



# Educator Resources

**A** **EBONY**  
**REPERTORY**  
**THEATRE**  
PRODUCTION OF

**RAISIN**  
**IN THE**  
**SUN**

By **Lorraine Hansberry**  
Directed by **Phylicia Rashad**

January 19–February 19, 2012  
Kirk Dougals Theatre

# Welcome

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Center Theatre Group is excited to have you and your students join us for *A Raisin in the Sun*.

A great play raises questions about the human condition, and a great educational experience allows students an opportunity to reflect upon those questions and begin to discover their own answers. To that end the material in Center Theatre Group's Student Discovery Guide and Educator Resources raise questions: What is a home? Is it a physical place? The people you live with? A feeling? What does it mean to be a family? Why do we sometimes struggle to communicate with the very people we are closest to? What dreams does your family have? Are they the same as your own individual dreams? Our goal is to provide you with a variety of entry points into *A Raisin in the Sun* so that you can choose what best suits you and your students.

The Educator Resources and Student Discovery Guide are companion pieces, designed to help you prepare your students to see the play and to follow-up the performance with options for discussion, reflection and creativity.

We have organized the Educator Resources into the following sections:

## Student Discovery Guide

The Student Discovery Guide provides students with background information about the play and the subject matter, as well as questions for individual reflection. Written to be student-driven, the Discovery Guide helps prepare your students for the performance.

## About This Play

This section includes a detailed synopsis of the play.

## Comprehension

This section includes background information about the subject matter of the play. We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.



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Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

## Connection

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives, and the world we live in. Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

## Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express. Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *A Raisin in the Sun*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

We know the hard work and dedication that it takes to bring students to see theatre. These materials are designed to support you in making the most of that experience. We applaud your passion for sharing theatre with your students, and thank you for sharing your students with all of us at Center Theatre Group. We look forward to seeing you at *A Raisin in the Sun*!

# About

## *A Raisin in the Sun*

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### Scene by Scene Synopsis

#### Act I

##### Scene 1

The Younger family lives in an over-utilized apartment. There's no private bathroom, but there are two bedrooms and a living area. Ruth wakes up, cooks, and feeds her young son Travis. Ruth and husband Walter Lee bicker over breakfast and an insurance check. The Youngers are expecting an insurance check for the death of Walter Lee's father. Travis asks for fifty cents (in today's money that's about \$5). Ruth tells him no, but Walter Lee gives him a dollar to spite Ruth. Travis leaves and Walter Lee talks about the liquor store that he would like to open with his business partners. This causes the couple to argue since he wants to use the insurance money to do this. Walter Lee's sister, Beneatha, enters from the bedroom. She's waiting to use the communal bathroom. We quickly learn that the two siblings are often at odds. Walter Lee doesn't believe Beneatha should go to medical school because she's a woman. Her tuition will make a dent into the insurance check. We learn that they are expecting a life insurance check for \$10,000 (which would be approximately \$92,872 in 2012). Walter Lee goes to work. Lena, the family Matriarch, enters and Ruth argues for Walter Lee to get some of the money for his liquor store. Lena won't have any part of that; she plans to use the money for Beneatha's education and a down payment on a house. Lena notices Ruth isn't feeling well and advises her to stay home. Beneatha talks about not getting married, and that she doesn't believe in God. Lena slaps her and makes Beneatha profess her faith in God. Beneatha leaves and Lena goes to water her plant. When she turns around, she finds Ruth lying on the ground unconscious.

#### Act 1

##### Scene 2

The next morning is cleaning day. Walter receives a call from his business partner Willy Harris. He says that he'll have the money soon. Lena gathers that Ruth is pregnant. Beneatha invites her friend Asagai over, even though the house is turned upside down. Ruth reveals that she has gone to see the doctor and she is indeed two months pregnant. Asagai arrives and gives Beneatha Nigerian robes and records. He brings up the matter about straightening her hair. Asagai leaves. The mail arrives, but before Lena opens it, she wants Ruth to clarify which doctor she went to see. The money becomes less important



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than the fact that Ruth has gone to see an abortionist. Walter Lee returns, excited about the possibility of seeing the insurance check. Lena reveals that Ruth is pregnant and thinking about getting rid of it. Ruth tells him that she's already put five dollars down on the abortion. Walter Lee is not happy about any of this. He goes to the bar.

## Act 2

### Scene 1

Beneatha has on the Nigerian robe and plays her new Nigerian record. She sings and dances. Walter Lee enters. He's drunk. He dances too. George Murchinson enters. He's taking Beneatha to the theatre. He asks her to change because he doesn't want to be embarrassed. Beneatha takes off her headdress and reveals her natural hair which causes a commotion. She then goes off with Ruth to change. Walter Lee and George talk. It's clear from their interaction that these two men are from different classes. Once Beneatha and George leave, Ruth and Walter Lee begin bickering again. This time, however, their bickering ends with a sweet kiss. Lena enters. She's been gone most of the day. She brings Travis in close to her and tells him that she bought a house for the family. Walter Lee is outraged. Lena reveals that the house is in a White neighborhood. This is a crushing blow to Walter Lee's dreams.

## Act 2

### Scene 2

Beneatha and George return from the theatre. George doesn't want to engage in a political conversation with her. Beneatha is turned off by his attitude toward social inequality. The Youngers receive a call from Mrs. Arnold. Mrs. Arnold employs Walter Lee as her family chauffeur. She tells them that he has been absent for three days and they're about to find someone else. This is shocking to both Ruth and Lena. Walter Lee defiantly tells them that he hasn't been going to work and he's proud of it. He's been able to see and understand new things about the world. Lena sees what her actions are doing to her son. She gives him an envelope with \$6,500 in it. She wants him to put \$3,000 away for Beneatha's schooling and the rest under his name. Walter Lee turns to Travis and shares with him his dream.

## Act 2

### Scene 3

Ruth, Beneatha, and Walter Lee are doing some last minute packing. Everyone is happy. Walter Lee took Ruth to a movie. Karl Linder, a representative from the Clybourne Park Neighborhood Association, knocks on their door. Mr. Linder explains that his association doesn't want them to move in and are prepared to buy the house back for more than it was sold for. The Youngers proudly let him know that they are not interested in his offer. Lena arrives. She's immediately told the story about Mr. Linder and then she's showered with gifts. They get a knock at the door. It's for Walter Lee. His business partner, Bobo, has some bad news. Bobo informs Walter Lee that Willy Harris has run off with all their liquor store money. Bobo leaves. Lena asks Walter Lee if all the money is gone. He tells her yes.

## Act 3

Asagai asks Beneatha to go with him to Africa. Beneatha says she will consider it. Asagai leaves. Walter Lee tells his family that he has invited Mr. Linder back and he's going to accept the offer. He's going to put on a show for "The Man". This is very upsetting to the women. Beneatha is disgusted with Walter Lee, but Lena advocates for him. She expects Beneatha to support her brother even at his lowest. Mr. Linder arrives. Walter Lee is prepared to perform and take the offer, but Lena has a trick up her sleeve. She forces Travis to watch his father. Walter Lee cannot take Mr. Linder's offer. He has too many dreams for his son. The moving day is back on. Things lighten back up when the movers arrive. Everyone leaves, but Lena. She has one last moment in the apartment. She takes her plant and goes downstairs.

