INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the educator resource guide for Triad Stage’s production of A RAISIN IN THE SUN. We are excited to share one of the greatest American plays with our student matinee audiences.

Our goals for this guide include:

- Noting historical and artistic context about the show that you can share with your students.
- Providing practical instructional activities that you can use in your classroom that make connections between the production and curricular standards in areas including English/Language Arts, Social Studies, and Drama/Theater.
- Offering opportunities for students to make personal connections between the production and their own experiences, as well as sparking dialogue about the play’s central themes and big ideas.

In the guide, you will find dramaturgical information about the show and Triad Stage’s production of the play, as well as a number of links to additional resources and information. There is also a section of classroom activities that are aligned with secondary English/Language Arts and Social Studies standards, are designed to meet curricular goals, and seek to support students’ exploration of the play’s themes. This guide is designed specifically for students in 7th grade and up, but you can adjust the activities and information for younger students as well.

If you have any questions about the guide or how to use it, please don’t hesitate to reach out to Learning Director Lauren Smith at lauren@triadstage.org.
ABOUT THE STORY

*A Raisin in the Sun* follows the Younger family, a Black family living on the South Side of Chicago in the 1950’s. The family’s matriarch, Lena, who often goes by “Mama,” is waiting to receive a life insurance check shortly after her husband has died. The check is worth $10,000 (a considerable amount in a time when the national median income for Black families was just short of $2,000). While Mama plans to use this money to support her daughter Beneatha’s medical training and to purchase a new home, her son, Walter, dreams of using the money to invest in a liquor store business to gain more material wealth. As the story unfolds, the characters confront institutional racism in job and housing markets; after Mama makes a down payment on the house she wishes to buy, a white member of the neighborhood association in that area makes the family a financial offer to “buy them out” of the house, or essentially pay the family not to move into an all-white neighborhood.

The play was completed in 1957 and Hansberry read the script to producer Philip Rose, who tapped Llyod Richards to direct and Sidney Portier to star in it. A play by a Black female playwright had never been produced on Broadway before and it took more than a year for them to raise the money to produce it. In that time, the play previewed in New Haven, Philadelphia and Chicago to rave reviews. On March 11, 1959 the play moved to the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, making Lorraine Hansberry and *A Raisin in the Sun* a critical success and a Broadway first.

White audiences raved that *A Raisin in the Sun* was “not really a negro play – it could be about anybody. It’s a play about people!”, and Black audiences had a chance to see something completely new: the perfectly ordinary lives of perfectly ordinary folk who looked and sounded and existed just like them on the largest stages in the country. Hansberry would become the first Black woman to win a New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award. Columbia Pictures bought the rights to *A Raisin in the Sun*, and Hansberry’s screenplay became a Cannes Film Festival favorite and was nominated for a SAG Award for Best Screenplay.

The play continues to be produced frequently in regional theatres across the country. It has also returned to Broadway twice, once in 2004 and once in 2014.

• What cultural works (i.e. music, plays, books, television shows, etc.) do you see as most influential in today’s world?
• What about those pieces is striking to you?
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born on May 19th, 1930, Lorraine Hansberry was the youngest of four children. Despite the deep economic challenges of the Great Depression, her father, Carl Hansberry, Sr., was able to support his family and grow their wealth through banking and real estate development. Despite his financial success, however, the Hansberrys were unable to move to areas outside of the South Side of Chicago due to racial redlining (or the practice of denying members of certain racial or ethnic groups services).

In 1937, Lorraine Hansberry’s father secretly purchased property in a predominantly white area of Chicago. When they moved in, however, they were met with resistance to their presence and repeated instances of violence. When these intimidation tactics by white people in the neighborhood failed to get the family to move, the Kenwood Improvement Association served them an injunction to vacate their home, granted by a Circuit Court judge. Hansberry’s father challenged the ruling, which eventually led to the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case Hansberry vs. Lee. Following the court case and a failed run for Congress, Carl Hansberry Sr. decided to move the family out of the country and went to Mexico to find a home. While there he suffered a cranial hemorrhage and passed away before the his family could join him. Lorraine was 15 when her father died and later said that “American racism helped kill him.” To find out more about Hansberry vs. Lee, click here, or visit our dramturgical website at https://sites.google.com/view/araisininthesundramaturgy/hansberry-vs-lee.

