

Exploring the American Dream with *A Raisin in the Sun*

Overview

In this lesson, students will discuss the concept of the “American Dream” and using poetry by Langston Hughes, will compare the “dream” to the reality experienced by particular groups who have historically struggled for access and equality. Students will then further this exploration by reading and discussing Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, using the play as a basis to examine the way 1950s American society particularly restricted African American access to the “American Dream.” Through their reading of the play, interactive class discussion, group work, art activities and creative writing activities, students will gain an understanding that the concept of the “American Dream” has been and continues to be multidimensional and complicated, particularly in terms of the historical struggles groups of people have faced in attaining equal rights, access, acceptance, etc.

Grades

10-11

North Carolina Essential Standards for Civics & Economics

- CE.C&G.2.7 - Analyze contemporary issues and governmental responses at the local, state, and national levels in terms of how they promote the public interest and/or general welfare (e.g., taxes, immigration, naturalization, civil rights, economic development, annexation, redistricting, zoning, national security, health care, etc.)
- CE.C&G.3.8 - Evaluate the rights of individuals in terms of how well those rights have been upheld by democratic government in the United States.
- CE.C&G.4.2 - Explain how the development of America’s national identity derived from principles in the Declaration of Independence, US Constitution and Bill of Rights (e.g., inalienable rights, consent of the governed, popular sovereignty, religious and political freedom, separation of powers, etc.)
- CE.C&G.4.5 - Explain the changing perception and interpretation of citizenship and naturalization (e.g., aliens, Interpretations of the 14th amendment, citizenship, patriotism, equal rights under the law, etc.)

North Carolina Essential Standards for American History II

- AH2.H.1.3- Use historical analysis and interpretation...
- AH2.H.2.2 - Evaluate key turning points since the end of Reconstruction in terms of their lasting impact (e.g., conflicts, legislation, elections, innovations, leadership, movements, Supreme Court decisions, etc.).
- AH2.H.3.3 - Explain the roles of various racial and ethnic groups in settlement and expansion since Reconstruction and the consequences for those groups (e.g., American Indians, African Americans, Chinese, Irish, Hispanics and Latino Americans, Asian Americans, etc.).
- AH2.H.5.1 - Summarize how the philosophical, ideological and/or religious views on freedom and equality contributed to the development of American political and economic systems since Reconstruction (e.g., “separate but equal”, Social Darwinism, social gospel, civil service system, suffrage, Harlem Renaissance, the Warren Court, Great Society programs, American Indian Movement, etc.).
- AH2.H.8.1 - Analyze the relationship between innovation, economic development, progress and various perceptions of the “American Dream” since Reconstruction (e.g., Gilded Age, assembly line, transcontinental railroad, highway system, credit, etc.).
- AH2.H.8.2 - Explain how opportunity and mobility impacted various groups within American society since Reconstruction (e.g., Americanization movement, settlement house movement, Dust Bowl, the Great Migration, suburbia, etc.).

- AH2.H.8.3 - Evaluate the extent to which a variety of groups and individuals have had opportunity to attain their perception of the “American Dream” since Reconstruction (e.g., immigrants, Flappers, Rosie the Riveter, GIs, blue collar worker, white collar worker, etc.).
- AH2.H.8.4 - Analyze multiple perceptions of the “American Dream” in times of prosperity and crisis since Reconstruction (e.g., Great Depression, Dust Bowl, New Deal, oil crisis, savings and loan crisis, dot.com bubble, mortgage foreclosure crisis, etc.).

Essential Questions

- What is the American Dream? What are the social, educational, economic, political and religious freedoms associated with “The American Dream?”
- Historically and currently, what groups of people have had limited access to “The American Dream?”
- What are some of the obstacles to achieving “The American Dream?”
- How does Langston Hughes characterize the American Dream in his poems “Let America be America Again” and “Harlem?”
- What forms of discrimination did African Americans experience during the Jim Crow era and how did this impact their access to the “American Dream?”
- How does the play *A Raisin in the Sun* mirror the social, educational, political, and economic climate of the 1950s and how does the play illustrate the impact this climate had on African Americans' quest for "The American Dream?"
- In what ways are the themes present in “Let America Be America Again,” “Harlem,” and *A Raisin in the Sun* relevant to today’s society?

Materials:

- Quotes about the American Dream (attached) these should be cut into strips before class arrives
- “Let America be America Again” (attached)
- “Harlem” (attached)
- Art supplies such as art paper, colored pencils, old magazines (if available), etc.
- Copies of the play *A Raisin in the Sun*
- Response sheet for *A Raisin in the Sun*, attached
- Create a Set Design for *A Raisin in the Sun*, assignment attached

Duration

- Up to four 60-90 minute periods
- Teachers can reduce the amount of time required by omitting activities, assigning parts of the play to be read independently/outside of class, or shortening the amount of discussion questions posed. Likewise, teachers should use their own pacing in terms of how many scenes/acts are read each day.