# Comprehension

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section includes background information about the setting and subject matter of the play.

We have selected the information that most directly connects to or informs what happens in the play. This section furthers and deepens the background information provided in the Student Discovery Guide. This section can be shared before the play and/or discussed after the performance. It can also be used to provide research topics for your classroom.

## LANGSTON HUGHES

James Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902. His parents separated because his father wanted to leave the United States to escape the extreme racism. He ended up settling in Mexico. Hughes' mother eventually left him with his grandmother, who raised him until he was thirteen. Hughes then returned to his mother, and her new husband, and lived in Illinois and Ohio. He began writing while attending high school in Lincoln, IL. He was one of two Black students in his class. He was designated as class poet.

Hughes spent a year with his father in Mexico after graduating from high school. He wanted to attend Columbia University to study writing. His father, however, didn't want him to attend a university in the United States. Instead, he wanted him to study engineering abroad. He refused to pay for college in the United States because of racism. Eventually, Hughes and his father came to an agreement. He could attend Columbia as long as he studied engineering. But, his father was right. Hughes dropped out of Columbia after a year due to his experiences with racism.

Langston Hughes was first recognized as an important literary figure during the "Harlem Renaissance." It was a literary, artistic, cultural, and intellectual movement that began in Harlem, New York after World War I, and ended during the Great Depression, around 1935. Throughout this era, significant issues affecting the lives of African Americans were brought to the forefront via various forms of literature, art, music, drama, painting, sculpture, movies, and protests.

Playwright Lorraine Hansbury borrowed the title of her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, from a line in the poem "Harlem" by Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes' literary career took many shapes. He was known as a poet, novelist, short story writer, playwright, song lyricist, radio writer, translator, author of juvenile books, and lecturer. Before becoming a successful writer, his jobs included assistant cook, launderer, and busboy. He worked as a seaman on voyages to Africa and Europe. He lived at various times in Mexico, France, Italy, Spain, and the Soviet Union. He was the Madrid correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro-American* in 1937. He was a visiting professor in creative writing at Atlanta University in 1947. He was also the Poet in Residence for the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago in 1949.

Hughes had great faith in humanity and hoped for a world in which people could sanely, and with understanding, live together. In the racially turbulent latter years of his life, this belief led to a decline in his popularity. However, Hughes never lost his conviction that “*most* people are generally good, in every race and in every country where I have been.”

## AU NATUREL

Hair and skin color can be contentious issues in Black America. Most Black Americans are of mixed heritage and ethnicity. During slavery, they were forced to procreate at the will of their masters. This resulted in many mixed-race Black Americans with varied hair texture, skin color, and physical attributes. In this abusive society, lighter skinned Blacks with straighter hair became the ideal of beauty because they were often given work preference and had greater opportunities to become free.

By the 1950's, these preferences had transitioned into a commercial phenomenon. Now that there was indoor plumbing for Black people, they could wash regularly, which lessened the occurrence of scalp disease. This meant that women could grow healthy hair. But, the beauty ideal was still straight hair. So Black women wore wigs and straightened their hair to conform.

Before the pinnacle of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, and the explosion of natural hairstyles like Afros, braiding, and cornrows, Avant-Garde artists adopted natural hair. Musicians like Nina Simone wore the Au Naturel hair style which is the forerunner of the Afro. It's a shorter hairstyle that forms a halo around the head. They adopted this because it was the preferred hairstyle of 19th Century Black American and British intellectuals.

When Beneatha chooses to "go natural", it's a huge deal. Bigger than what we might be able to imagine. She precedes the majority of her peers by ten years.

## DREAMS DELAYED

Frank Kameny, a leading gay rights activist, died at the age of 86. Kameny began fighting for his own rights and those of others in the 50s when his position in the military was terminated because he was gay. Recently, he had a front row seat to witness President Obama signing the bill allowing openly

gay individuals to serve in the military. He saw his work recognized and his dreams come to fruition. But what if he hadn't? Lorraine Hansberry didn't live long enough to see the results of the Civil Rights movement or the feminist movement. Many of us dream dreams that will never come true. Are they still worth having? Can they still make a difference in our lives? In the lives of others?

## Family

Lorraine Hansberry was a groundbreaker. She was a young African-American woman with a strong political point of view who succeeded in getting her message out and being recognized for it before the civil rights movement had taken root. She was a strong supporter of the East African Airlift Program, responsible, in part, for changing the way people of color might see their own cultural history, and the ways in which it influences their lives. She was also a gifted communicator who told stories that continue to resonate with an entire nation.

But Hansberry also came from a family of groundbreakers. Her parents were both active in social change in Chicago and moved their family into a White community, desegregating the area, in spite of (sometimes violent) protests and severe legal struggles. Her uncle, William Leo Hansberry, was fighting to recognize the relevance of African History, and its cultural importance in academia, at a time even less friendly to such endeavors. She was strongly influenced by political activists and great creative minds of the time including Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, and Jesse Owens.

# Connections

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides ways to explore connections between the ideas presented in the play, the students' lives, and the world we live in.

Structured thematically, each section contains questions and exercises that may be used for reflection, discussion, and/or writing prompts both before and after the performance.

## Race and Honesty

*“The play is honest. She has told the inner as well as the outer truth about a Negro family in the South Side of Chicago at the present time... That is Miss Hansberry’s personal contribution to an explosive situation in which simple honesty is the most difficult thing in the world.”*

—The New York Times, Brooks Atkinson, review of original Broadway production.

With the words “explosive situation” Brook Atkinson is referring to the racial tensions in the United States during this time period. The final line of Langston Hughes’ poem “Harlem” asks the reader to reflect on what happens to a dream deferred and questions “does it explode?”

- Do you believe that being honest is the “most difficult thing in the world” when it comes to race in America? Why?
- What is the power in simple honesty? Why is it difficult? Is it still difficult to be honest in talking about race today? Do you believe that honesty is needed to defuse or change an explosive situation?
- Do you believe that art can help defuse or change an explosive situation? How?

## The Other

*“You people.”—A Raisin in the Sun*

In *A Raisin in the Sun* we see and hear about the impact of racism including cramped housing, low wages, lack of opportunities, and the loss of dreams. But not until the character of Karl Lindner appears, do we actually witness prejudice and racism in action.

Representing the Clybourne Park Neighborhood Association, Lindner is fervent in his belief that it would be better for everyone if they all just stayed where they are supposed to be with people of their own kind. He insists that he is not racist, but in terms of the Younger family moving into the neighborhood, his objection is clearly based on race.

- Do you think people prefer to live with people just like them? Why? Why not?
- Why do we divide people into an “us” and a “them”? Is it always based on race? What other divisions make us see a person or a group as “the other”?
- Do you believe that racism is learned or innate to human beings? Have you experienced prejudice or racism in your own life?
- Do you think what we have in common is more important than our differences? Or do our differences make us who we are? Is it possible to celebrate our differences without forgetting what we share?

