January 10 – February 3, 2018

on the IRT’s OneAmerica Mainstage

A Raisin in the Sun
by Lorraine Hansberry

STUDY GUIDE
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A RAISIN IN THE SUN by LORRAINE HANSBERRY

After years in a crowded, run-down, inner-city apartment, the Younger family dreams of a better life in the green, sunny suburbs. But when opportunity comes along, will they agree on the best route to get there? And will the gates be open to them?

This inspiring American classic comes to life on the IRT stage for the first time in more than two decades. Students will be moved as three generations of the Younger family fight for their future while navigating a world shaped by an oppressive past. A Raisin in the Sun was the first Broadway play to be written by a black woman and the first with a black director, and now it returns to the IRT to introduce a new generation to this powerful story of redemption and hope.

STUDENT MATINEES 10:00 AM on January 17, 18, 23, 24, 26, 30, 31, & February 1

ESTIMATED LENGTH Approximately 2 hours, 45 minutes

CONTENT ADVISORY
A Raisin in the Sun is a classic American drama that contains some adult language and themes. A script preview is available on request.

AGE RANGE Recommended for grades 7-12

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THE STORY OF **A RAISIN IN THE SUN**

The Youngers are an African American family living on the racially segregated South Side of Chicago in the late 1950s—five people crammed in two rooms, sharing a bathroom down the hall with their neighbors. The family is awaiting the arrival of a $10,000 life insurance check, a legacy from the recent death of Walter Younger. Each person has a different idea about how to use the money to improve the family’s situation. Lena (Mama) wants to buy a house in the suburbs and thus fulfill a dream she shared with her husband. Walter Lee wants to buy a liquor store and go into business to improve the family’s economic status. Beneatha wants to go to medical school and become a doctor. At the same time, she is exploring her place as a black woman in a changing America, as well as discovering her roots in Africa.

The Youngers clash over their competing dreams as each deals with his or her hopes and fears for the future. When Mama puts down a deposit on a house in an all-white community, the family is visited by one of their new white neighbors. Representing the neighborhood association, he offers the family money if they will give up the house and stay out of the neighborhood. An unexpected crisis raises the stakes, and the money becomes a symbol of not only how the Youngers will move forward in the world, but how—or if—they can maintain dignity and unity as a family. The climax of the play highlights the tensions between white and black society and the strains of a black family trying to make a home while achieving their dreams.

The story of a black family moving into a white neighborhood was familiar to playwright Lorraine Hansberry. In 1938 Lorraine’s father bought a house in Washington Park, a subdivision of Chicago. Their white neighbors tried to force them out, and a series of court battles led to the United States Supreme Court. The Hansberrys won their case, but Lorraine’s father died in 1946. She later said, “American racism helped kill him.”

Hansberry drew inspiration for *A Raisin in the Sun* from the lives of her father’s tenants and her own schoolmates; individual characters were inspired by members of her extended family. The playwright said, “Beneatha is me, eight years ago.” It took two years to raise the money to produce the first Broadway play by an African American woman. On the eve of opening night, Hansberry wrote her mother: “Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes, and life, and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are—and just as mixed up—but above all, that we have, among our miserable and downtrodden ranks, people who are the very essence of human dignity.” When *A Raisin in the Sun* won the 1959 New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play, Hansberry was not only the first black playwright to win the award, but, at 29, also the youngest to do so.
I often wonder what would have happened in the American theatre if Lorraine Hansberry hadn’t died so young. She finished only two plays, including *A Raisin in the Sun*, before dying at age 34. She was the first black woman to have a play performed on Broadway, and the youngest playwright ever to win the New York Drama Critic’s Circle Award for best new play. Her writings in other mediums—essays, articles, and two screenplays—give us a record of a woman of immense intellectual and writing prowess, and one who was poised to change the face of the American theatre.

So not surprisingly, *Raisin* quickly moved into the canon of American theatre classics, where it holds a position of high esteem, and where it has remained since 1959. It continues to be taught in high school and college curriculums, and it is frequently produced in professional theatres as well as amateur ones.

There are reasons for the play’s popularity other than sentiment and the tragic demise of its author (she died of pancreatic cancer). And I imagine that, in a way, she wishes that its content was no longer relevant. The long shadow of racial profiling and the deep economic and cultural impacts of slavery continue to plague our country, making plays like *A Raisin in the Sun* sadly and continuously relevant.