Preparation

- Students should have an understanding of Jim Crow, segregation, and the fight for civil rights that took place throughout the 1900s prior to participating in this lesson. Detailed lessons on these topics that teachers may want to implement before this lesson are available in Carolina K-12’s Database of K-12 Resources. Go to k12database.unc.edu/ and click on “Civil Rights” under topics, or enter the following titles into the search box:
 - Moments in the Lives of Engaged Citizens who Fought Jim Crow
 - Journey of Reconciliation, 1947
 - School Segregation
 - The Freedom Rides of 1961
 - Greensboro Sit-Ins: A “Counter Revolution” in North Carolina
 - Sitting Down To Stand Up For Democracy
 - The Power of Youth: Exploring the Civil Rights Movement with “Freedom’s Children”
- Any study of American society during the 1900s, when Jim Crow and segregation were a way of life, brings up sensitive topics and language. It is important for students to explore this period of history, as well as

make connections to today's society, but in an effective and safe manner. Teachers must thus have established a safe classroom with clear expectations of respect, open-mindedness, and civil conversation. See Carolina K-12's "Activities" section of the Database of K-12 Resources k12database.unc.edu/ for ways to ensure a classroom environment conducive to the effective exploration of controversial issues.

- Students should also be prepared that at one point in the play, a derogatory slur is used by the character of Walter Lee, when he refers to another character's shoes as "faggoty-looking." Teachers should let students know ahead of time to expect this so that it does not become distracting and likewise, teachers should make clear why such language exhibits intolerance and should not be repeated in the classroom.
- Several days of the lesson involves students reading *A Raisin in the Sun* out loud. It is recommended that teachers pre-select student readers (ideally, students who read well out loud and can infuse the script with some emotion) prior to the start of class to save the time of trying to figure this out during class. Teachers should use their discretion whether to change readers each day (so that a larger variety of students can participate), or to have the same students read for the duration of the entire play (for consistency.)

Procedure

Day 1

"The American Dream"

1. Write the word DREAM on the board and ask students to spend a few minutes brainstorming what comes to mind on notebook paper. Tell students that they can write words and phrases that they relate to the word, cite examples or personal experiences, sketch pictures, etc. After around 2 minutes, allow students to share their thoughts and compile a master brainstorm on the board. Further discuss:
 - What does the word dream mean?
 - What do you associate with the word dream?
2. Next, write the phrase "American Dream" on the board and again ask students to again brainstorm what comes to mind, recording thoughts in a list. After responses have waned, review the list and discuss the different categories that are present (i.e., social, educational, economic, political, religious, etc.) Create a class definition of the American Dream; for example:
 - the ideals of freedom, equality, opportunity personal happiness and material comfort traditionally held to be available to every American and attainable via motivation and hard work
3. Further discuss:
 - Does anyone know when the phrase "American Dream" was coined?
 - Discuss with students that the idea of the American Dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence which proclaims that "all men are created equal" and "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights" including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." However, the phrase itself was actually penned by James Truslow Adams in 1931, in his book "The Epic of America," which stated that "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement regardless of social class or circumstances of birth."
 - In what ways has the meaning of the American Dream changed throughout history?
 - What makes the American Dream appealing?
 - How might your background, culture, race, identity, etc. impact your definition and/or understanding of the American Dream?
 - What are some obstacles people face in trying to achieve the American Dream?
 - What must happen for the American Dream to be realized by everyone (or is this even possible)?
4. Next, divide students into small groups of 3-4 and provide them with one of the attached quotes regarding the "American Dream" to further the discussion. Write or project the following questions for the groups to discuss regarding their quote:
 - What does your quote say about the American Dream?
 - What values are implicit in the concept of an "American Dream" according to this quote?

- Do you agree or disagree with the quote and why?
- What is your own personal definition of the American Dream for yourself? How does this quote compare to that? (Each group member should answer this for himself/herself.)

Langston Hughes and “The American Dream”

5. Tell students that they are going to now read a poem by Langston Hughes that discusses the American Dream in a different fashion than the quotes they just read. Ask students if any of them already know anything about Langston Hughes and then share some background information on him such as:
 - Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was an African American writer who is particularly known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of black life in America from the twenties through the sixties. He wrote novels, short stories and plays, as well as poetry, and is also known for his engagement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing. His life and work were enormously important in shaping the artistic contributions of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Hughes refused to differentiate between his personal experience and the common experience of black America. He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter, and language itself. (Source: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/83>)

Further discuss:

 - Given the time period during which Hughes was born, grew up, and wrote (1902-1967), what type of society did he experience?
 - It is said that Hughes wanted to tell the stories of black America, including their suffering. In particular, what type of suffering did black America experience during the years Hughes was alive? What types of racial injustice were present during the 1900s? How do you think social and legal racism (Jim Crow, segregation, etiquette, etc.) impacted African Americans?