## Gender Roles and Expectations

Walter Lee and Beneatha, in addition to loving their family, dream of aspirations outside the family. Mama and Ruth are focused on the family unit flourishing. Do you think one is more important than the other? What do you see as the way to balance aspirations and family, if they are not one and the same?

It might be said that Mama is a Matriarch, Ruth is dedicated to supporting Walter Lee, and Beneatha is seeking independence from poverty and traditional roles of women serving men. When Beneatha accepts Asagai’s love as he presents it, (going to Africa with him), how do you feel about this? Mama eventually supports the man in her life, her son Walter Lee, by giving him the trust and financial support that will empower him. Do you see these choices by the three women as influenced by their gender roles, or simply as family supporting family? Is there overlap? How so?

Ruth suggests to Mama that she should spend the insurance money on herself and travel. How would you feel about doing that today if it was you? Do you feel there are perceptions people have if you travel on your own? What does it mean to you if a man is traveling alone? A woman? Is a woman’s obligation to her family different than a man’s? How would you define the obligation?

- How would your life be different if you were the opposite gender?
- Is there anything you feel you could do that you can’t do now?
- Is there something your gender allows you to do that you value? Do you think you would lose anything by being the opposite gender?
- Do you feel that equal importance and respect is given to both genders in your community and school?

- What is a valuable lesson an adult of the same gender has given you about being a man or a woman?
- What are your needs and dreams as a person? Would they exist regardless of your gender?

Lorraine Hansberry writes the following stage direction about Travis softening to his mother Ruth after being mad at her: “The masculinity and gruffness start to fade at last.” What might some of the basic assumptions and implications about masculinity be here? Where do we get these from? In what ways do you think they’re accurate or not accurate?

What does Mama allowing Walter Lee to have the insurance money do to his concept of himself?

What does Walter Lee teach Travis he should do to become a man? Do you agree with his ideas?

Mama says the following to Beneatha: “You ain’t got the pride you was born with.” What do you think the pride Mama wants Beneatha to have looks like? What do you think Asagai means when he says “for a woman it should be enough”?

Mama tells Walter Lee “It’s dangerous son...when a man goes outside his home to look for peace.” Do you think this concept is related to gender? Do you agree with Mama’s statement? Where do you go to look for peace?

Walter Lee asks George “...but they teaching you how to be a man? How to take over and run the world?” What do you think Walter’s concept of being a man is based upon? What is your conception of what it means to be a man?

- If you were Asagai, and you loved Beneatha, write a scene or monologue on what your response would be when she says she can find the kind of feelings Asagai has for her anywhere.
- If you were Beneatha, and Asagai told you “for a woman it should be enough,” write a scene or monologue with what your response would be.
- Research the Ashanti empires and Songhay civilizations George Murchison refers to, and share what the roles of men and women were in these cultures. What aspects do you think are worth emulating today? What are the limitations?

# Creativity

Comprehension | Connections | Creativity

This section provides opportunities for your students to use theatre to explore and express.

Theatre activities are included that examine both specific artistic aspects of the production, as well as delve deeper into the ideas and questions raised by *A Raisin in the Sun*. The activities and information in this section can be used both before and after the performance.

## Cultural Mapping

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.
- Students will be introduced to *A Raisin in the Sun* and begin to reflect on the play.

### EXERCISE

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle. Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify Los Angeles in the space. Have students who were born in Los Angeles gather in that place. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south, or west of Los Angeles). Each group must determine two additional things that they have in common. Report back to the whole class. (Example: The members of the “north” group all like pizza and are the oldest in their families.)

Repeat activity using other divisions such as:

- Oldest, middle, youngest, only child.
- Speak one language, two languages, etc.
- Quotes from the production:

Ask each student to stand by the quote that most intrigues them. Discuss in the group why they chose that quote. What intrigues them about it?

- “When it gets like that in life—you just got to do something different, push out and do something bigger.”
- “In order to create the universal, you must pay very close attention to the specific.”
- “And we are very proud...and we will try to be good neighbors.”
- “Ain't many girls who decide—to be a doctor.”
- “But they teaching you how to be a man?”
- “There is always something left to love.”

## Tableau/Frozen Picture

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will practice using their bodies to communicate an idea or theme.
- Students will reflect on the varied interpretations of the theme.
- Students will reflect on *A Raisin in the Sun* through a physical exploration of its themes.

### EXERCISE

Divide students into pairs. Student A is the artist. Student B is the statue. Have student A create a statue out of B on the theme of “the future”. Examples: Flying cars, world peace, destroying the environment, graduating from college. Statues can be realistic or symbolic, personal or global. Have each student title their statue and present to the class. Repeat exercise with B as the artist and A as the statue.

Repeat with the themes of home, family, dreams, racism, oppression, identity, man, woman.

Have each student sculpt an image that represents one of these themes. Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant to the characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Are they similar or very different?

## Raisins Drying in the Sun: A Poetry Exercise

### CENTRAL QUESTION:

Can dreams disappear or evaporate?

### VOCABULARY:

defer<sup>1</sup> |di'fər|

*verb* ( **-ferred** , **-ferring** ) [ trans. ]

put off (an action or event) to a later time; postpone.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The title of the play *A Raisin in the Sun* comes from the following poem by writer, Langston Hughes. Read the poem aloud as a choral read with the class.

**“Harlem” by Langston Hughes**

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?

**DISCUSSION:**

What is Langston Hughes writing about?  
Can dreams really perform these actions? Why?  
Have you had dreams that haven't come true? Are you worried some won't?  
Why do you think some dreams don't come true?  
Can we change the outcome?

**ACTIVITY:**

Use two clean, inexpensive window screens purchased from a hardware store. Ask students to lay one screen on a flat table outside that receives a lot of sunlight. Spread fresh, washed grapes all across the screen. Then cover the grapes with the second screen.

During the same class period for an entire week, students should observe how the grapes change each day when exposed to sunlight.

In a writing journal, students should complete these three sentence observations on a daily basis:

1. Today, our grapes \_\_\_\_\_.
2. When I look at them they make me think of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. If these raisins could talk about dreams, today they would say \_\_\_\_\_.

At the end of the week, students should have 21 new lines. Using only the words/phrases they wrote to fill in the daily blanks in the 3 lines above, the students can construct a 21 line poem by writing down the sentences/sentence fragments in any order they choose. Slight re-writing is allowed. Students share their ‘Dried Raisin’ poems aloud with the class.

CLOSURE:

What images came to mind as you heard fellow students read their poems?  
What do we dream about in this class based on what we heard?

## The Hansberry Case: An activity exploring a true courtroom drama

CENTRAL QUESTION:

Where does inspiration come from?

VOCABULARY:

covenant ['kɒvənənt]

*noun*

an agreement.

- Law a contract drawn up by deed.

