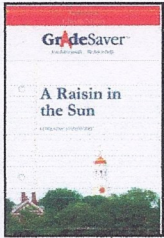

Section Navigation



A Raisin in the Sun

by Lorraine Hansberry

A Raisin in the Sun Summary

The Youngers are a poor African-American family living on the South Side of Chicago. An opportunity to escape from poverty comes in the form of a \$10,000 life insurance check that the matriarch of the family (Lena Younger or Mama) receives upon her husband's death. Lena's children, Walter and Beneatha, each have their plans for the money. The oldest son, Walter (a man of 35 with a wife and a young son), wishes to invest in a liquor store. The younger sister, Beneatha, currently a college student, wants to use the money for medical school. Lena has plans as well for the money: she wants to buy a house for the family and finance Beneatha's medical school.

The environmental pressures are high: five people live in a tiny one-bedroom apartment, two families share a single bathroom, and the building is run-down and roach-infested. These pressures increase when Walter's wife, Ruth, finds out that she is pregnant for the second time, and begins seriously contemplating abortion. Yet even in an environment where a request for fifty cents becomes a family conflict, there is room for ideas and dreams.

Beneatha Younger is the source of the many of the new ideas and philosophies that infiltrate the family's home. Currently in college, she is constantly challenging the notions of culture, race, gender, and religion that her family has grown up with. She is dating two men who represent very different aspects of African-American culture. George Murchison, the first, is a wealthy African-American classmate of Beneatha's. Through his character, Hansberry is able to illustrate many of the class tensions that exist within the African-American culture. Asagai is her second boyfriend, a college student who is from Nigeria. Through Asagai, Beneatha is able to learn more about her African heritage. He gives her Nigerian robes and music, encourages her idealistic aspirations, and near the end of the play invites her to return to Nigeria with him to practice medicine there.

Walter Younger truly encapsulates the American dream. He has a genuine entrepreneurial spirit and desire to progress. Walter doesn't want to challenge the present system as Beneatha does. Instead, he wishes to progress up the social ladder into a higher class. He is unsatisfied with his job as a chauffeur, and wants a big house, a nice car, pearls for his wife, and an office job. In short, he desires the bourgeoisie lifestyle. Walter's idolization of wealth and power actually creates a deep hunger within him for change, but as long as obstacles like racism keep him stagnated, his hopes and dreams fester. After several events, Mama realizes the significance of his plans even though she morally objects to the idea of a liquor store.