➤ **Teacher Note:** This should be a review discussion, as students should already have an understanding of Jim Crow, segregation, and the fight for civil rights that took place throughout the 1900s prior to participating in this lesson. Detailed lessons on these topics that teachers may want to implement before this lesson are available in Carolina K-12’s Database of K-12 Resources. See the “Preparation” section at the beginning of the lesson for suggested lesson plans.
6. Hand out copies of the attached “Let America Be America Again” for reading. The poem can be read out loud as a class (with either the teacher or a volunteer student reading the poem), in small groups of 3-5, or individually. Discuss:
 - What words, thoughts, images, etc. first come to mind after reading this poem?
 - What are the various pictures of America the author paints? (Discuss the idealistic version of America the author paints, i.e. a land of liberty, opportunity, freedom, etc., compared with the alternative notion that the ideal is seldom reached by particular groups.)
 - According to Hughes, what specific things have interfered with America reaching its potential?
 - This poem was written by Hughes in 1935. What are some of the ways American society is different today than in 1935?
 - What does the author mean when he says that “America was never America to me?”
 - According to the poem, what groups of people in particular have struggled gaining access to or obtaining the American Dream and why?
 - The poem mentions Native Americans, African Americans, the poor, and immigrants. To delve into this further, teachers can break students up into groups and instruct them to spend time compiling a list of the various ways these groups have been denied equal opportunity, or have suffered based on not having access to the American Dream.
 - Are there additional groups of people not necessarily referred to in the poem that have also been deprived of all America is supposed to have to offer? (i.e., women)
 - How does the tone change throughout the poem?
 - How does the poem compare to the quotes we examined?

- What is Langston Hughes’s ultimate message about America and the American Dream?
 - Is this poem a negative portrayal of America? Explain. (Discuss with students how while the author is pointing out how America hasn’t reached its potential or provided the opportunity to all people equally as it should, he also exhibits a sense of hope that it still can be the ideal America.)
 - Although this poem was written in 1935, do you think the themes still have relevance today? Has America fulfilled its potential in your opinion? Explain.
7. Next, tell students they are going to read “Harlem, another poem by Langston Hughes from a collection he wrote in 1951 called “A Dream Deferred.” Either in partners or small groups, instruct students to read the poem and discuss together:
- What images strike you when reading this poem, either that are explicitly described or that come to mind based on what you read?
 - What is the tone and mood of the poem? If you were to hear the poet read it, how do you think his voice might sound in terms of emotional quality, volume, etc.?
 - What central question is Hughes asking?
 - Even though the poem includes a series of questions, what statement is Hughes making? What is his message about dreams deferred? Do you agree with Hughes? (Encourage students to consider examples from personal experiences, books, television, movies, etc. regarding what happens when dreams are not fulfilled.)
 - How does this poem relate to “Let America Be America Again?” Which specific lines in “Let America Be America Again” compare to “Harlem?”
8. After students have had time to read and discuss in partners/groups, allow them to report their thoughts back to the class as a whole and further discuss:
- Whereas the first poem we read was written by Langston Hughes in 1935, he wrote this one 16 years later, in 1951. How were things different in 1951 than they were in 1935? What impact do you think the timing in which he wrote this poem had? What are the various things that were occurring in society that might relate to the concept of “dreams deferred?”
 - Discuss with students: "In 1951, the year of the poem's publication, frustration characterized the mood of American blacks. The Civil War in the previous century had liberated them from slavery, and federal laws had granted them the right to vote, the right to own property, and so on. However, continuing prejudice against blacks, as well as laws passed since the Civil War, relegated them to second-class citizenship. Consequently, blacks had to attend poorly equipped segregated schools and settle for menial jobs as porters, ditch-diggers, servants, shoeshine boys, and so on. In many states, blacks could not use the same public facilities as whites, including restrooms, restaurants, theaters, and parks. Access to other facilities, such as buses, required them to take a back seat, literally, to whites. By the mid-Twentieth Century, their frustration with inferior status became a powder keg, and the fuse was burning. Hughes well understood what the future held, as he indicates in the last line of the poem." (*Source:* <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/83>)

The American Dream v/s the American Reality

9. As a culminating activity, tell students that they will use the concepts in the poems to create a visual representing Langston Hughes’s concept of “The American Dream/The American Reality,” as well as write an accompanying paragraph explaining their artwork. Provide students with drawing paper and instruct them to divide it in half (or have students do one drawing on the front and the other on the back.) Tell students that they should create two visualizations: the first should illustrate the American Dream. The second should illustrate what Langston Hughes paints as the American reality as compared to the dream.

Tell students that their art work can include literal or abstract art and drawings, words and phrases, as well as specific lines from the two poems discussed. In addition to art supplies such as paper and colored pencils, teachers may also want to provide magazines from which students can cut images to mix with

their own art work. Students should also write a paragraph or more explaining why they feel their chosen image illustrates the “The American Dream/The American Reality” as viewed by Hughes.

Day 2

10. At the start of class, instruct students to post their homework assignment around the room. Give each student 2 Post-It Notes and provide them approximately 5 minutes to browse through all of the art. As they browse, tell students to place their Post-It Note beside the two images (other than their own) that they feel best capture the concept of the American Dream/American Reality. Once all students have returned to their seats, ask the students whose images have the most Post-It Notes by them to share their thought process when creating their art. Use this discussion as a means of reviewing the poems by Langston Hughes and the connected themes.