Hansberry attended the University of Wisconsin and briefly the University of Guadalajara, and eventually left college to join the staff at Paul Robeson’s publication Freedom in New York City. As a writer and editor at the magazine, she became even more energized to advocate for the rights of Black Americans, and worked alongside many other Black intellectuals, including W. E. B DuBois, Alice Childress, and Charles White. She became the youngest editor of the publication and fulfilled international speaking engagements for Paul Robeson when his passport was revoked by McCarthy Era policies. She was an active organizer in the Civil Rights movement as well.
As noted earlier, *A Raisin in the Sun* was a major success for Hansberry in 1959. The success of the play brought not only fame and recognition, but also brought a new circle of friends for Hansberry which included artists like Harry Belafonte, Nina Simone and her dearest friend James Baldwin. Along with these friends, she continued to create art and activism that sought to free the people of America from racism and homophobia. This group, along with others, met with Attorney General Bobby Kennedy and beseeched him to aid the Civil Rights Movement. This meeting would ultimately be a disappointment for all involved and stir up controversy for several of the attending artists. But Hansberry was no stranger to political controversy; she had been being monitored by the FBI for years and had even had her passport revoked along with Paul Robeson for suspected Communist ties.

In 1964, Hansberry wrote the following: “Do I remain a revolutionary? Intellectually--without a doubt. But am I prepared to give my body to the struggle or even my comforts...I think when I get my health back, I shall go into the South to find out what kind of revolutionary I am.” She was never able to make this trip, as she passed away from cancer in early 1965 at the age of 34. Although her life was cut short, Hansberry’s revolutionary achievements bolstered Black American theatre in ways that no other writer’s work had done before.

For further information about Hansberry’s life and writings, please visit https://sites.google.com/view/araisininthesundramaturgy/lorraine-hansberry.

- Take a moment to review Lorraine Hansberry’s words about being a revolutionary; how would you define “revolutionary” in today’s society? Who are the modern revolutionaries who you see advocating for change?
CHICAGO: A SHORT HISTORY

While *A Raisin in the Sun* rang true across the U.S. in the 1950’s when it was first published and continues to resonate with Americans from all over the country today, it is specifically grounded in the history of Chicago. Before being settled by European colonists, the area which would become known as Chicago was inhabited by several native tribes including Miami, Sauk, Fox and Potawatomi tribes. The first Non-Native person to settle the area was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, who arrived around 1780. Just over 50 years later, the Black Hawk War ended the Native resistance to European settlement and Chicago was incorporated as a town in 1833.

Chicago’s position as a portage between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi watershed made it a bustling industrial hub and by 1837 the population had grown to over 4,000 residents. Just under twenty years later, due to innovations in grain farming, the population had swelled to 30,000 inhabitants, making Chicago the largest grain port and America’s largest Midwest city.

Recovering from the 1871 Great Chicago Fire wherein the 100,000 of the city’s now 300,000 residents were rendered homeless, Chicago emerged as an architectural innovator giving us the world’s first skyscraper. As industry grew, and prosperity abounded for the heads of these corporations, specifically railroad, meatpacking, manufacturing and shipping industries, the quality of life for the laborers and residents of Chicago began to deteriorate. The turn of the century was marked by poverty, protest, corruption and unrest in the city. Still, as industries grew, so did the availability of unskilled labor opportunities and the population continued to swell.

The Great Migration
The Great Migration refers to the movement of nearly seven million African Americans from the rural south to the Northeast, Midwestern and Western United States from 1916 and 1970. Precipitated by Jim Crow laws, the invention of the cotton gin, the devastation of Southern crops by the boll weevil and general unrest in the South, many Black people sought the urbanized and industrialized Chicago as a place to gain work, higher wages and social freedom. In early days they were met with employers who would not hire them and instead strictly hired the European immigrants who were flooding into the city for the same reasons. When WWI legislation halted European immigration, employers sought out Black laborers.