INTRODUCTION:

Back in 1937, Lorraine Hansberry's father, Carl Hansberry, bought a home in a White Chicago neighborhood. He openly defied a covenant that the white neighbors had signed to ban Black families from buying property in their community. A White female neighbor (Anna Lee) sued Carl for ignoring the covenant. Carl took it to the Supreme Court (*Hansberry v. Lee*, 1940) which reversed the decision...but only on a legal technicality. Not because the covenant was illegal and racist.

Playwright Lorraine Hansberry was only seven years old when the feud between her parents and the White neighbors began.

Q. How do you think Lorraine Hansberry felt as a child watching her parents go through this fight with the neighbors?

Returning to the central question, where does inspiration come from? How do you think this case may have inspired Lorraine to write a play?

**ACTIVITY, PART 1**

In the Fall of 1940, the US Supreme Court heard the case and made a decision on November 12, 1940.

Nine justices heard both sides. In some ways, a court room is much like a theatre performance. There are people, in a place, who are solving problems.

Visit this link: <http://supreme.justia.com/us/311/32/case.html>

With a partner, take a look at this decision delivered by the Supreme Court in *Hansberry v. Lee*.

In your journal, identify all the people, places, and problems you can find mentioned in the case. This is an original document, don't worry, you aren't lawyers. It's okay that there are many words you may not understand. Do your best. It's part of the adventure!

**ACTIVITY, PART 2**

Now, let's do a performance. Let's create a mock courtroom. To learn first a bit more about how the United States Supreme Court works, looks, and sounds, here is an optional video that can be used to study character, setting, costume, props and sound:

OPTIONAL VIEWING: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/>

Judges seating: Arrange the classroom so there are 9 chairs at the front of the room.

Plaintiff and Defendants: Two tables facing the row of 9 chairs with a 2 seats each.

Audience/Press: Arrange remaining rows to accommodate the rest of the class.

The teacher casts 9 students to play Supreme Court Justices, 4 students to play Plaintiffs and Defendants, and a few other remaining students as reporters and audience members.

If possible, provide costumes and props. Graduation robes for the judges, suit jackets for the lawyers, reporter pads and pens for the journalists.

Explain how the classroom has become a “representational set” just like sets used on stage.

Q. What does “representational set” mean?

Using an excerpt from *Hansberry v. Lee* as a script, students perform a part of the actual trial: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/us-supreme-court-transcript-of-record-hansberry-v-lee-us-supreme-us-supreme-court/1107255636>

CLOSURE:

Each of the 9 justices read aloud one line below, including the title and author.

1. Harlem
2. by Langston Hughes
3. What happens to a dream deferred?
4. Does it dry up like *a raisin in the sun*?
5. Or fester like a sore-- And then run?
6. Does it stink like rotten meat?
7. Or crust and sugar over-- like a syrupy sweet?
8. Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.
9. Or does it explode?

## A New Beginning?

Mama: “...*You what supposed to be my beginning again.*  
*You—what supposed to be my harvest...*”  
—*A Raisin In The Sun*

In *A Raisin In The Sun*, Mama invests her energies into raising her children and grandchild so they can create a better life than her own. She reminds us that the next generation has the potential to start again and not have to live the hardships of the prior generation—her slave owned-share cropping generation. However, Mama sees they are at a crossroads.

Aim: To explore the questions, “Will they move towards a new beginning, or take a payoff and keep living as they have?”

Skills: Writing skills; practice in capturing their thoughts, feelings images, their imagination with paper and pen.

Eventually, this multi-tiered exercise also includes practice with discussion skills of listening and expressing oneself within a group. Team work to express through physical-izing shapes and gestures (sculpting) with the body and building poetry based on the sculptures are also practiced.

**PART I: WRITING TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING; IF YOU CAN WRITE IT, YOU CAN REALIZE IT!**

Let's honor our creativity and explore what we dream for ourselves.

Ask the students to take out a pen or pencil and a piece of paper or journal to explore their thoughts and feelings on paper. In addition to scripting out thoughts, remind the students that drawing colors, imagery, or describing sounds and sensations/feeling are also valid expressions to be honored and brought out onto the page.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. First, ask the students to take some quiet moments by breathing and noticing their inner voice/thoughts.
2. Then, begin to pose the questions: What would you do? Start a new beginning or take a payoff? Why?
3. Have you or your family experienced a new beginning or starting over? When? What happened?
4. We experience the opportunity for new beginnings throughout our entire lives. If you could create a new beginning now, what would it be?
5. Soon you will be at a crossroads when you graduate from high school, what do you care about? How can you incorporate that into what you envision as a new beginning for your future?

**FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION:**

After giving the students time to explore these questions on paper, ask if anyone would like to share their writings and/or drawings with the class. Allow a discussion to unfold.

Before attending the show, remind the students of these questions. After the show, check in to see if experiencing the play affected their answers, or not?

**PART II: SCULPTING THE FUTURE; FIRST STEPS TO IMAGINING AND REALIZING YOUR VISION!**

**Aim:** Utilizing what the students discovered in their writing prompts, let's bring their expressions to life!

**Skills:** Teamwork and honoring their creative impulse to explore their potential. With a partner, the students will sculpt each other into what they envision for the future. A good jumping off point would be to sculpt images of what they care about, hope for, or want to do to realizing their vision/future.

1. Pair up. (The teacher can pair up their students or ask them to find a partner.)
2. Decide who is "A" and who is "B."
3. Instruct the "A's" to sculpt their partner into some aspect of their vision; what they care about, hope for, or want. Remind them they can refer to their writing prompt to inspire their sculpting. Ask the artists to name their sculpture, their work of art.
4. Offering a time limit can motivate the artist to focus and find their way with purpose.
5. Call time and one by one, have each artist share the name of their sculpture and brief description.
6. Switch and repeat the exercise with "B" as the sculptor and "A" as the one being sculpted.
7. This sculptor should be given the same amount of time as the other group if at all possible.

To take this exercise even further, group the students into pairs (four students total, or more depending on the total number of students).

1. Ask each member of the group to demonstrate their sculpture from the exercise above.
2. Then, ask each member to choose and speak a phrase from their writing prompts. If a student didn't write words, but drew imagery instead, encourage them to share about their creativity. This student can either create a phrase or incorporate their drawing into Step #3.
3. Once everyone has shared their phrase, direct the group to set about utilizing their phrases as spoken word along with their sculptures to present a poem and group sculpture/image of their vision. Their piece

should continue to explore what they care about, hope for, and/or want for their lives. Encourage the groups to be creative in how they present their poem and group sculpture.

4. Direct the group to choose a new name for their piece and/or theme to focus their creativity. (The initial phrases and sculptures may evolve as the group works to find their message/theme together.)
5. Ask each group to share their spoken word/sculpture pieces.
6. Enjoy the class discussions that will arise from this activity.