Introduction to *A Raisin in the Sun*

11. Next, tell students that they will continue exploring the concept of the American Dream and related themes by participating in a class reading of a play called *A Raisin in the Sun*, by African American writer Lorraine Hansberry. Ask students if any of them already know anything about the play or Lorraine Hansberry and allow them to share their thoughts. Give students some background information on Lorraine Hansberry, explaining that much of this information will be relevant to their understanding of the play:
 - Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) lived in Chicago with her parents, both of whom were very active in the Chicago black community, including in social change work. Her uncle, William Leo Hansberry, studied African history. Visitors to the home included Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, and Jesse Owens. One of Lorraine Hansberry's brothers served in a segregated unit in World War II; another refused his draft call, objecting to segregation and discrimination in the military.
 - In 1938, her family moved into an all-white neighborhood in Chicago. At that time, the neighborhood had a restrictive covenant against integration. Violent protests occurred against Hansberry's family and the case made its way through the courts, all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Hansberry vs. Lee*. While the Supreme Court ruled that restrictive covenants were illegal, this unfortunately did not stop enforcement of them in Chicago and other cities (like many other Jim Crow laws of the time.)
 - Lorraine Hansberry attended the University of Wisconsin for two years, then left to work for Paul Robeson's newspaper, *Freedom*, first as a writer and then associate editor. She attended the Intercontinental Peace Congress in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1952. Hansberry eventually left her position at *Freedom*, focusing mostly on her writing and taking a few temporary jobs.
 - *Raisin in the Sun* was Hansberry's first play, which she completed in 1957.
 - She began to circulate the play in hopes of interesting investors, producers, and actors. However, with a cast in which all but one minor character is African American, *A Raisin in the Sun* was considered to be a risky investment, and it took over a year for producer Philip Rose to raise enough money to launch the play. After touring to positive reviews, it premiered on Broadway at the Barrymore Theatre on March 11, 1959.
 - *A Raisin in the Sun* was the first play written by a black woman to be produced on Broadway, as well as the first play with a black director (Lloyd Richards) on Broadway.
(Source: <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/aframerwriters/p/hansberry.htm>)
12. Discuss:
 - Similar to Langston Hughes, Hansberry was writing during a time of great conflict and change in society. What specifically was taking place in America around the time the play was written? Students should review occurrences such as:
 - 1954 - The Supreme Court states that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.
 - 1955 – First Claudette Colvin and then Rosa Parks refuse to give up their seat to a white passenger. Martin Luther King Jr. organizes a bus boycott, which lasts almost a year.
 - 1956 - Segregation on buses and trains is banned.

- 1957 – In Arkansas nine black students are prevented from entering a school. The president sends troops to facilitate the school's integration. The nine students become known as the "Little Rock Nine"
- Where do you think Lorraine Hansberry got the title of the play from? (Students should recognize the phrase from Langston Hughes' poem, "Harlem.")
- Not only did she title the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, she also uses the poem "Harlem" as a forward to the play. I also previously mentioned that all of the characters (other than one minor role) are African American. Given this, the historical context of the time in which Hansberry was writing, as well as what you've learned regarding Hansberry's background, what predictions might you make regarding the themes or content that will be present in the play? (Teachers can note these on chart paper and return to the list after students read the play to see if any predictions were close to the actual content of the play.)

Class Reading of *A Raisin in the Sun*

13. Next, provide students with copies of the play (students can pair up and share if needed) and let the class know that they are going to be reading it aloud. (In order to save class time, it is recommended that teachers select students to read for the various characters prior to class starting. The teacher can either plan on reading the stage directions himself/herself, or recruit a student to also do this.) Let students know that the play takes place in the apartment of a family, the Youngers, who live in Chicago's Southside. The time period of the play is noted as "sometime between World War II and the present." Point out to students that while the actual actors performing the play would speak with a particular dialect, the student readers should read using their own manner of speaking. This is to ensure their reading doesn't come across as being stereotypical.
14. Provide students with the attached response sheet and tell students that as they follow along, they should note their first impressions and visualizations (i.e., what they picture in their head) of both the setting and each character they meet. Students should be as specific as possible, paraphrasing specific wording or referring to particular moments of action and/or dialogue that lead them to feel this way. Let students know that they are welcome to use words and phrases, as well as artistic sketches and symbols.
15. Begin by reading Act I, Scene One, stopping to discuss the following questions afterwards. If time permits after the discussion of Scene One, have the class continue on to read Act I, Scene Two, again providing ample time for discussion after.

Act I, Scene One

- At the beginning of the play, Hansberry uses a lot of details to help the reader/viewer visualize the Youngers' apartment. How did you visualize the apartment in your head based on the description and the action throughout the first scene? How would you feel walking inside this apartment?
- What do some of Hansberry's word choices in describing the setting tell us about the family, before we even meet them? Refer to specific lines in the text. (i.e.: "...the furnishings of this room were actually selected with care and love and even hope – and brought to this apartment and arranged with taste and pride..."; "Weariness has, in fact, won in this room.")
- What is your first impression of Walter Lee? What does Hansberry's beginning description tell you about him? (i.e., she describes him as "...a lean, intense young man in his middle thirties, inclined to quick nervous movements and erratic speech habits – and always in his voice there is a quality of indictment.")
- What are your first impressions of Ruth? ("...it is apparent that life has been little that she expected, and disappointment has already begun to hang in her face.")
- What are your first impressions of what Ruth and Walter's relationship is like?
- What message is Walter conveying when he says to Ruth, "You tired, ain't you? Tired of everything. Me, the boy, the way we live – this beat-up hole – everything." Is this statement about Ruth, or something more?
- What is Walter's dream? How does he view the rest of the family in terms of his fulfilling that dream?