We see in the Younger family a yearning for many of the American values that should be available to all: a passion for self-improvement, a desire to live the American dream of prosperity, safety, space, fresh air, good schools. A belief in the right of equality. A commitment to family. These are the values that continue to fire the beliefs of all Americans, and Hansberry captured the depth of that timeless yearning in this family in a way that speaks to all of us. And we need to keep listening. Ultimately, the play is legendary because it is an exquisite piece of art that captures a deep and resonant set of sociological truths. We honor Hansberry, while sending out a renewed call for understanding and equality, by producing, as artfully as we can, her masterwork.

*(left) Lorraine Hansberry: Self-Portrait.*

*(opposite) Costume designer Kara Harmon was inspired by this photograph of a family dressed up for moving day.*
PAST, PROLOGUE, & PRESENT PRESENCE

BY TIMOTHY DOUGLAS, DIRECTOR

Lorraine Hansberry’s seminal *A Raisin in the Sun* has become a touchstone for me throughout my career in theatre. I participated as one of the Moving Men in the 25th anniversary production at Yale Repertory Theatre (which featured breakout performances from Beah Richards, Delroy Lindo, and Mary Alice). Later it was the very first play I ever staged—a production that would serve as the catalyst for the prolific directing career that continues for me these 23 years later.

This IRT production makes the fourth time I have journeyed alongside the Youngers as they compel us to take a cold, hard look at the festering, unresolved wound of American slavery, along with its ongoing after-effects. At the same time, we discover an equally transformational, unwavering, and driving faith in humanity that inextricably interweaves itself with the spoken woes of racism’s grotesqueness. Delivered through Hansberry’s lyrical, muscular, and culturally precise use of African American vernacular, drama crystallizes into poetry.

My previous three investigations of *Raisin* compelled me to enter the story through the prisms of Walter Lee, Lena (Mama), and Ruth, respectively. Each exploration yielded impactful and honest points of view, along with authentic and earned sentimentality. But this time—heavily influenced by the current headline- and statistic-driven realities facing Black American men—sentimentality has waned for me. I suppose that’s because I’m now relating as a Black American man whose age and experience sit squarely between those of the play’s central figures, parent and adult child.

For me, the central conflict of the play is no longer limited to the given that as a black man, Walter Lee doesn’t stand a chance of realizing his mid-20th century American dream. Instead, I’ve become laser-focused on the ideological wrestling match between two of American drama’s most compelling titans—Lena and Walter Lee—and their struggle to determine who is best suited, prepared, and battle-ready to lead the Younger family through the harsh realities facing America’s 99 percent. Both Walter Lee’s and Mama’s parallel plans for their family’s very survival are as revolutionary now as they were in the late 1950s. Encoded within the prescient genius of Lorraine Hansberry’s script is the play’s ability to speak out loud the trials of life’s heights and depths—not only in her own time, but in ours as well.
DESIGNER NOTES:

LIVING ON THE SOUTH SIDE

PETER MARADUDIN  LIGHTING DESIGNER
The goal of the lighting design for this production is to support the other visual elements in creating an environment of oppressive constriction: a small, highly pressured world from which this family has to escape. The light that enters the space is leached of color; no vibrancy here. Light—and life—must be found outside this home. The ceiling—a visual element that is often problematic for a lighting designer—is incredibly important in conveying the pressure this family is enduring in its cramped quarters. We have striven to find ways for light to creep into the space without compromising the overall vision.

Preliminary model by scenic designer Tony Cisek.
KARA HARMON  COSTUME DESIGNER
The costume design for *A Raisin in the Sun* was sparked for me by a beautiful photograph of a family in the 1950s, dressed in their finest clothes, standing outside of their tenement with suitcases [see page 5]. The hope and dignity that each person in the photograph feels is radiating from their gaze. Each family member has a story to tell and dreams to dream. Through the costume design for this production, I want to take us on a parallel journey, reflecting the perspective, class, dreams, and hopes of each character in the play, while maintaining a simplicity that allows the story to remain accessible and human.

Preliminary costume sketches by designer Kara Harmon for Beneatha, Travis, Mama, Walter Lee, & Ruth.