## The Check Is In The Mail!

Mama: *“Somebody would of thought my children done all but starved to death the way they talk about money here late. Child, we got a great big old check coming tomorrow.”*

Ruth: *(Sincerely, but also self-righteously) “Now that’s your money. It ain’t got nothing to do with me. We all fell like that—Walter and Bennie and me—even Travis.”*

Mama: *(Thoughtfully, and suddenly very far away) “Ten thousand dollars.”—A Raisin In the Sun*

This is the amount the family anticipates and eventually receives from Mr. Younger’s life insurance policy when he dies: \$10,000. This becomes known near the start of the play. Does your mind start to wander and think about how you would spend or save \$10,000 if it were coming to you?

Receiving \$10,000 in 1959 would be like receiving \$90,000 today. This tells us \$10,000 must have felt like a great sum of money for the Younger Family.

### EXERCISE:

Aim: To review the various financial strategies explored in *A Raisin In The Sun*, by discussing how each family member might spend the \$10,000 check that is to arrive. Our aim is to also examine the value of money and to practice creating a budget. Each person practices listing down their needs and wants. To examine what needs are versus wants. To create a vision through the language of dollars and cents; allowing one to plan towards their dreams in relation to money.

**Skills:** Budgeting: The beginnings of learning to plan and list needs and wants with a set amount of money in mind. To practice talking about money is an important set of skills to prepare the students for adult life. Discussion; the practice of taking turns and expressing oneself within a group is included in this exercise.

## The \$10,000 Spending Game

Begin by asking the students to get out a blank sheet of paper or their journal and a pen or pencil.

1. Write on the chalk board “\$10,000.00”
2. Tell the students that they have just been gifted \$10,000.00 and they are to spend every cent by listing what they would buy or how they would spend this money. They should list each item and an estimated cost associated with it.
3. Ask students to share what they listed, what they would buy or how they spent the money.
4. Then, surprise! Write “\$10,000.00 on the chalk board again and to the right start a total figure of “\$20,000.00. Ask the students to continue by listing what else they would purchase or how they would spend this additional \$10,000.00. Again ask them to list the items with the estimated cost associated with each item.
5. Continue in this fashion where the students don’t know if you will gift another \$10,000 or not.
6. When \$90,000.00 is reached, remind the students this is roughly the amount equivalent to \$10,000.00 in 1959. Ask the students to notice how it feels to have listed all that they have up to this point.
7. Allow surprise and continue until you reach \$100,000 or until you reach the end of the class period.
8. Allow the students to leave and discuss their thoughts after they return the day or two later. Ask them what they thought, felt, and if they had discussions with friends and/or family.
9. Notice and discuss if they met needs or wants first when they listed what they would buy.
10. It is possible to start this exercise and return to it for a few minutes each class period during the week. It can be an ongoing project to practice listing the price of an item and to account for it and stay within the amount “gifted.” See if what they budget changes over time.

11. Ask the students if they started to allot money to a savings account. Or if there are expenditures other than items they “want.” Do you allot money to take care of your family, or friends? Are you a risk taker with money? Or are you conservative and do you play it safe with money? This exercise could be a wonderful way for students to plan and practice budgeting in ways or for things they might not otherwise be able to realize right away.

POST-SHOW REVIEW AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How did Walter want to spend the money? How did you feel when you found out he had been swindled? What would you do in his case?
2. Did Ruth want to spend the money? Do you remember what she encouraged Mama to do with the money? Would you have encouraged her to take a trip or save the money, or spend it any other way?
3. What about Beneatha’s name? What does it sound like? What do you think Lorraine Hansberry had in mind when she named a character with a name that sounds like “beneath ya?” When you’re not the oldest and you’re a young black woman during that time, what dreams do you or can you have? If you were Beneatha how would you spend the money?
4. Travis is much younger, what kind of messages is he getting about money and how to spend it? Do you relate to Travis in any way? Should Travis’ future be considered when the family thinks about what to do with the money? How would you spend the money if you were Travis?

If time permits, divide the students into groups of three to four and ask them to create two tableaus based on one of the characters. **In the first tableau explore what happened to that character regarding the \$10,000 check. In the second tableau have the group explore how they would have that character spend the money.**

Count down the group, 5,4,3,2,1 and have them form their first tableau and then the second tableau. Encourage the other students to share what they have seen in each tableau. Were they able to see what the tableau group intended?

It can be interesting to play the \$10,000 Spending Game daily by adding \$10,000 each day and having the students add to their on-going budget. Allow discussion once a week for a continued process with this game.

## Family

*A Raisin in the Sun* is about (among other things) family. It seems evident that Hansberry's own family had a strong influence on both her life and her art.

The following exercises are designed to explore how a family support system can help to influence and strengthen one's own endeavors and the pursuit of one's dreams.

### FULL GROUP WORK:

What is Family? What is the American Dream?

- Ask your students to consider and discuss what family means to them. List the elements that emerge on the board
- Ask for a single volunteer to step strike a pose representing something that represents one element of Family.
- One by one, have students add onto this original pose, slowly creating a larger picture.
- When the picture feels finished, ask the rest of the class to notice the different elements as they appear physically in the frozen picture. Do they look the way they imagined?
  - ◇ Ask one of the students in the audience to give the picture a title.
  - ◇ Ask students to consider the picture from different perspectives and angles.
  - ◇ Without breaking from their poses, ask individuals inside the picture to say a single word expressing what they represent as you gently tap them on the shoulder.
  - ◇ Ask students from the audience to replace certain elements they may have different ideas about, exchanging the pieces for different images.
  - ◇ Discuss how each of us has individual images and ideas that might translate into a staged picture, making theatre an effective medium for the sharing of ideas.
  - ◇ Repeat the above exercise, this time focusing on the following question: What is the American Dream?

## Generational Differences:

- Briefly discuss how times have changed since our great grandparents' era. Speculate on how things may be different when our children and grandchildren are grown up.
- Break the class into small groups of approximately 6 students.
- Assign each group a time period (Great grandparents, grandparents, parents, ourselves, our children, etc.)
- Ask each group to have a brief discussion specifically about their assigned era and what the people of that time dreamed of (or might dream of in the future) for achieving a better life.
- Ask each group to create a tableau representing the dreams of the people in their assigned era.
- Have each group share their tableau.
- Ask the remaining students to comment from the outside on what they see.
- When all the groups have shared, discuss the differences between the students' own dreams and the dreams of the generation they were responsible for. Do these dreams stray from the original definition of the American Dream we created earlier?

## Find the Dream:

Divide students into small groups. Each group will be given a character from *A Raisin in the Sun*. In their groups, the students will analyze a main character's dream throughout the play. Each group will look at the following:

- A. Define the characters' dream.
- B. Find three textual examples that develop and support the defined dream.
- C. How does the dream fit or differ from the American dream?
- D. What obstacles does he or she have in achieving their dream?
- E. Is the American Dream valuable or hurtful to this character?

Each group will have 5 min to present their interpretation and supporting text on their character.

## Groundbreakers:

- In the pursuit of our dreams, we face adversity. Lorraine Hansberry had to contend with prejudice based on race, sex and age. The following exercises are designed to explore physically what it feels like to have someone else in control of your destiny.