- Consider Walter’s passionate plea to Ruth: “Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. Man say: I got to change my life, I’m choking to death, baby! And his woman say – Your eggs is getting cold!” What’s going on with him in this moment?
- Considering the time in which the Youngers live, why do you think Walter says he is “choking to death?”
- What does Walter want from Ruth?
- What are your first impressions of Mama? What is Hansberry conveying about her when she writes, “...being a woman who has adjusted to many things in life and overcome many more, her face is full of strength...”? Given what we’ve learned about the 1900s, what types of things do you imagine Mama has had to adjust to and overcome?
- Ruth says to Mama, “...something is happening between Walter and me. I don’t know what it is – but he needs something – something I can’t give him any more. He needs this chance, Lena.” What is happening between Walter and Ruth? What is it that he needs that Ruth can’t give him (beyond money?)
- What do we find out regarding Mama’s dream? (“...you should know all the dreams I had ‘bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back – and didn’t none of it happen.”)
- How is Mr. Younger described? What do you think Mama means when she calls him a fine man that “just couldn’t never catch up with his dreams?”
- What is your first impression of Beneatha? What is her dream? What is her relationship like with the family?

Act I, Scene Two

- What do we learn about Ruth at the start of Scene Two? How does she seem to be handling the news of her pregnancy?
- What is Asagai like? How does he differ from the Youngers? Why do you think Beneatha is interested in him?
- Mama expresses concern to Walter regarding his personality: “Something eating you up like a crazy man. Something more than me not giving you this money. The past few years I been watching it happen to you. You get all nervous and wild in the eyes...Seem like you getting to a place where you always tied up in some kind of knot about something.” What is she trying to get him to see? Why do you think Walter is behaving in this way?
- Even though they argue, in what ways are Walter Lee and Beneatha similar? In what ways do they both differ from Mama?
- What does Mama mean when she says to Walter, “You something new boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too...Now here come you and Beneatha – talking ‘bout things we ain’t never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain’t satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; that we kept you out of trouble till you was grown; that you don’t have to ride to work on the back of nobody’s streetcar – You my children – but how different we done become.”
- In what ways are dreams part of the story throughout Act I? (Make sure to discuss each character’s dream if any haven’t been touched on thus far.)
- What is conflict in terms of a story or play? (Discuss with students that it’s the internal/external struggles of the characters.) After reading Act I, what do you identify as the main conflict of the play so far? How does this relate to each character’s dream?
- What is a symbol in terms of a story or play? (A symbol is a person, place, or thing that comes to represent an abstract idea or concept.) How can symbols/symbolism help tell a story or move the action along? What are some possible symbols from Act I that you think are/will be meaningful to the life of the play? What could these symbols mean? (i.e., the insurance money, Mama’s plant, Africa, etc.)

- Overall, how would you characterize the Younger family?
- Have you ever been faced with a decision, or tried to convince someone to make a decision, that seemed as if it would affect your whole life? If so, what was this like? If you've never actually been in such a situation, what do you imagine such a situation would be like?
- If you were Mama, what would you do with the money? Do you think she should give it to Walter Lee? Why or why not?

Create a Set Design for Act I of *A Raisin in the Sun*

16. Draw student attention back to the opening of the play, where Hansberry provided a detailed description regarding the Youngers' apartment. Discuss:
 - Why is the setting of a play important? What types of things might it tell us about the play itself?
 - How might a set be designed to symbolize aspects of a play's story, its characters, etc.?
 - How might lighting further be used in symbolic ways?
17. Tell students that based on their visualizations and interpretation of Act I, they are going to create a set design for Act I of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hand out the attached assignment sheet and explain to students that a stage design needs to be built in such a way that it helps communicate the themes and action of the play and connects to what the people in the play are portraying. Provide students with the attached assignment sheet and go over it, accepting any questions. Let students know to be prepared to share their work in groups the next time class meets.

Day 3

18. As class convenes, have students form groups of approximately 6 students each and instruct them to share their set designs with one another. Tell students to begin by having one person present their design to the group (without providing any information about their design at this time.) The remainder of the group should offer feedback by answering the following questions:
 - What first catches your eye about this set design? What do you find interesting?
 - What does the design tell you regarding the artist's interpretation of Act I of *A Raisin in the Sun*? Why do you think the artist chose to design the set in this way?
 - What questions do you have about this design?
19. After spending approximately 2 minutes offering feedback, the artist should share his/her reasoning behind his design (this should be detailed in his/her paragraph accompaniment to the design) and then the process should repeat for the next group member. Once all group members have shared their design, instruct groups to spend a final few minutes discussing:
 - Were there any similarities among all of the designs? What significant differences can you identify, if any?
20. Optionally, teachers can instruct students to select the top design from their group (based on creativity, interpretation, connection to the play, etc.) then have these students present their design to the entire class for discussion.

Continued Class Reading of *A Raisin in the Sun*

21. Next, ask for student volunteers to summarize what took place during Act I of the play, then continue on to reading Act II, stopping after each scene to discuss.