MICHAEL KECK  COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER
Lorraine Hansberry highlights the role of music in the Younger’s home with 1950s Gospel and Blues on the radio and with West African and Soul recordings on the record player. Each song is essential to its place in the narrative. With this informing my process, I began choosing recordings with the appropriate tempo and tone. Then, inspired by Walter Lee’s speech about the musicians at the Green Hat, I sketched out brief pieces with a small blues/jazz ensemble to set in a busy Chicago city soundscape. Our director, Timothy Douglas, reminded me of the famous clarinet glissando opening from Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*—an idea which affirmed my instincts but called for a slightly different arrangement for an alto saxophone in order to match my ensemble.
LORRAINE HANSBERRY
YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK

BY RICHARD J ROBERTS, RESIDENT DRAMATURG

Lorraine Hansberry was born in Chicago in 1930. Her father, a successful real estate broker, founded one of the first banks for blacks in Chicago. Her mother was a teacher and ward committeewoman. Both were active Republicans, as well as members of the Urban League and the NAACP. Lorraine was the youngest of four children. Her father’s shrewd investments kept the family prosperous through the Depression.

In 1938 Lorraine’s father bought a house in a white subdivision of Chicago. Their neighbors tried to force them out; a brick thrown through a window barely missed Lorraine. A series of court battles led to the United States Supreme Court, where the Hansberrys won their case. The family became prominent figures in Chicago’s black community, and they hosted many of America’s most prominent African Americans in their home. Lorraine grew up surrounded by such visiting luminaries as author and activist W. E. B. Du Bois; actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson; poet Langston Hughes; musician Duke Ellington; and Olympic athlete Jesse Owens.

After attending the University of Wisconsin in Madison for two years, Hansberry moved to New York City in 1950, “to seek an education of a different kind.” In 1951 she moved to Harlem and joined the staff of Freedom, the progressive black newspaper published by Paul Robeson. She worked her way up to editorial assistant, eventually writing news articles and editorials about U.S. and global Civil Rights issues. In 1953, when Robeson was denied a visa by the State Department, she represented him at a peace conference in Uruguay.

That same year she married Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish songwriter, publisher, and political activist whom she had met at a protest against racial discrimination at NYU. The couple moved to Greenwich Village and Hansberry began writing full time. In 1957 the couple separated, although they continued to work together. When A Raisin in the Sun opened on Broadway in 1959, Hansberry became an instant celebrity.

In 1960, Hansberry was commissioned by NBC to write a TV drama for the centennial of the Civil War; but her script, called The Drinking Gourd, was considered too controversial, and the project died. In 1961, A Raisin in the Sun was filmed with seven of its original Broadway cast, including Sydney Poitier. Hansberry wrote the screenplay, after two initial attempts that were again deemed too controversial.
In 1963 Hansberry was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She and her husband officially divorced in 1964, but they kept working together. That same year, her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*, opened on Broadway. The title character is a Jewish man who publishes an underground newspaper in Greenwich Village, and the play deals with black activism, feminism, gay rights, and prejudice. The play received mixed reviews and ran for only three months. It closed in January 1965, on the day that Hansberry died at the age of 34.

In 1968 Robert Nemiroff, Hansberry’s ex-husband, collected her unpublished writings, journal entries, speeches, and interviews, and created a play, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*. It was a great success Off Broadway and toured all across America. The material was published as a book the next year and received more critical acclaim. The title comes from a speech Hansberry gave in 1964 to winners of a United Negro College Fund creative writing contest: “Though it be a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic, to be young, gifted, and black.”

For the last four years of her life, Hansberry had labored over *Les Blancs*, a play set in Africa and focused on the struggle to achieve independence from European Colonialism. An epic play on a Shakespearean scale, *Les Blancs* uses music and dance to theatricalize African culture. Hansberry considered it her most important work. In 1970, Nemiroff compiled and edited the incomplete drafts of the play and produced it on Broadway, with a cast that included James Earl Jones. It was lauded by some critics, but only ran for a month.

In 1973 the musical *Raisin*, based on Hansberry’s first play, opened on Broadway, winning two Tony Awards, including Best Musical. There have been two Broadway revivals of *A Raisin in the Sun*. The 2004 production featured Phylicia Rashad and Audra McDonald, who both won Tony Awards. The 2014 starred Denzel Washington and won three Tony Awards, including Best Revival of a Play.

Hansberry’s untimely death left a void in American theatre and in the circle of black writers. In response to this great loss, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “Her commitment of spirit … her creative literary ability, and her profound grasp of the deep social issues confronting the world today will remain an inspiration to generations yet unborn.”