## Yes! No!

- Pair students in like-sized couples. These pairings will remain throughout the lesson and depend on concentration and safe behavior.
- Facing one another in their own space (two parallel lines works well), students make eye contact with their partner (this naturally induces giggling, and the instructor may have to allow for some silliness to play itself out).
- When ready, student A declares “Yes!” to which, student B simply responds by declaring “No!”
- Students should repeat this basic line of communication, altering volume, inflection, tone, and tempo.
- Once students have practiced the verbal combat back and forth, they are ready to add some physical contact: Students should grasp the forearm of their partner firmly.
- Students now begin a slow sawing motion, flexing and extending their arms while they alternately rock forward and backward on their feet. (Note: Students must maintain eye contact throughout this exercise, always being sure that their partner is safe and comfortable with the action. This should look like a dance rather than a tug o’ war.)
- Now students combine the verbal “Yes!” and “No!” commands with the physical movement, increasing volume and energy while maintaining eye contact.

## Mirror/ Power/ Follow or Lead

- Students pair up two feet from each other.
- Student A places the palm of his/her hand 8 inches from Student B's face.
- THE STUDENTS ARE NOT TO TOUCH AT ANY TIME. The exercise should be performed in total silence. The students are to pretend that a string runs from the palm of Student A's hand to Student B's.
- Student A explores the space with his/her palm by moving it back and forth, up, down and around. Student B must follow so that imaginary string will not break.
- Start by having the students mirror each other and encourage them to move about the space, avoiding collision. Have Student A manipulate Student B into grotesque shapes and images. Then switch positions and have A follow B.
- Discussions : How did it make you feel when you were the person leading or following?
- What do you think would happen if you added another person and had to lead and follow at the same time?
- Where are some of places where we see a powerful struggle take place in *A Raisin in the Sun*?

## A Blueprint for a Better Tomorrow:

- Draw a blueprint of your neighborhood.
- Indicate the "heart" of the neighborhood or where all the action happens.
- Indicate the safest place of the neighborhood.
- Indicate the scariest place in the neighborhood.
- Indicate where you spend most of your time (where kids play, where families go to eat, where school is, etc.)
- Now think of ways to make it better.
- What could you add to make the neighborhood better?

## Cultivation, Care and Growth: Plant Imagery in *A Raisin in the Sun*

*“Lord, if this little old plant don’t get more sun than it’s been getting it ain’t never going to see spring again.” (Mama)*

When creating a story for the theater, playwrights make very specific decisions about what their characters do, and don’t do. The smallest detail can be very powerful. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry chose to have the character of Mama Lena check on a potted plant when she initially enters the action of the play. This is the very first thing the audience members see Mama do.

- What does this action signify to you?
- What might it say about that character? What kind of person takes care of plants?
- Who in your family would be the person to check on a plant growing in your home?

### QUESTION FOR A POST-SHOW LESSON:

- Why do you think Lorraine Hansberry chose this action for this particular character?

*Ruth: ...You just got strong-willed children and it takes a strong woman like you to keep ‘em in hand.*

*Mama: They spirited all right, my children. Got to admit they got spirit—Bennie and Walter. Like this little old plant that ain’t never had enough sunshine or nothing and look at it...*

*Ruth: you..sure..loves that little old thing, don’t you?...*

*Mama: Well, I always wanted me a garden like I used to see sometimes at the back of the houses down home. This plant is close as I ever got to having one.*

During the play, Mama demonstrates much concern, compassion, and care for everyone and everything around her: she irons clothing, offers her robe, tends

to the potted plant, and expresses affection for the grandson who didn't make his bed very well.

She is attempting to cultivate a thriving family.

- Cultivation, Care, Growth: How do these topics relate to your life? The lives of those around you?
- Do you have any plants in your home environment? Who takes care of them? How do they make you feel? Have you ever thought about their presence before? Why or why not?
- If you don't have any plants in or around your home, what do you imagine it would be like if you had a potted plant, or a garden, to take care of?

QUESTION FOR A POST-SHOW LESSON:

- Cultivation, Care, Growth: How are these topics addressed in the play?
  - ◇ Cite specific examples: character behavior and relationship, dialogue, elements of the plot, scenic design, etc.

Ruth: *Is there-is there a whole lot of sunlight?*

Mama: *Yes, child, there's a whole lot of sunlight.*

- What do plants need in order to survive?
- In order to *thrive*?
- What gets watered and what doesn't? How does one decide this?
- What is the effect of sunshine on plant life?
- What if a plant gets too little, or too much, sun?
- How does all of this relate to human beings?
- In the title of the play, and in the Langston Hughes poem, "Harlem," does being "in the sun" signify a positive experience or a negative one? Explain.

Not only does Mama take care of others, but she also tries to take care of herself. She works to find a balance between these dueling concerns.

- Do the people who take care of you also take care of themselves?

- What kind of care do you provide for yourself? How do you make sure your needs are met? Do you rely on others, or are you self-sufficient?

QUESTION FOR A POST-SHOW LESSON:

- How do we know that Mama takes care of herself?
- What obstacles does she encounter while trying to achieve this?

*“And there’s a yard with a little patch of dirt where I could maybe get to grow me a few flowers...”*

In the play, Mama dreams of having a garden and strives to make it a reality.

- What are your dreams?
- What steps can you take to make them become a reality?
- How is making your dreams come true related to taking care of a plant or cultivating a garden?

QUESTION FOR A POST-SHOW LESSON:

- If the Younger family members were plants and flowers in a garden, what kind of plant or flower would each character symbolize for you?

Plant imagery exists in the title, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

- What is a raisin? What kind of plant does it come from?
- What other aspects do raisins have?
- What positive aspects can we see and/or taste in them?

Plantations and cotton picking are mentioned in the play; allusions to the days and work of slavery. Compare picking cotton on a plantation to cultivating one’s own garden.

- Divide students into small groups. Half of the groups create tableaux (frozen pictures) of working on a plantation; the other groups create tableaux addressing gardening. Each tableau is presented to the class. Use this as a springboard for discussion about the similarities and differences between these two realms.

## Seeing Through Looking

*“In order to create the universal, you must pay very close attention to the specific.”*

—Lorraine Hansberry

In this lesson, we are going to pay very close attention to the specific. And we will do this through drawing.

- How does focusing on detail help us to get in touch with the universal?
- Why might it be useful, important, or even enjoyable, to focus on details?

Many students may not have been asked to draw anything for many years in class. Since students often use technology to locate and utilize pre-existing images for projects, this activity may seem novel to them and may surprise them in its engaging, creative focus. They will experience paying close attention to specific details through drawing. Ideally, they will be looking at objects in ways that they never have before. Dialogue should be conducted about how this translates to other arts disciplines and academic subjects. And the instructor should constantly remind students that this series of exercises is not about creating a “good” or “bad” drawing; it is about the experience of looking at a subject very closely and deeply.

(Note: It is suggested that the classroom teacher model the following exercises for their students by engaging the exercises while they teach them. Students love to see their teachers be creative! Even if you consider yourself a mediocre visual artist at best, your students will respect you for modeling personal courage and for taking the journey with them. And you might be surprised by how much you enjoy it!)