Washington Park
The Younger family from *A Raisin in the Sun* lives in the Washington Park subdivision of the Woodlawn community on the South Side of Chicago. Below are some key facts about this neighborhood:

- While originally a largely German and Irish immigrant neighborhood, the turn of the century saw a major “white flight” (or White people moving towards the suburbs rather than continuing to live in urban areas). By 1930 the community was 92% Black and remains (as of 2015) 95.98% Black.

- The 1960 census produced the following numbers
  - Population: 43,690
  - Black residents: 43,310
  - White residents: 332

- Residents of other ethnicities/racial groups:
  - The Washington Park population has been in steady decline since 1950, when Chicago Land Clearance Commission initiatives drove the population down from nearly 57,000 to 14,146 in just 50 years.
WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO SEE?

Costume Designer Olivia Trees needed to consider the many tasks that the characters attend to throughout the play in addition to their location and socioeconomic status. Here, you can see a number of Beneatha's costumes:

- Beneatha in her cleaning clothes
- Beneatha in her clothes to go out with her wealthy boyfriend
- Beneatha in a Nigerian outfit that Joseph Asagai had his sister send from Nigeria
- Beneatha in her clothes for attending college classes

Scenic Designer Nevena Prodanovic considered the location of the play, the entirety of which takes place in the Youngers’ Chicago apartment. Designers conduct extensive visual research, especially for productions that are set in different time periods, before they finalize their interpretation of the story.

Wanting more?
If you are interested in further information about the important events and aesthetics of the 1950s, please visit our dramaturgical website at https://sites.google.com/view/araisinthesundramaturgy/1950s-america.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: TOUR OF A SPACE

Content Area: English/Language Arts
Approximate Time: 30 minutes
Instructional Cycle: Before or after reading/viewing A RAISIN IN THE SUN
Standards:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

Directions:
Ask students to find a partner and then sit down next to that person. Have students close their eyes (or look down at the floor, if that is more comfortable for them) and imagine a place that feels like home to them. This could be a place they currently live, a place they have lived in before, or somewhere that they feel at home, even if it is not a residence. Ask them to imagine that place in detail, thinking about the way all five senses contribute to the experience of being in this place. You might ask them who is present in that place, what memories they have from that place, etc. Ask them to hold onto these details as they open their eyes.

Their next task will be to share this place with their partner, as though they were really there. Each pair of students will walk through the space as though they were giving their partner a tour of the actual space. You may want to model this (actually moving through space, pantomiming opening doors). Emphasize that the person who is going on their partner’s tour is able to ask clarifying questions but should refrain from judging their partner’s home.

Give about five minutes for students to give their partner a tour, then signal that the students should switch who is giving the tour and who is taking the tour.

After both students have had a chance to share their homes, come back together as a group and ask the following reflection questions:
- What was your experience of giving your partner a tour of your space like?
- What was receiving your partner’s tour like? (What did you notice about the way they shared information with you?)
- What commonalities did you notice between your home and your partner’s home? What differences?
- Based on our conversation, what do you think we value most about a place that feels like home?
- (If moving through this activity after experiencing the play): How do our ideas of home relate to the way the characters in A RAISIN IN THE SUN felt about the idea of home?

NOTE: The idea of home can be challenging for students who are experiencing (or have experienced) homelessness, or those whose family lives are challenging or dangerous. Use your best judgment regarding the application of this strategy in your context.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: VISUAL MAPPING

Content Area: English/Language Arts
Approximate Time: 30-60 minutes
Instructional Cycle: After reading/viewing A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Standards:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.2: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Directions:
The goal of this activity is to give students a way to visually explore the meaning of the script through dialogue. There are many ways you can approach this activity with A RAISIN IN THE SUN; a few options are below.

Cut pieces of recycled paper into strips (about four per piece of 8 ½ x 11 paper) and give several strips to each student. Give students a prompt to respond to that relates to the play, and ask them to generate several answers to that prompt, writing one per slip of paper (generally, this works best if students write a word or short phrase, rather than a long quotation or sentence).

Some prompts you might use (or feel free to write your own!):
- What themes stood out to you in RAISIN IN THE SUN?
- What words or moments do you remember the most clearly from the performance?
- How would you describe the Younger family? (or a specific character)
- If you had to describe the play in one word, what would you say?