(opposite) Lorraine Hansberry as a high school senior, 1948.

Chicago Sun-Times columnist Vern Garrett wrote this about black life in Chicago in the decades before the 1950s: “The ghetto used to have something going for it. It had a beat, it had a certain rhythm and it was all hope. I don’t care how rough things were. They used to say, if you can’t make it in Chicago, you can’t make it anywhere. You may be down today; you’re gonna be back up tomorrow.”

By 1959, much of the hope that Garrett had recalled in earlier decades was gone, but the ghetto he had described was unchanged. Chicago’s South Side, the crowded area southwest of the downtown Loop, housed the largest concentration of Chicago’s black population. In the prosperous decade following World War II, Chicago’s African American population tripled as more and more blacks from the rural South migrated north to find jobs in the steel mills, stockyards, and fertilizer plants that ringed the ghetto.

The population density of the South Side was four times that of the rest of the city. Overcrowding was a serious problem created by the restrictive covenants that overran Chicago—legal contracts that prohibited white owners from selling their property to black buyers. The median income for non-white families was only 54% of that of the median white family, so most of the families on the South Side could never realize the goal of buying a house. Only 10% of Chicago’s African Americans owned their homes in 1950. And when black families were able to buy, 95% of Chicago’s insurance companies charged them seven times the amount charged to white families for home-owner’s insurance.

It is no surprise that Chicago’s South Side was the site of many small-scale race riots throughout the 1950s. These conditions still existed when the 1965 Civil Rights Act was signed—six years after A Raisin in the Sun made its debut. The Civil Rights Act itself unleashed yet more violence and xenophobia as Americans wrestled with the concept of equality.
THE CITY

The play contains a number of references to places and institutions in Chicago.

Chicago Tribune
The Tribune is the most-read newspaper of the Great Lakes region and the 8th-most-read in the US.

Clybourne Park
fictional

Lake Shore Drive
Lake Shore Drive features some of the city’s most expensive hotels and apartment buildings.

Maxwell Street
One of the city’s oldest residential districts, it is known for the Maxwell Street Market, the birthplace of Chicago blues, and the “Maxwell Street Polish,” a sausage sandwich.

Morgan Park
Morgan Park is located on the far south side of Chicago, 16 miles south of the Loop.

South Center
The South Center department store was one of the largest retail businesses on the South Side when it opened in 1928. It featured the same products as fashionable Loop department stores; but unlike them, it welcomed African Americans as customers, staff, and management. It closed in 1970.

Although Clybourne Park is fictional, it might have looked something like this typical Chicago working-class suburb.
AFRICAN HERITAGE

Beneatha’s interest in African history and culture makes her part of a new movement in the 1950s, as more and more African Americans began to explore their African roots.

Asagai
An **assegai** is a Zulu weapon, a light spear or javelin with an iron tip.

**Ashanti Empire**
Founded in 1701, the Ashanti Empire had military prowess, wealth, sophisticated architecture, and a refined society and culture. The Ashanti Kingdom became a state in union with Ghana in 1957.

**Bantu**
The 250 distinct but related Bantu languages are spoken by Africans who live below the equator. They share a long heritage of poetry in the oral tradition.

**Bénin**
One of the longest-lasting civilizations in West Africa, Bénin (1440–1897) is known for its sculpture in cast bronze, carved ivory, and terra cotta, featuring a high degree of both realism and stylization.

**colonialism**
In 1870, only 10% of Africa was under European control; by 1914, almost 90% of the continent was under colonial rule. The largest tracts were ruled by the French and the British. At the time of the play, only a few African countries had achieved independence; largely this change began to happen in 1960.

**Ethiopia**
Located in northeastern Africa, Ethiopia is the most populous landlocked country in the world, and the second most populous nation in Africa. It is widely considered as the origin of *Homo sapiens*.

**Jomo Kenyatta**
Jomo Kenyatta (c. 1890–1978) was an anti-colonial activist and politician, Kenya’s first President (1964–1978). He believed that independence meant not just self-rule, but an end to the color bar and to the patronizing attitudes and racist slang of Kenya’s white minority.

**Liberia**
Located on the west coast of Africa, Liberia was founded by former US slaves. Declaring its independence in 1847, Liberia is Africa’s first and oldest modern republic.
Middle Passage
The Middle Passage was part of the Atlantic slave trade, known as the triangle trade. Ships departed Europe with manufactured goods, which were traded in Africa for purchased or kidnapped Africans, who were transported across the Atlantic as slaves (the Middle Passage) and sold or traded for raw materials, which were transported back to Europe to complete the triangle.

