passes. In addition to migrating for job opportunities, African-Americans also moved north in order to escape the oppressive conditions of the South. Some of the main social factors for migration included lynching, an unfair legal system, inequality in education, and denial of suffrage. In the North, black children also had access to better schools and adult men could vote, joined by women after 1920. Many African-Americans also believed they could escape the racial segregation of Jim Crow laws and the increasing terrorism from White-supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan by seeking refuge in the North.
1940-1970 Second Great Migration

From 1940 to 1970, more than five million African-Americans moved from the South to the North, Midwest, and West, including California where there were new jobs in the defense industry. Many of the migrants were skilled, educated laborers who were escaping racism and seeking a more prosperous life. In Mississippi and South Carolina, for example, the black population declined from around 60% in 1930 to around 35%, in 1970.

The Great Migration, one of the largest internal migrations in the history of the United States, forever changed the urban North and the rural South, and in many respects, the entire nation.
CREATIVE CONNECTIONS:  
THEATRE, POETRY, AND ART IN DIALOGUE

The Great Migration of the early 20th century laid the groundwork for the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement in which art, music, and literature depicted the stories and struggles of African-Americans while exploring their relationships with their heritage and each other. Although the Harlem section of New York City was the symbolic epicenter of the movement, the artistic innovation that grew out of it was not limited to that city alone; Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. boasted vibrant cultural contributions all their own.

Just as the Italian Renaissance was a rebirth of European art that wielded an undeniable cultural influence for centuries, artists of color have felt deep connections to the music, literature, and visual art creating during the Harlem Renaissance for decades. The sentiments expressed in the poetry of Harlem's Langston Hughes and Chicago's Gwendolyn Brooks and in the art of painter Jacob Lawrence embody experiences and themes similar to those in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Read the poems and examine the art works and answer the questions that follow.

Questions:

• When it came time to choose a title for her play Lorraine Hansberry tentatively chose *The Crystal Stair*, based on a line from Langston Hughes’ poem, *Mother to Son*. Though in the end she changed her mind about the play’s title, she still looked to Hughes for inspiration, pulling the phrase “A Raisin in the Sun” from another of his poems, *A Dream Deferred*. What do you think it was about these poems that inspired Hansberry? How do the stories in these poems, and in *Kitchenette Building*, parallel the experiences of the characters in the play?

• Research the lives of Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Jacob Lawrence. How are their stories similar to Lorraine Hansberry's? How did real life influence their art? In addition to Brooks and Hansberry, what other African-American artists has Chicago produced?

• *Clybourne Park*, a 2010 play by Bruce Norris, depicts events before and after the action of *A Raisin in the Sun*, using the house in the white neighborhood the Youngers plan to move into as the setting. Act I shows the white family who previously lived in the home and their decision to sell in 1959. Act II takes place in the same house in 2009, but fifty years has brought significant changes — Clybourne Park has transformed from an exclusively white neighborhood into an all-black neighborhood that is gentrifying. Read *Clybourne Park* or attend the Boston production by SpeakEasy Stage Company from March 1-30, 2013. Describe the dialogue created by the two plays. What perspectives are presented in each? How does familiarity with one play inform your understanding of the other?
“A DREAM DEFERRED” BY LANGSTON HUGHES (1951)
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?

“KITCHENETTE BUILDING” BY GWENDOLYN BROOKS (1945)
We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray. “Dream” makes a giddy sound,
not strong
Like “rent,” “feeding a wife,” “satisfying a man.”
But could a dream send 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.