### EXPLORING LINES IN SPACE:

Before utilizing pencil and paper, students experience a kinesthetic exploration of drawing.

Students stand for this exercise.

- Each student identifies a specific spot in the room and points to it. (The teacher does this with them.)

- With their index fingers, students are to “draw” in the air a straight path from the point they have chosen to another point. This is defined as a “straight line.”
- The teacher instructs students to draw different kinds of straight lines (vertical, horizontal, diagonal).
- The teacher asks students to point to another spot in the room. (Teacher does this with them.)
- The teacher instructs students to draw a curved path from the chosen point to another. This is defined as a “curved line.”
- Students are asked to find yet another spot in the room and point to it. They are to draw zigzag lines, going from one point to another to another.
- Instructor asks students to find one last spot to point to. They are instructed to draw all of the different kinds of lines that have just been explored. However, when drawing a new type of line, they do not begin with a new point. This is called a “continuous line.”
- Students choose an object in the room to point to.
- Instructor asks students to trace, in the air, the exterior of this object with their index fingers. This is called a “contour.”

**PARTNER WORK:**

(Note: The following takes place with partners standing 2-3 feet apart. They are, once again, pointing and “drawing” in the air. No touching is involved.)

- Put students in pairs.
- One partner chooses to be the purple partner; the other chooses to be the green partner.
- Students stand approximately 2-3 feet across from each other.
- Begin the exercise by having purple point to a spot on the outside edge of green.
- Without touching green, purple traces the contour of green, the same way that he/she just traced the contour of the object they pointed to in the previous exercises. (Side coaching from the teacher might include: “notice every detail”; “think about all of the different lines we just explored”; “take your time.”)
- The partners switch roles and green traces purple’s contour. (Repeat above side coaching.)
- Now, green turns his/her back to purple. Purple traces green’s contour.

- Partners switch roles (purple turns back to green. Green traces purple's contour.)
- (The teacher may conduct discussion about the differences between facing your partner while drawing and not having eye contact with your partner while drawing.)
- Partners face each other again.
- Green strikes a pose. Purple draws the contour.
- And....switch!
- Final pair exercise: Green faces purple. Purple draws all of the interior lines that are seen in green, in a continuous line (do not start from a new point.) Partners switch roles.

(Note: Exploring lines in space is a good way for English language learners to gain new vocabulary. Physicalizing the above terms—straight, curving, contour, etc. —can bolster language comprehension.)

#### EXPLORING LINES ON PAPER:

*“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.”*  
—Scott Adams

Now that we have drawn in the air, let's practice on paper!

Students will have a drawing board, pencil, and paper placed in front of them. (Note: Drawing boards can be made from corrugated cardboard and large clips. Pencils should not have erasers. Each board has five pieces of paper attached to it.)

A brief introduction to the materials we will be using:

- Drawing board: Looking down at a piece of paper lying on a table distorts the perspective of the artist. Students are encouraged to take their drawing boards in hand, and hold them at an angle that makes it easy to view the paper.
- Pencils: They have no erasers. Why might that be? Solicit responses from students. Have a brief discussion about not erasing “mistakes.” Suggest that students might instead try to view “mistakes” as opportunities to learn how to improve for the next time. Or, they

might try to see them as part of the artistic journey they are taking today.

- Paper: We are not throwing any of the paper away today. All drawings will be kept as documentation of students' artistic journeys.

Now we begin to draw....

Ask students to find a point to start from on the paper (like we just did in the beginning of the lesson when we were exploring lines in the air.)

Instruct them to draw in a continuous line (one with no new starting points) a...

- vertical straight line
- horizontal straight line
- diagonal straight line
- curved line
- zigzag

Still using a continuous line, ask students to draw particular objects. Model this for students on the white board. Have one student tell you which objects to draw, and you do your best to draw...

- A cat
- A boat
- A house
- Etc.

Now, it's the students' turn as you call out objects of your choosing. When you are done calling out objects for them to draw, students sign their names at the bottoms of their papers.

(If desired, students will put their drawing boards down on their desks so that their neighbors can see their work, and they can see the work of others. However, no critique will take place. Students will merely observe.) They will take this first sheet of paper off of their drawing boards.

SEEING THROUGH LOOKING:

The teacher instructs the students to take the second sheet of paper off of their boards and hold them up in the air.

Once everyone has shown the teacher that they have the blank paper in their hands, they are instructed to crumple the paper.

The teacher gives the students the following instructions:

- Set the crumpled paper on your desk.
- Draw the contours and interior lines of the crumpled paper in a continuous line. Students may approach this in a couple of ways:
  - ◇ They may choose to only look at the object, observe the detail, and not watch what they are drawing.
  - ◇ Or they may choose to go back and forth, from looking at the object to looking at what they are drawing.
- Remember, students are drawing one continuous line. No new starting points.

Model this for students on the white board. As you are drawing the contours and interior lines of your crumpled paper, speak your process aloud: “I am going to start at this point. The first part of the contour is a straight diagonal line that is now turning into a curve as I go downward. Now I am going to draw this interior line that moves horizontally, from side to side, and it also begins to curve as I go up.” Etc.)

Students begin to draw images of the crumpled paper before them.

Give them about five minutes or so to do this.

Other side coaching could include:

- “This is not about drawing well or poorly. This exercise is about seeing as much detail as possible. We are working on making the eye, to the brain, to the hand connection.”
- “If you get lost, just do your best. Choose a place to start again.”
- “Take in as many details as possible.”

When the instructor calls time, students sign their names and put their drawing boards down. Students may silently observe the drawing of their classmates.

Students are to keep their drawings of the crumpled paper on their drawing boards.

After drawing the crumpled paper, small boxes of raisins could be distributed to the students. They would then conduct an exploration of drawing the details in the raisins, utilizing the above approach.

STILL LIFE:

*Beneatha: Mama, what are you doing?*

*Mama: Fixing my plant so it won't get hurt none on the way...*

*Beneatha: Mama, you going to take that to the new house?*

*Mama: Un-huh—*

*Beneatha: That raggedy-looking old thing?*

*Mama: It expresses ME!*

The teacher brings to the students' attention a potted plant that he/she has brought to class.

Students will be drawing as many details, as many lines, as they can see in the potted plant. They will do this in a continuous line.

However, there is a twist.

They will not be allowed to look at what they are drawing on the paper. This part of the exercise is all about looking at the plant and taking in its details.

Students will begin by lifting up the paper on their drawing board, and putting their pencils under the paper, ready to draw on the next piece of paper. (This will prevent them from looking at what they are drawing.)

Students begin drawing, in a continuous line, the contours and interior lines of the potted plant. (If the plant is small, the teacher may want to bring a few plants to the classroom so all students have a good view of at least one plant.) Allow students about five minutes to draw.

At the end of time, students sign their names and put down their drawing boards.

Students may silently observe each other's work.

Students remove both drawings from their drawing boards and start with fresh pieces of paper.

The teacher asks that they raise the hand that they usually draw with in the air, clasping their pencils.