Nigeria
Located on the west coast of Africa, Nigeria was long ruled by a succession of colonial powers. At the time of the play, Nigeria was a colony of Great Britain; in 1963, it gained its independence. Since then, open hostility among internal factions has bred chaos, civil war, and mass starvation.

Ocomogosiay
A Yoruba chant that welcomes the hunters back to the village.

Opegede! Ogbamushe!
According to the first edition of the script, this is a Yoruba exclamation of admiration.

Owimoweh
“Owimoweh,” from the song “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” is a mishearing of “Uyimbube” (Zulu for “you are a lion”), written and first recorded in 1939 in South Africa by Solomon Linda under the title “Mbube.” The Tokens’ 1961 doo-wop version is today the best-known recording.

Songhai civilizations
At its peak in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Songhai Empire was the largest and richest country in Africa; its largest city, Timbuktu, was the center of education and commerce in the Muslim world.

surgical operations
Pre-colonial African medicine was often more advanced than medicine in Europe. Vaccination, autopsy, brain surgery, skin grafting, dental fillings, false teeth, anesthesia, and operating under antiseptic conditions were all common in ancient Africa before they were known in Europe.

West Africa
Considered to be the southern half of the northwestern area of Africa, West Africa includes a wide variety of cultures with similarities in dress, cuisine, music, and culture.

Yoruba
The Yoruba people are an ethnic group based in parts of Nigeria and Bénin. With more than 40 million people, they are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa.

Chaka Zulu
Chaka Zulu (1787-1828) was an African warrior-king who built the Zulu tribe into a powerful nation that united against colonial powers in the early nineteenth century.
“HARLEM: A DREAM DEFERRED”

A POEM
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?*

---

A CONTROVERSIAL WORD

The word *nigger* is used by one of the characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* as he expresses his anger and frustration with racist attitudes in America during the 1950s.

The word *nigger* was not originally used for verbal assault. It first appears in historical documents in 1587 as *negar*, an alternate spelling of *Negro*. *Nigger* was a common word in both England and America by the seventeenth century; it was considered nothing more than an alternate pronunciation of *Negro*. By 1825, however, both abolitionists and Blacks found the word offensive and began to object to its use.

Often when a word is employed as a slur against a certain group, members of the group will use that word among themselves to rob it of its negative power. Today, the word *nigger* is still controversial. While it may be heard frequently in rap songs and in conversation among younger African Americans, many older African Americans are deeply offended by it. Even within generations, not everyone agrees whether the word should be used within the African American community. Society at large, however, has condemned the word as a racial slur; its use by other races against black people demonstrates an ignorance and hatred that should not be imitated.
ALIGNMENT GUIDE

Seeing a performance at Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text. Some key literature standards to consider on your trip would be:

READING – LITERATURE

- **RL.1** – Read and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- **RL.2** – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas
  - Sample: 9-10.RL.2.2: Analyze in detail the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a work of literature, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.
- **RL.3** – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
  - Sample: 11-12.RL.3.2: Analyze a work of literature in which the reader must distinguish between what is directly stated and what is intended (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) in order to understand the point of view.
- **RL.4** – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

READING – NONFICTION

- **RN.2** – Extract and construct meaning from nonfiction texts using a range of comprehension skills
  - Sample: 8.RN.2.3: Analyze how a text makes connections and distinctions among individuals, events, and ideas.

READING – VOCABULARY

- **RV.3** – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
  - Sample: 9-10.RV.3.3: Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.
INTERACTIVE CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

When we hear the term Civil Rights, many of us often think exclusively of African Americans. But Civil Rights is a broad term that covers people of all races, genders, and sexualities.