“MOTHER TO SON” BY LANGSTON HUGHES (1922)
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.
But all the time
I’se been a-climbin’ on,
And reachin’ landin’s,
And turnin’ corners,
And sometimes goin’ in the dark
Where there ain’t been no light.
So boy, don’t you turn back.
Don’t you set down on the steps
’Cause you finds it’s kinder hard.
Don’t you fall now—
For I’se still goin’, honey,
I’se still climbin’,
And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.
HOUSING SEGREGATION IN 1950S
SOUTH SIDE CHICAGO

Already experiencing a population boom after Reconstruction, Chicago was a popular destination for African Americans moving from the South to the North in the early 20th century. In the twenty years from 1890 to 1910, Chicago’s African-American population increased from 15,000 to approximately 40,000 due to the Great Migration. The majority of African-American Chicago residents settled in the South Side neighborhood and, due to discriminatory real estate practices and threats of violence in white neighborhoods, one almost entirely black section of the South Side came to be referred to as the Black Belt. By the mid-20th century, three-quarters of Chicago’s African-American population lived in this area. As new African-American inhabitants moved in, the descendents of prior, mostly Irish, immigrants moved out to the suburbs or relocated to other parts of the city.

Following the Great Depression, new housing structures were rapidly added in Chicago. Most of these were built on the South Side, and many were quite small and overcrowded. These generally included bungalows (small, generally one floor houses), studio apartments, and kitchenette buildings that featured units such as A Raisin in the Sun’s apartment setting. These spaces offered little access to natural sunlight and required the residents on a floor to share a single bathroom. In the late 1940s, the Chicago Housing Authority began to build high-rise public housing units on the South Side after white residents objected to an earlier proposal to add the units in less congested parts of the city.

For much of the 20th century, the neighborhood was very racially segregated. During the 1920s and Lorraine Hansberry’s childhood in the 1930s, white home owners banded together to create racially restrictive housing covenants, which stated that residents much be of a particular race in order to live in that neighborhood. The Hansberry family faced one of these covenants in 1938 when they moved into Washington Park, a white section of the South Side. Due to the existing covenant agreed to by the

New public housing units in the “Black Belt” on the South Side; photo: City of Chicago
Woodlawn Property Owners Association, a state court ordered the Hansberrys to vacate. When they refused, a signatory of the covenant, Anna Lee, sued Lorraine’s father, Carl Hansberry, and Harry H. Pace, an African-American lawyer who had recently purchased a building nearby. A circuit court ruled against Hansberry and Pace, but they pursued their case to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled in Hansberry’s favor on a legal technicality, saying that the number of signatories the covenant required to make it valid had not been met. The United States Supreme Court would not rule racially restrictive covenants unconstitutional until 1948. However, even this did not alleviate the challenges African Americans faced in trying to find affordable housing in Chicago as white neighborhood associations discouraged their members from selling to black families. The struggles faced by her family and other African Americans in Chicago had profound impact on Lorraine Hansberry, and clearly inspired her to write *A Raisin in the Sun*.

**Questions:**

- **African-Americans migrated from the South to the North in search of better opportunities.** What types of work did they find in Chicago? How did economic challenges impact African Americans’ ability to secure better quality housing? How is the Youngers’ housing situation at the beginning of the play tied to their economic status?

- **Study the ethnic composition of your region.** Historically, are there particular communities where immigrants of specific backgrounds have tended to settle? Why did they choose to live in that area?

- **Research contemporary housing laws in your city and state.** What types of housing are available in your area? What are the criteria for receiving public housing assistance?

- **Research the history of Boston’s neighborhoods.** Which ethnicities occupied which neighborhoods and when? What cultural events or rationales encouraged movement out of Boston to the suburbs?

- **How did your family come to live where they do today?** Ask your parents and grandparents about your family’s own migration story.