Once students have written their responses, have them lay the slips out either on a large flat surface like a table or on the floor. Ask students then to “map” their responses, physically moving the pieces of paper around to make create a visual representation of their reactions to the prompts. This is a collaborative activity, and students may find multiple ways to group responses that make sense.

Some possible side-coaching questions as students are working:
- What similarities do you notice between the answers? How might you categorize them?
- I notice that you have a group of similar responses over here; what might you title this group?
- How might one group of responses connect to another group?

If you have a larger class, it may be advantageous to have two groups mapping at the same time, and then have students view each other’s maps and note what they see in how their peers mapped their ideas. Some reflection questions to ask might be:
- What do you notice about the way this group mapped the responses?
- What new insights into A RAISIN IN THE SUN does this map offer?

For additional ideas, visit http://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/content/visual-mapping.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: JOURNAL ENTRY

Content Area: English/Language Arts
Approximate Time: Variable (could be used as a formative assessment or homework assignment)
Instructional Cycle: After finishing Act Two
Standards:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.D: Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic; convey a knowledgeable stance in a style that responds to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of likely readers.

Directions:
After reading the second act of A RAISIN IN THE SUN, ask students to write a journal entry from the perspective of one of the characters present in the last scene (either Mama, Beneatha, Ruth or Walter) immediately following the conclusion of Act Two (when Walter finds out that all of the insurance money is gone).

You might ask students to include particular elements in their journal entries, including, if you like:
- At least one simile or metaphor to describe how they are feeling about the situation.
- At least one action they plan to pursue.
- Things they wish they would have said (or still wish to say) to their family members or other characters in the play.

If you are not reading the play in class, you might adjust this activity to use after students view the performance. In this situation, they can write a journal entry from the perspective of any member of the Younger family after they have moved into their new home. You might encourage them to consider what they think the Youngers’ experiences will be, drawing from textual and historical information:
- How is the character you chose adjusting to life in a different part of the city?
- How does not having the money they had planned on affect their new life?
- How do the new neighbors receive the family?
- What is easier or more pleasant about life in a new part of town?
- What new challenges do they face in this next chapter?
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: CONSCIENCE ALLEY

Content Area: English/Language Arts
Approximate Time: 20-30 Minutes
Instructional Cycle: During or after reading/viewing A RAISIN IN THE SUN
Standards:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Directions:
Prior to beginning this activity, take some time to review the story of the play and the key arguments that the characters make, specifically regarding what to do with the money from the life insurance check. Ask students to examine the issue of what to do with the money from different perspectives, including Walter’s, Beneatha’s, Ruth’s, and Travis’.

Have students write on a piece of paper an argument that one of the characters might make (it may be helpful to assign certain groups of students to a specific character’s position) regarding the money. These should be written either in direct quotes from the play, or in language that the students feel like the characters could have said or thought even if they didn’t say it directly in the play (i.e. “We could get rich if we start that liquor store” for Walter or “I’m too tired to even think about moving” for Ruth).

Next, have students form two lines with some space in between (hence the “alley”) and hold their pieces of paper. Take a volunteer student to play Mama (or you can take on this role yourself). The person who is taking on the role of Mama will walk in between the two lines. As this person passes people in the lines on either side, they will say the line they have written to try to convince her to take a specific action with the money.

Once this exercise has finished, first ask the person who played Mama what their experience of walking down the center and hearing all of the opinions was like. How did they feel taking in all of that advice and information?

Next, ask the following reflection questions to the group:
- How did you decide what to write based on your character?
- What perspectives did you hear represented that were different from those expressed in the play?

What societal factors did Mama and the Younger family have to consider as they decided what to do with this money?

http://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/teaching-strategies/conscience-alley
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ON HOUSING POLICY AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The Racist Housing Policy that Made Your Neighborhood
https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/05/the-racist-housing-policy-that-made-your-neighborhood/371439/

The Forgotten History of How the US Government Segregated America
https://www.npr.org/2017/05/03/526655831/a-forgotten-history-of-how-the-u-s-government-segregated-america

Interacting Redlining Maps Zoom in on America’s History of Discrimination


LORRAINE HANSBERRY