1863  Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/

1865  13th Amendment ratified—slavery abolished
http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html

1865  Reconstruction begins (through 1877)
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/exhibits/reconstruction/timeline.html
http://www.shmoop.com/reconstruction/timeline.html

1868  14th Amendment ratified—equal protection under the law
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215201/Fourteenth-Amendment

1875  Civil Rights Act of 1875 (ruled unconstitutional in 1883)
http://history.house.gov/HistoricalHighlight/Detail/35889
http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/turnerbd/summary.html

1876  First Jim Crow laws
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/civil-rights/

1888  First Black-owned banks
http://www.blackpast.org/aah/true-reformers-bank-1888-1910
https://www.fedpartnership.gov/minority-banking-timeline/capital-savings-bank

1896  Plessey v. Ferguson—separate but equal ruled constitutional

1870  15th Amendment ratified—right to vote
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANexperience/features/general-article/grant-fifteenth/

1909  NAACP founded
http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history
1916  The Great Migration
http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration
http://www.inmotionaame.org/print.cfm;jsessionid=f8302664861457417887695?migration=8&bhcp=1

1936  Blues legend Robert Johnson makes his first recording
http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/blues-legend-robert-johnson-makes-first-ever-recording
http://www.biography.com/people/robert-johnson-9356324
http://blues.about.com/od/earlybluesessentials/a/10earlybluesart.htm
http://www.thebluestrail.com/artists/mus_jal.htm

1936  Jesse Owens wins at Berlin Olympics
http://www.jesseowens.com/about/

1939  Marian Anderson sings at Lincoln Memorial
http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/marian-anderson-sings-at-lincoln-memorial
http://www.npr.org/2014/04/09/298760473/denied-a-stage-she-sang-for-a-nation

1946 The integration of the NFL
http://www.sikids.com/si-kids/2016/01/12/forgotten-four-who-integrated-nfl

1947  Jackie Robinson breaks the color line in Major League Baseball
http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/jackie-robinson-breaks-major-league-color-barrier

1948  President Harry Truman desegregates the armed forces
http://www.trumanlibrary.org/anniversaries/desegblurb.htm
http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/civilrightsstruggle1/a/order9981.htm

1954  Brown v. Board of Education—separate but equal ruled unconstitutional
http://www.naacpldf.org/case/brown-v-board-education

1955  Montgomery, Alabama begins year-long bus boycott
http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/
1955  A. Phillip Randolph, father of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, becomes a vice-president of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council
http://apri.org/387-3/
http://www.aphiliprandolphmuseum.com/
http://www.aflcio.org/About/Our-History/Key-People-in-Labor-History/Asa-Philip-Randolph-1889-1979

1955  Death of Emmett Till
http://www.biography.com/people/emmett-till-507515
http://time.com/4008545/emmett-till-history/

1957  Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) founded; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. elected president
http://sclcnational.org/our-history/

1957  Civil Rights Act of 1957
http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_act.html

1957  Nine Black students integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas
http://life.time.com/history/little-rock-nine-1957-photos/#1

1960  Lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, Nashville, and elsewhere
http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/6-legacy/freedom-struggle-2.html

1963  Medgar Evers killed on his front porch
http://www.evertribute.org/house_tour.php

1963  March on Washington—Dr. King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech

1964  Civil Rights Act of 1964
http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act/
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q11kvbJy0cs

1964  Affirmative Action

1965  Voting Rights Act is signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson
http://www.core-online.org/History/voting_rights.htm
1968  Dr. King’s speech, “I Have Been to the Mountaintop”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDl84vusXos
http://abcnnews.go.com/Politics/martin-luther-kings-final-speech-ive-mountaintop-full/story?id=18872817

1968  Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike

1968  Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated
http://history1900s.about.com/cs/martinlutherking/a/mlkassass.htm

1968  Shirley Chisholm is the first African-American woman elected to Congress. >
http://history.house.gov/HistoricalHighlight/Detail/37113?ret=True
http://atyourlibrary.org/culture/shirley-chisholm-her-historic-run-congress-and-president-influenced-generations

The Civil Rights movement beyond the 60s
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/modern_01.html

Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement: 1960-1970

Gay Rights Movement
http://time.com/184/gay-rights-timeline/

Latino Civil Rights Movement
http://www.tolerance.org/latino-civil-rights-timeline

The Women’s Rights Movement 60s and 70s
On page 14, read Langston Hughes’s poem “Harlem: A Dream Deferred,” from which Lorraine Hansberry derived the title of the play. Although he wrote his poem in 1951, how might it be applied to life in America today?

The family in *A Raisin in the Sun* receives a $10,000 insurance check in 1959. Today that check would be worth about $80,000. What would your family do with an $80,000 check? How would you come to a mutual agreement about how to spend that money together?