In the early 1950s, Mark Satter opened his law practice in the Chicago suburb of Lawndale, but his life’s work really began in 1957, the day a black couple, Albert and Sallie Bolton, walked through his doors needing a stay on an eviction from a home they had just purchased. Satter uncovered a citywide scheme, in which landlords sold African-Americans overpriced homes, keeping the titles until black homeowners paid them off, while charging excessive interest rates to insure they never could.
VISUAL ART/CREATIVE WRITING — INSPIRATION FROM OTHER ART WORKS
From 1940 to 1941, African-American artist Jacob Lawrence made a series of 60 paintings depicting the Great Migration — a subject that, at the time, had received little previous public attention. When the series was exhibited at the Downtown Gallery in Manhattan in 1941, Lawrence became the first black artist to be represented by a New York gallery. The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. and New York's Museum of Modern Art agreed to buy and divide the series. Images of the paintings at the Phillips Gallery can be viewed online at http://www.phillipscollection.org/collection/migration-series/.

Ask students to spend some time looking at these pictures and then create their own stories, in words or pictures, of an individual or family moving from the rural South to an urban city during the Great Migration.

VISUAL ART — STUDY OF SYMBOLISM
Throughout her play, Hansberry uses many symbols: Lena’s plant, George Murchison’s white shoes, Asagai’s Nigerian robes, and money for Walter Lee. Divide the class into small groups and assign one symbol to each group. Ask students to discuss their symbol and then report to the entire class what it reveals to the audience about the dreams and values of the character to which it is assigned. Then ask each student to make a collage showing the symbols that best represent his or her own life.

ACTING 1 — FAMILY STORIES
Ask students to stand in a circle with the teacher in the center. Tell students to face the outside of the circle and close their eyes so they cannot see anyone. Ask them to think about their household, where they live, and those who are in charge of making family decisions. Whoever it is — be it mom, dad, grandma, someone else — what is the thing they say most in the house? What is the thing they say over and over again?

Once students have chosen the line, ask them to open their eyes and face back into the center of the circle. Tell the students to imagine they you are playing them and they are playing the role of that leader of the household. On a count of three, ask them to all say the line they chose to you. They should look directly at you and use as much emotion as possible as they deliver their lines all at once. Repeat this several times, encouraging them to use more and more emotion.

Next, ask students to add a gesture. Coach them to think about what this person looks like when they say this line — do they point, put hands on their hips, open their arms wide? Repeat with everyone saying their lines together again, and adding the gesture. Experiment with different levels of volume. Bigger gestures with bigger voices. Once the gesture and voice are as big as they can be, go
around the circle as each student does their performance one at a time.

The final step is improvisational acting. Invite two student actors to come to the center of the circle. Ask student A to perform his or her line and gesture and Student B to respond as the family member who is hearing the line. Encourage Student B to act in a genuine way when s/he hears the line. Encourage the two actors to improvisationally build the scene.

**Variation:** Do this process using characters from *A Raisin in the Sun*.

### ACTING 2 — SCENE STUDY

Choose students to direct and act out or read scenes with great dramatic tension from the play. Ask students to identify:

- **Objective:** What does my character want?
- **Tactics:** What are they doing to get what they want?
- **Stakes:** What is at risk for my character? What is the best thing that could happen if they succeed or the worst thing that could happen if they fail in achieving the objective?

**Suggested scenes:**
- The argument over spending the insurance money
- Beneatha’s argument with her mother over the existence of God
- Mama’s announcement that she has made a down payment on a house in Clybourne Park
- Mama entrusts Walter with the money
- Walter refuses Lindner’s offer

**Variation:** Compare and contrast scenes from *A Raisin in the Sun* with scenes from *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris. Are there similarities between the characters' objectives, tactics, and stakes in the two plays? What themes appear in both?
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

- *A Raisin in the Sun* (film — 1961)
- *A Raisin in the Sun* (made for TV movie — 2008)
- *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* by Lorraine Hansberry (1969)
- *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* by Lorraine Hansberry (1965)
- *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris (2010)
- *Luck of the Irish* by Kirsten Greenidge (2011)
- Chicago History Museum (www.chicagohistory.org)
- Chicago’s DuSable Museum of African American History (www.dusablemuseum.org/)
- City of Chicago (www.cityofchicago.org)
- Phillips Gallery’s Jacob Lawrence Collection (www.phillipscollection.org)