Act II, Scene One

- How is Beneatha dressed and behaving at the opening of Act II? Why do you think she is interested in Nigeria? Why do you think Walter participates, whereas Ruth is embarrassed, particularly once George arrives?
 - Teachers may be interested in showing students a clip of the culture and dance Beneatha refers to, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8h-yBFBI08>

- Why is Walter so resentful of George? For example, what is he getting at when he says to him, “I see you all the time – with the books tucked under your arms – going to your ‘clahsses.’ And for what! What the hell you learning over there? Filling up your heads - with the sociology and the psychology – but they teaching you how to be a man? How to take over and run the world? They teaching you how to run a rubber plantation or a steel mill? Naw - just to talk proper and read books and wear them faggoty-looking white shoes...”
- How are George and Asagai different? Consider George’s white shoes compared to Asagai’s Nigerian robes. In what ways are these items symbolic of the men themselves, and perhaps their own dreams?
- What do we find out that Mama did with the money?
- What do we learn about Clybourne Park, the neighborhood in which the house is located?
- How does Ruth react to learning she gets to move?
- How does Walter take it when he learns his mother bought a house rather than entrust the money to him?
- How do you think it impacts Mama when Walter says, “So you butchered up a dream of mine – you - who always talking about your children’s dreams...?”

Act II, Scene Two

- Describe Mrs. Johnson. What do you think her purpose is in visiting the Youngers? How do her attitudes differ from those of Mama? How does this relate to the disagreement between Walter and Mama?
- What does Mama mean when she says to Walter, “I say I been wrong, son. That I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you...there ain’t nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, nothing else – it if means- if it means it’s going to destroy my boy...?”
- What big decision does Mama make? Do you think this is the right decision? Why or why not?
- What does money symbolize to Walter Lee? How do you think his feeling like he has money will affect him?
- Although Travis does not have many lines, in what ways is his character significant?

Act II, Scene 3

- What is Karl Linder’s purpose for visiting the Youngers?
- How do the Youngers respond? How do you think you would respond were you in their situation?
- Could something like this take place today? (Discuss with students that while segregation is illegal in the eyes of the law, and while our communities are typically more diverse than they were in the 1950s, many neighborhoods remain segregated today. Allow students to share their thoughts regarding reasons for this.)
- What news does Bobo bring? What do we find out regarding what Walter did with the money? What is your opinion of Walter in this moment?
- How do you think the family feels in learning the money is gone? How do you imagine Walter feels?
- In particular, how does Mama react to the news and why?
- Overall, how do you think the Youngers' environment has impacted their life?
- Reconsider the set you designed for *A Raisin in the Sun* based on the events and action of Act I. Is there anything you would change about your design, or add or take away from your design, based on Act II? Explain.
- Predict what you think will happen next. If you were to write the last act of the play, what would take place?

Create a Sensory Figure

22. After completing Act II, instruct students to reconsider each of the main characters in the play. Have them review their Response Sheet, considering not only their first impressions of the characters, but how they have developed throughout the first and second acts of the play. Instruct students to create a “Sensory Figure” for a particular character. (Teachers should assign each student a character to ensure a fairly even number of figures per character are created.) Instruct students to:

- Visualize what you imagine your assigned character to look like (consider physical characteristics, clothing, accessories, etc.) As best you can, draw the character as you imagine him/her to appear.
- Next, consider this character's thoughts, emotions, dreams, struggles, etc. What are the major aspects of your character's overall personality and core nature/motivation? Connect the major aspects of your character to various parts of your drawing. For example, you should draw a line to the character's heart and fill in the statement, "I dream..." You might also draw a line to the character's head ("I think..." or "I hope..."), eyes ("I see..."), ears ("I hear..."), etc. Connections and statements can be literal or abstract.
- Your final sensory figure should have at least 7 statements, one of which must complete the prompt, "I dream..."

Day 4

23. At the beginning of class, have students hang their sensory figures around the room. Teachers should have all the same characters placed in the same section for easy comparison. Provide students a few minutes to browse the various figures, then assign a group of students to each particular character/section and instruct them to discuss the following questions for a few minutes. (Teachers might purposely assign students to alternate characters from the one they focused on for their homework assignment.) After group discussion, each group should report out on their assigned character as a means of reviewing Acts I & II of the play.
- Based on what has taken place in the first two acts, and based on the various sensory figures, how would you describe <insert character name>?
 - Are there particular aspects of this character that you see repeated among the various figures? Explain.
 - What are the various dreams this character has that have been identified in the figures? As of the end of Act II, how far along is this character in reaching his/her dream and why?
 - Is there hope for this character? Why or why not?

Continued Class Reading of *A Raisin in the Sun*

24. Next, have students complete their reading of *A Raisin in the Sun*, using the following questions to discuss.

Act III

- Act III begins with stage directions that note that "there is a sullen light of gloom in the living room, gray light not unlike that which began the first scene of Act One." What do you think this symbolizes?
- Why is Beneatha disheartened?
- How does Asagai react to her disillusionment? What message does he try to convey when speaking to her about his village?
- What does Asagai mean when he says, "...isn't there something wrong in a house – in a world – where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?"
- Mama notes that she remembers people talking about her when she was a little girl: "...you aims to high all the time. You needs to slow down and see life a little more like it is. Just slow down some..." Why do you think she is now reminded of this? Do you think this is an appropriate response to someone's dreams? Why or why not?
- Why has Walter Lee invited Karl Linder back to their home? What do you think of this decision? Why does he say he's going to put on a "show" for George Linder?
- Why does Beneatha say regarding Walter, "Where is the bottom! Where is the real honest-to-God bottom so he can't go any farther...?"
- What is Mama's opinion of Walter's plan? What message is she conveying when she says, "I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers – but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. We ain't never been that – dead inside...?"