The teacher asks them to put the pencil in the OTHER hand.

Students begin to draw, in a continuous line, the contours and interior lines of the potted plant with the hand that they are not used to using. (Allow about five minutes.)

Students sign drawings, put down drawing boards, and take note of each other's work.

Time permitting, students may now draw the plant with the hand that they usually draw with, with full visual access to the paper.

Time permitting: ask students to choose their favorite drawing. Every student will bring his/her drawing to the teacher. The teacher will post the drawings (with tape?) on the board and then conduct an analysis of each one. Side coaching might include;

Which images have similar aspects?

Which images have bolder lines?

Which images have similar use of the space on the paper?

(Try to utilize methods of critiquing so that everyone's work is acknowledged. Make this a safe space for students to express themselves in. Do not use language that indicates whether work is good or bad.)

Resources: The drawing exercises are based on work done in October of 2011 during the Inner City Arts professional development series, "Creativity in the Classroom."

## Poetry

Playwright Lorraine Hansbury borrowed the title of her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, from a line in the poem “Harlem” by Langston Hughes.

### “Harlem”

by Langston Hughes

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?

What does a “dream deferred” mean?

Langston Hughes offers us many descriptions of a dream deferred. How would you describe it? What does it mean to you?

What are your dreams for the future?

What are the dreams of your family members? If you don’t know, what do you think they would say if you asked them about their dreams?

Why do you think Lorraine Hansberry utilized this line from “Harlem” for the title of her play?

What connections do you find between the Langston Hughes poem, “Harlem,” and the play?

*“At first dreams seem impossible, then improbable, then inevitable.”*  
—Christopher Reeve

The working title of *A Raisin in the Sun* was originally *The Crystal Stair*, a phrase from another poem by Langston Hughes entitled “Mother to Son.”

## “Mother to Son”

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've 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've still goin', honey,  
I've still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177021>

Why would Hansberry have used this phrase as the title of her play?  
What might have caused her to change it to *A Raisin in the Sun*?  
Where could we find the real story about why she changed the title?

Writers such as Hughes and Hansberry used poetry and playwriting as social commentary. This is when writers use their work as a lens through which to view the world around them.

Other examples of poetry as social commentary addressing African American life in the United States:

“Equality” by Maya Angelou  
“Southern Cop” by Sterling Brown  
“Always There Are the Children” by Nikki Giovanni  
“Democracy” by Langston Hughes  
“Touching the Past” by Robert Sargent  
“On Being Brought From Africa to America” by Phillis Wheatley

## Bringing Poetry to Life

Students create a series of tableaux (frozen pictures) based upon the two Langston Hughes poems, “Harlem” and “Mother to Son.”

- Students are to work in small groups containing approximately 5 students each.
- Each group chooses one of the poems to explore.
- Once the poem is chosen, the group discusses the poem. Each member of the group is to verbally offer their thoughts about the poem to the rest of the group. (Teachers should visit the groups and scaffold this conversation: “What does the poem make you think of? How does it make you feel? Does it make you think of any experience you have had in your life? Does it make you eager to see the play? Why or why not?”)
- The group is to create three frozen pictures, or tableaux, depicting the chosen poem.
- Each series of tableaux is to have a beginning, middle, and an ending. Students should work out smooth transitions between each tableau.
- Students should be given creative freedom when working on the tableaux. They may create literal references to the poem, utilize abstract images, or draw from personal experiences that they have had that relate to the poem.
- All groups will show their work in class.

## Creating Dream Poems

The tableaux created in the exercise above will be used as a springboard for new poetry. Each student will play the role of “poet” and each small group will create a poem together.

- Before the tableaux are presented, all students will be given large strips of paper (about 2”x 8”). Each student will receive two strips for each small group that they will watch. For example, if there are five small groups, then each student receives 8 strips of paper (4 groups, 2 strips for each group).

Or

- Have students create their own strips of 2x8 paper.
- After the first group presents its series of tableaux, each audience

member is to think of two words that describe his/her reaction to the presentation. This is where everyone becomes a poet. Then he/she is to write each word on the paper strips, putting only one word on each strip.

- The students will now work in their small groups. They will share the words that they came up with. They are to create a new poem utilizing all of the descriptive words.
- All new poems will be shared in class.
- Time permitting, repeat this process with all presentations.

Creating Dream Poems adapted from an exercise learned during the Inner City Arts professional development series, “Creativity in the Classroom.”

## Family Poems

The notions of family and of dreams are two central themes in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Lorraine Hansberry tells this story through the image of Langston Hughes’ poem about a raisin shriveling up. Since a family is a unit, try writing a poem about your family comparing them to parts of a single unit/category/theme. Here are some categories to get you started: flowers, foods, spices, cultures, types of houses, rooms in houses, parts of a tree, parts of the human body, planets, countries, types of terrain, genres of movies or plays, subjects in school (i.e., math, science, sociology), mediums in fine art (oil, charcoal), types of instruments, types of cell phone carriers or cell phones, types of video games, types of drinks (Grape juice, horchata, etc.), types of computers, cars, animals, languages, hairstyles, music styles, TV shows styles, clothing styles, shoes, perfumes, sports, bikes, or political ideologies.

Write from all 5 senses (taste, touch, sight, sound, smell).

Explore who your family is, and what you hope/dream for yourselves. This might mean writing two poems, about what is, and what you hope comes to pass. This might mean poems with multiple sections. It might mean exploring what happens when the dreams are deferred, as in Hughes’ poem.

Try exploring how your family might look if their dreams come to fruition using the image/category you’ve chosen. I.e., if your family is like different pieces of furniture, perhaps they become pieces made from stronger wood, are refinished, become shiny like when they were first delivered, or they are

demolished and made into something bigger, etc. Perhaps ideas and images for how to make the dreams come to be will emerge as you write. Share with class if desired.

DISCUSS:

Did writing this poem teach you anything about your family?

Did it give you more understanding for another member of your family?

Did it reveal anything to you about yourself and your own dreams?

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Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

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### FUNDER CREDITS FOR A RAISIN IN THE SUN

The Education and Community Partnerships Department receives generous support from The Dream Fund at UCLA Donor Advised Fund and the Center Theatre Group Affiliates, a volunteer organization dedicated to bringing innovative theatre and creative education to the young people of Los Angeles.

Additional support for Education and Community Partnerships is provided by The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation, the Employees Community Fund of Boeing California, The Sascha Brastoff Foundation, the Brotman Foundation of California, the Carol and James Collins Foundation, the Culver City Education Foundation, the James A. Doolittle Foundation, the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, the Lawrence P. Frank Foundation, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Education Endowment, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the MetLife Foundation, the Music Center Fund for the Performing Arts, the Kenneth T. & Eileen L. Norris Foundation, Laura & James Rosenwald & Orinocco Foundation, Playa Vista, Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, Theatre Communications Group, and the Weingart Foundation.

Center Theatre Group is a participant in the A-ha! Program: Think It, Do It, funded by the MetLife Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the professional American theatre.