Think about the neighborhood you live in, or the school you attend. Do you feel comfortable and safe there? Are people treated fairly and with consideration? What makes a healthy community? What can you do to help make this happen? Who else is responsible?
POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

On page 14, read Langston Hughes’s poem “Harlem: A Dream Deferred,” from which Lorraine Hansberry derived the title of the play. What are the dreams of each character in the play? How has each of those dreams been “deferred”? How does the play illustrate the themes of the poem?

Think about the five members of the Younger family. How does each change over the course of the play? In what ways do they not change? How do you envision their lives in a year? Five years? Ten?

Beneatha has two suitors in the play, George and Asagai. How do they represent different ways of viewing the world in the midst of the Civil Rights movement? How are their attitudes towards Beneatha different? How are they similar? How do they represent different options for Beneatha in the early days of feminism? What other choices might she have for her future?

What is the American Dream? How does the American Dream differ for different cultures? For different races? For different sexualities? For men and women? For those born here and for immigrants? How is the American Dream different for each member of the Younger family? How is it the same? What is the family’s relationship to the American Dream at the end of the play?

What does Beneatha mean when she says, “It expresses me”? What is she searching for in the play? How does this search shape her character and the way she relates to the other characters?

What does assimilation mean in today’s American society? How can it be seen as a strength? How can it be seen as a weakness?

What does Mama mean when she says, “Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it’s money”? How do different generations develop different ideas of what is important in life? Why do we need to look back to our history as well as forward to our future?

Asagai refers to Beneatha as Alaiyo, meaning “One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough.” What does he mean? Why does Beneatha appreciate this nickname?

What does Mama’s houseplant mean to her? Why? What does the plant symbolize in the play?

What do you think of Walter Lee’s business plan? Do you think he would make a success of the liquor store? Why or why not?

How do you envision the family’s life in their new home in Clybourne Park? How will each of their lives be different? What do you think they can expect from their white neighbors? How do you think they will manage the financial demands of their new mortgage, insurance, utilities, etcetera?

Keeping in mind that the play was written some 60 years ago, how does Hansberry critique traditional sex roles in the play? In what ways does she challenge stereotypes of African Americans in the play? To what extent do you think that conflicts and issues presented in the play are still relevant?
WRITING PROMPTS

Choose a section of the play and rewrite it in a contemporary setting. What does each character want? How would he or she go about getting that in today’s world? How have social and economic realities changed since the 1950s? How have family structures changed? How have race relations changed? How have they remained the same?

Choose one of the characters in the play and a particular scene in the play. Write a diary entry for that character describing his or her reactions to the events of that day.

Write an essay that compares and contrasts A Raisin in the Sun with other classic American family plays, such as Death of a Salesman, The Glass Menagerie, or Long Day’s Journey into Night, as well as more contemporary family dramas like Fences, Buried Child, or August: Osage County. How does each play reflect the time in which it was written and the unique viewpoint of the playwright?

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your impressions of the script and the strength of the story and/or themes, as well as your opinions of the production and its theatrical aspects: scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting. What moments made an impact? How do the design elements work with the actors’ performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: education.irt@gmail.com

ACTIVITIES

Using magazine photos or your own artwork, create a collage illustrating themes of the play. What ideas are important to you that you want to bring out? How do you personally relate to the issues in the play?

Research the Harlem Renaissance. How does Lorraine Hansberry’s personal connection to Langston Hughes connect her to that literary and cultural movement? Create a timeline of writers, artists, and musicians, and their creations, showing the growth and development of Black culture from the 1920s to today. What is the significance of A Raisin in the Sun in that progress? How does Hansberry’s work relate to the plays of August Wilson, or Suzan-Lori Parks, or Lynn Nottage? How does Beyoncé in her album Lemonade address contemporary black life as Hansberry did in her play?

Beneatha’s decision to become a doctor is a bold one. In 1960 (one year after this play was written), 6.8% of practicing physicians in the United States were women. Of those women, 1.7% were African American. In other words, .1% of doctors—one out of 1,000—were African American women. Research economic opportunities for women and minorities in the 1950s and today. How do salaries compare between women and men? Between different races? What jobs have become more available? What career paths still present barriers? Create a display with pie charts or bar graphs as well as recommendations for future action to make situations more equitable.
RESOURCES

BOOKS

Hansberry’s Drama by Steven R. Carter
Lorraine Hansberry by Anne Cheney
To Be Young, Gifted and Black adapted by from the writings of Lorraine Hansberry by Robert Nemiroff
The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation by Natalie Y. Moore
Harlem Stomp! A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance by Laban Carrick Hill
Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal by Andrew Hacker
Race Matters by Cornel West
Roots by Alex Haley
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
The Color Purple by Alice Walker
The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre, edited by Harvey Young
The Timetables of African-American History: A Chronology of the Most Important People and Events in African-American History by Sharon Harley
The Jim Crow Encyclopedia, edited by Nikki L. M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford
Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s by Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer (companion to the TV series Eyes on the Prize)
Making Freedom: African Americans in U.S. History, from Primary Source, Inc.
the plays of August Wilson

WEBSITES

History of Fair Housing
http://www.hud.gov

A Women’s Liberation Timeline
http://www.cwluherstory.com

The Chicago Freedom Movement: Summer 1966
http://www.pww.org

The Struggle and Triumph of America’s First Black Doctors
assimilationism
Cultural assimilation is the process by which a person’s or group’s culture come to resemble those of another, larger group. The term can refer to either foreign immigrants or native residents who come to be culturally dominated by another society. Whether or not assimilation is desirable is often disputed.

Pearl Bailey
Pearl Bailey (1918–1990) was an actress and singer, much beloved for her mischievous witticisms and her warm, distinctive vocal style.

Harry Belafonte
Harry Belafonte (born 1927), one of the most successful African American pop stars in history, released the first million-selling LP. He is perhaps best known for “The Banana Boat Song” (“Day-O”).

caps
A cap gun is a toy that makes a loud sound like a gunshot when the cap is struck. They were especially popular during the era of TV and movie westerns, from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s.

conk
The conk was a hairstyle that chemically straightened hair using a relaxer (sometimes the pure corrosive chemical lye). It was popular among African American men from the 1920s to the 1960s.

Greta Garbo
Greta Garbo (1905–1990) starred in such films as Grand Hotel, Camille, and Ninotchka. She shunned publicity and retired at 35, leading some to consider her stubborn and willful.

graft
bribery used to secure illicit gains in politics or business; corruption

*Monsieur le petit bourgeois noir*
French; literally, “mister small middleclass black.” The term petty bourgeois is often used as a derogatory term for lower-middle-class persons with upper-middle-class pretensions.

Mrs. Miniver
Mrs. Miniver is a 1942 Hollywood film about a British family in a rural village during World War II. Mrs. Miniver is portrayed in the film as the ultimate mother: strong, loving, courageous, beautiful.

NAACP
The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded in 1909. At the time of the play, it was instrumental in the Civil Rights movement, providing counsel for such landmark cases as Brown v. Board of Education and helping to organize the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
“I Don’t Feel No Ways Tired”
“I Don’t Feel No Ways Tired” is a song James Cleveland (1931–1991), a driving force behind the creation of the modern gospel sound incorporating traditional black gospel, soul, pop, and jazz.

Prometheus
In Greek mythology, Prometheus is known for defying the gods. He stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans; the gods chained him to a mountain, where his liver was eaten every day by an eagle.

quiet desperation
“Most men lead lives of quiet desperation.”—Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). With the rise of corporate culture, this statement was a popular topic for philosophical discussion in the 1950s.

retrogression
the process of returning to an earlier state, typically a worse one

riding habit
A set of clothes for riding horses, including a fitted jacket, shirt, tie, breeches, boots, gloves, and a hat.

Paul Robeson
Paul Robeson (1898–1976) was an African American singer and stage and screen star. His outspoken social activism caused him to be blacklisted during the McCarthy era.

sharecroppers
Farmers who live on someone else’s land and pay a large share of their crop as rent, leaving little for their families to live on.

slubborn
Perhaps a portmanteau (a word blending the sounds and combining the meanings of two other words) created from the words stubborn and slovenly or sloppy.

thirty pieces
According to the Bible’s Gospel of Matthew, Judas Iscariot, a disciple of Jesus, betrayed him to the high priests of Jerusalem in exchange for 30 pieces of silver. The image is often used in literature and common speech in reference to compromising a trust, friendship, or loyalty for personal gain.

Uncle Tom
“Uncle Tom” is used as a derogatory epithet for an overly subservient African American. The name comes from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin, but its use as an insult is the result of later stage versions which lampooned and distorted the more positive character of the novel.
THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

You, the audience are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink must stay in the lobby.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don’t talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can’t hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.