- Do you feel that Walter has taken responsibility for his actions as of the beginning of Act III? What does he mean when he says, “What’s the matter with you all! I didn’t make this world! It was give to me this way!”
- Even though Walter Sr. never appears in the play, in what ways is his character significant?
- In the end, what does Walter tell Karl Linder? Why do you think he changes his mind? What is your opinion of this decision?
- The play ends with Mama coming back for her plant. What do you think the plant symbolizes? Why do you think Hansberry chose to end the play this way?

Culminating Discussion

25. Move on to a culminating discussion of the entire play and related themes:

- How do the themes present in the poems relate to those present in *A Raisin in the Sun*? In particular, why do you think Lorraine Hansberry chose to use “Harlem” as a forward to the play? What particular lines can you relate to particular moments/occurrences in the play?
- The American dream means something different to each character in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Discuss these differences and how they conflict with one another.
- The opening description of the setting and time notes that the play takes place sometime between World War II and the present.” While it was written in 1957 and performed on Broadway in 1959, in what ways are the themes and issues of the play still relevant today? Could this play be staged to take place in present times? If so, would any edits be needed? Explain.
- Consider some of the major themes in the play: poverty, wealth and opportunity; education; family; self-identity. What impact do each of these areas have on the various characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*?
- Before reading the play we discussed that it took quite some time before *A Raisin in the Sun* was produced on Broadway, since it was considered a risky investment. Why do you think this was the case?
- Imagine it is March 11, 1959, the night *A Raisin in the Sun* opens on Broadway, and you are Lorraine Hansberry. You peek around the curtain from backstage and see a largely white audience. How do you feel right before the curtain rises and the play begins and why?
- Which particular aspects of Hansberry’s background do you think informed her writing of *A Raisin in the Sun*? Why do you think she decided to write this play and work diligently to have it produced?
- Given American society in 1959, what type of responses do you imagine this play got when it opened? What were Hansberry and the other people who worked on it risking?
- In particular, what commentary does the play make regarding housing discrimination in the 1950s and how is this still relevant today? In what ways is a person impacted by his/her environment? How do you think the Youngers in particular were affected by their environment?
 - Share with students: Hansberry's play is timeless because she is able to make contemporary political issues part of the very art of the stage, drawing her audience into a conversation that continues to be relevant even today. The appearance of Mr. Lindner on stage is the physical manifestation of the housing controversy that has been a menacing presence throughout the play. Housing has various implications not only for health, but also for education. Although the burden fell most heavily upon African-Americans, they were not the only ethnic group affected by housing discrimination during this era. Restrictive covenants also prohibited Italians, Asians, and Jews from residing in certain areas. The Housing Act of 1949 had only been in place for ten years when the play hit the stage, but the majority of African Americans were still living in poverty. The law suggests that integrated neighborhoods will benefit from improved health and living standards, as well as from the growth and advancement of under-served communities. However, several practices continued even after the passing of the act that made integration difficult. Real estate agents would sell houses at an inflated cost after having coerced the white owners into selling at a loss because of the threat of integration. Rental agencies would delay appointments with African-Americans in hopes that a white customer would rent first. The Fair Housing Policy of 1968 attempted to address the problem by forbidding these deceptive practices. Even today, housing continues to be issue, particularly given how it affects education. Schools are still funded through

property taxes in most area, and children have the option of attending alternate schools through busing or school vouchers to private institutions. (Source: <http://www.gradesaver.com/a-raisin-in-the-sun/study-guide/section8/>)

26. Explain to students:

- Waiting for the curtain to rise on opening night, Hansberry and producer Phillip Rose did not expect the play to be a success, for it had already received mixed reviews from a preview audience the night before. Though it received popular and critical acclaim, reviewers argued about whether the play was "universal" or particular to African-American experiences. However, the New York Drama Critics' Circle named it the best play of 1959, and it ran for nearly two years and was produced on tour.
- Hansberry noted that the play introduced details of black life to the overwhelmingly white Broadway audiences, while director Richards observed that it was the first play to which large numbers of blacks were drawn. The *New York Times* stated that *A Raisin in the Sun* "changed American theater forever."
- In 1960 *A Raisin In The Sun* was nominated for four Tony Awards: best play, best actor, best actress, best direction.

Discuss:

- What is monumental about *A Raisin in the Sun* being named the best play on Broadway in 1959, particularly given society at the time?
- How do you think it felt for Lorraine Hansberry when *A Raisin in the Sun* was named the best play and when in 1960, the play won four Tony Awards?
- Do you think all of America was equally excited about the content of the play? Explain.
- What do you think this play could teach people in the late 1950s-1960s? What can it teach us today?

Culminating Assignments

27. Choose one (or more) of the following to provide students as a culminating assignment:

- **One Month Later**
Predict what you think happens after the curtain closes on Act III of *A Raisin in the Sun* and the Youngers head to their new home in Clybourne Park. Write 1 or more scenes that take place at least a month later illustrating your predictions of what takes place. Your final product should:
 - Have a beginning, middle and end
 - Contain action (something significant should happen)
 - Include at least two (or more) of the original characters of *A Raisin in the Sun*. If desired, you can introduce new characters as well.
 - Be at least three pages long and written in the following format:

Title	
<i>Scene1: The curtain opens to ... <describe the setting and any opening stage directions needed to set the scene.></i>	
Character 1:	<i>(Any action/movement a character takes should be described in italics and parentheses.)</i> Hello? Is anyone home?
Character 2:	In here! I'm lying down.
Character 1:	Are you feeling OK? Would you like a drink of water?
Character 2:	Oh, yes please. That would be lovely.

- **Character Opinions in Historical Context**

As discussed, *A Raisin in the Sun* is set during a fairly tumultuous period of American history, when African Americans were forced to fight for the same rights provided to White citizens. Consider the various events that took place in the 1950s-1960s and select one particular event to research and learn more about. Simultaneously, choose one of the characters from *A Raisin in the Sun* and write a one

page monologue in which that character discusses the historical event of your choosing. For example, what do you think Walter Lee or Beneatha would say regarding the Montgomery Bus Boycott? What might Mama say about the 1963 bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, when four African-American girls were killed? How do you think George Murchinson would react to the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*? Your final monologue should:

- Be written in first person, from the perspective of the character you have chosen
- Show a basic understanding of the historical facts regarding the occurrence selected (i.e., date, location, people involved, chronology of events, etc.)
- Share the character's opinion regarding the historical occurrence
- Be at least 2 pages double spaced

- **Design a Poster for an Upcoming Presentation of *A Raisin in the Sun***

Imagine that a local theatre is staging a production of *A Raisin in the Sun* and has hired you as their new marketing director. Your first assignment on the job is to design a new poster for advertising the play and boosting ticket sales. Consider how you can create a poster that will provide hints regarding what the play is about and intrigue people enough that they want to come and see it. Your final poster should:

- Include art work, visual images, and/or symbols that represent *A Raisin in the Sun* (can be literal or abstract)
- Contain text or phrases (either from or about the play)
- Be effective in recruiting audience members
- Be creative, colorful, and show that that the creator of the poster put forth thought, time, and effort into the design

American Dream Quotes

There are those who will say that the liberation of humanity, the freedom of man and mind is nothing but a dream. They are right. It is the American Dream.

~Archibald MacLeish

I look forward confidently to the day when all who work for a living will be one with no thought to their separateness as Negroes, Jews, Italians or any other distinctions. This will be the day when we bring into full realization the American dream -- a dream yet unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few; a dream of a land where men will not argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character; a dream of a nation where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone, but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity; the dream of a country where every man will respect the dignity and worth of the human personality. That is the dream...

~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We believe that what matters most is not narrow appeals masquerading as values, but the shared values that show the true face of America; not narrow values that divide us, but the shared values that unite us: family, faith, hard work, opportunity and responsibility for all, so that every child, every adult, every parent, every worker in America has an equal shot at living up to their God-given potential. That is the American dream and the American value.

~Senator John Kerry

America is the sum of our dreams. And what binds us together, what makes us one American family, is that we stand up and fight for each other's dreams, that we reaffirm that fundamental belief - I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper - through our politics, our policies, and in our daily lives.

~President Barack Obama

Being an American is so much more than just having citizenship. It's that beat in your heart to be free, to be your own man, to have control over your own destiny. America has always been an idea. It has nothing to do with papers, documents, or immigration laws. It has a lot to do with ideals and dreams.

~Paul Cuadros

The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

~James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America*, 1931.

Let America be America Again

by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land.
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek--
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.

I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home--
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."
The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?

For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay--
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again--
The land that never has been yet--
And yet must be--the land where *every* man is free.
The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME--
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,

I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath--
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain--
All, all the stretch of these great green states--
And make America again!

From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Copyright © 1994
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Harlem

from *A Dream Deferred*

by Langston Hughes, 1951

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Response Sheet for *A Raisin in the Sun*

Setting (what do you visualize?)	
First Impressions	What is this character's dream?
Ruth Younger:	
Walter Lee Younger:	
Beneatha Younger:	
Lena ("Mama") Younger:	
Travis Younger:	
Joseph Asagai:	
George Murchison	

Create a Set Design for *A Raisin in the Sun*

Based on your visualizations and interpretation of Act I, you are going to create a set design for Act I of *A Raisin in the Sun*. The ultimate goal of your set is to add to the audience's understanding of the play in a visual way.

Your final set design should build upon Lorraine Hansberry's set description and directions as well as your own interpretation and must contain two components:

- A color drawing (8 ½ by 11) of the set (from the perspective of the audience)
- A paragraph or more description of your design

Questions to consider when brainstorming, designing and writing about your design:

- What are the key elements of the first act and how will your design bring them out?
- What mood do you want your setting to convey to the audience, and what elements of the set contribute to this?
- What colors will help you express this particular mood?
- What interactions and action does your design need to accommodate?
- Why do you think this design is particularly appropriate for *A Raisin in the Sun*?
- What symbols are present in your set and what is their purpose?

Specifically, consider:

- What type of stage will you design your set on? (i.e., a traditional proscenium stage, theatre in the round, a non-traditional space such, etc.)
- Is your design literal or abstract?
- What specific physical items (furniture, home décor, etc.) are needed? Consider the floor, walls, windows/doors, etc. as well.
- How will lighting be used to enhance your set design?

Questions/notes:

