

A STUDY GUIDE FOR



Produced by

THEATRICAL
OUTFIT

and



SEPTEMBER 11-29, 2024

The Balzer Theater at Herren's
84 Luckie St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30303

Lorraine Hansberry's *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* comes to Atlanta with a fresh look at an American classic that proves to be as provocative and powerful today as it was in 1959. Lena Younger has decided to use her late husband's life insurance to move her family out of their cramped apartment on Chicago's South Side. Her son, Walter Lee, has other ideas. This powerful new co-production fearlessly interrogates the American dream in the face of racial and economic strife.

**"A Milestone In The American Theatre" - *Ebony*
Listed Among The Best Plays Ever Written - *TIME OUT***

Run Time: 2 hours and 30 minutes with 1 intermission

Please Note: *This production contains mature language and themes. We recommend this show for audiences ages thirteen and older.*

About the Playwright **Lorraine Hansberry**



Lorraine Hansberry is best known for her work, *A Raisin in the Sun*, a play about a struggling black family, which opened on Broadway to great success. Hansberry was the first African American playwright and the youngest American to win a New York Critics' Circle award.

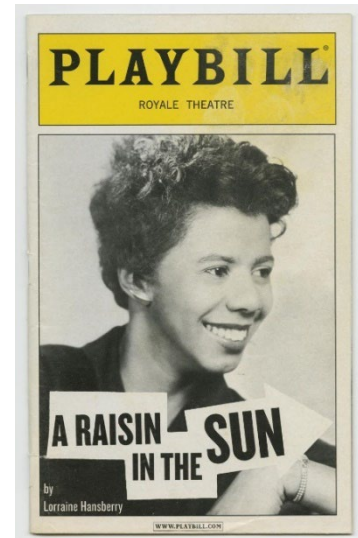
Throughout her life, she was deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement. At the young age of 34, Lorraine Hansberry passed away from pancreatic cancer.

Early Life

Lorraine Vivian Hansberry was born on May 19, 1930, in Chicago, Illinois. Hansberry's father was a successful real estate broker, and her mother was a schoolteacher. Her parents contributed large sums of money to the NAACP and the Urban League—organizations dedicated to advancing social, economic, and legal equity for African Americans. In 1938, Hansberry's family moved to a white neighborhood where they were violently attacked by their neighbors. They refused to move until a court ordered them to do so. However, their case made it to the Supreme Court as *Hansberry v. Lee*, and the Supreme Court's decision in this case ruled restrictive covenants illegal. Hansberry broke her family's tradition of enrolling in Southern black colleges and instead attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison. While at school, she changed her major from painting to writing, and after two years, decided to drop out and move to New York City.

Commercial Success

In New York, Hansberry attended the New School for Social Research and proceeded to work for Paul Robeson's progressive black newspaper, *Freedom*, as a writer and associate editor from 1950 to 1953. She also worked part-time as a waitress and cashier, and wrote in her spare time. By 1956, Hansberry quit her jobs in order to write full time. In 1957, she joined the Daughters of Bilitis – one of the first organizations for lesbian civil and political rights in the US– and contributed letters to their magazine, *The Ladder*, about feminism and homophobia. Because of the nature of these letters, she wrote under her initials, L.H.N., for fear of discrimination. During this time, Hansberry wrote *The Crystal Stair*, a play about a struggling African American family in Chicago, which was later renamed *A Raisin in the Sun*, a title that comes from a line in a Langston Hughes poem. The play opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York on March 11, 1959, and was a great success – it ran for 530 performances. It was the first play produced on Broadway by an African American woman. The film version of *A Raisin in the Sun* starring Sidney Poitier was completed in 1961 and received an award at the Cannes Film Festival.



In 1963, Hansberry became active in the Civil Rights Movement. Along with other influential people, including Harry Belafonte, Lena Horne and James Baldwin, Hansberry met with then attorney general Robert Kennedy to test his position on civil rights. In 1964, her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, opened on Broadway to an unenthusiastic reception. The show was later revived on Broadway in 2023 to positive response and received two Tony and three Drama League nominations including Best Revival of a Play.



Personal Life and Legacy

Hansberry met Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish songwriter, on a picket line, and the two were married in 1953. Hansberry and Nemiroff divorced in 1962, though they continued to work together. In 1964, the same year *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* opened, Hansberry was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She died on January 12, 1965. After her death, Nemiroff adapted a collection of her writings and interviews in *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, which opened off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre and ran for eight months. *A Raisin in the Sun* is considered one of the hallmarks of the American stage and has continued to find new audiences throughout the decades, including Emmy-nominated television productions from both 1989 and 2008. The play has earned accolades from Broadway as well, winning Tony Awards in 2004 and

2014, including Best Revival of a Play.

African American Theatre Timeline

1816 - William Henry Brown starts the African Company in New York. This company attracts white patrons and serves as a training ground for some of the first African American Shakespearean actors.

1823 - William Henry Brown writes and produces *King Shotaway*, the first play publicly produced by an African American. The play is based on a slave rebellion on the island St. Vincent which, at the time, was under British rule. The production starred James Hewlett and Ira Aldridge.

1848 - Blackface minstrel shows become popular, translating formal art such as opera into more popular terms for a general audience. Minstrel shows portray African Americans as dim-witted, lazy, buffoonish, superstitious, happy-go-lucky, and musical.

1916 - *Rachel*, by Angelina Weld Grimke, is considered the first successful African American play for its protest of *The Birth of a Nation* – a film famous for its technical achievement and infamous for its overtly racist message.

1921 - *Shuffle Along* is the first musical written, produced, and performed by African American theatre artists on Broadway.

1935 - Langston Hughes' play, *Mulatto*, debuts on Broadway. It is the first African American musical on Broadway to be a commercial success.

1940 - American Negro Theatre (ANT) and Negro Playwrights' Company (NPC) are established as an outgrowth of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP). NPC members include Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, and Edna Thomas.

1944 - The Library Theatre, located in Harlem produces *Anna Lucasta* by Philip Yordan with an all-African American cast on Broadway.

1955 - *Trouble in Mind* is produced at the Greenwich Mews and wins the Obie Award for best Off-Broadway play, making playwright Alice Childress the first African American woman to be awarded the honor.

1959 - Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* debuts on Broadway. Hansberry becomes the first African American woman to have a play on Broadway. The play reveals the struggles associated with black identity and the related roadblocks to achieving the American Dream. This show also becomes one of the markers of the beginning of the Black Theatre Movement and Black Arts Movement.

1965 - Amiri Baraka (originally LeRoi Jones) establishes the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in Harlem. He inspires artists like playwright Ed Bullins to create a strong "black aesthetic" in American theatre.

1967 - Douglas Turner Ward, Robert Hooks, and Gerald S. Crone become the founders of the Negro Ensemble Company (NEC), a New York based theatre company that focused on original work with themes that centered the Black experience. Many of its alum go on to become some of the most lauded and influential Black artists on stage, screen, and television in the final decades of the 20th century.

1975 - Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, becomes the 2nd play by a Black woman to be produced on Broadway. She also creates a new theatrical medium, the chorepoem, that incorporates poetry dance and music in the exploration of non-traditional narrative. The play is later adapted into a film by Tyler Perry (2010).

1983 - August Wilson receives the Pulitzer Prize for his play, *Fences*. This honor is awarded to him again in 1990 for his play, *The Piano Lesson*.

1983 - The touring production of *Mama, I Want to Sing* by Ken Wydro and Vy Higginsen re-invigorates the traditional music touring circuit, colloquially known as the "chittlin circuit," which brings Black productions to predominantly Black cities across America. The success of these commercial productions creates a template that inspires several Black independent producers like Tyler Perry and David E. Talbert who will eventually branch out from plays to achieve much success as film and television producers.

1990 - Suzan-Lori Parks wins her first Obie Award for her play *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*. Her subsequent awards include the 1996 Pulitzer for *Venus*, the 2002 Pulitzer for *Topdog/Underdog*, and the 2014 Obie for *Father Comes Home from the Wars Parts 1, 2, & 3*.

2009 - Lynn Nottage wins her first Pulitzer Prize for her play *Ruined* and wins the award again for her 2017 play *Sweat*, tying her with August Wilson for wins of this prestigious award.

2020 - During the height of the COVID pandemic and the summer of "racial reckoning" in America, theatre artists create the document *We See You, White American Theatre*, which highlights the challenges that American artists of color face in contemporary theatre. The document also offers suggestions on how theaters can become more equitable in the future. In 2021 seven plays by Black playwrights "reopen" Broadway as the pandemic begins its decline.

DOMINION ENTERTAINMENT + THEATRICAL OUTFIT

PRESENT THE CAST OF LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S

A RAISIN IN THE SUN



AMARI CHEATOM
WALTER LEE YOUNGER



JEN HARPER
LENA YOUNGER



CYNTHIA BARKER
RUTH YOUNGER



ALEIGHA BURT
BENEATHA YOUNGER



MARLON ANDREW BURNLEY
ASACAN



STEPHEN RUFFIN
GEORGE MURKINSON



ANTHONY GOOLSBY
BOBO



DOYLE REYNOLDS
MR. LINCOLN



SHAMAR HILL
TRAVIS YOUNGER

LIMITED ENGAGEMENT | SEPTEMBER 2024



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Robert John Connor, Director
Moriah & Isabel Curley-Clay, Scenic Design
Deondre Cumberbatch, Costume Design
Mike Wood, Lighting Design
Jeremiah Davidson, Sound Design
Leah Thomas, Properties Design
Lisa Watson, Stage Manager

Exploratory Questions and Activities for *A Raisin in The Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

1.) The title of Hansberry's play is inspired by the poem, "Harlem" by Langston Hughes. Read the poem several times, then discuss how its themes are explored in the play:

"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?"

2. After reading the play, write a **five-page scene** that explores the Younger family's first day in their new home in Clybourne Park.

3. One of the themes that the play explores is housing discrimination and disparities for Black families in the late 1950's. Do some research on the housing concerns in your own city **today**. Discuss the similarities and differences between then and now.

4. Discuss the differences between Lena and Walter's way of seeing the world. Which perspective do you personally feel aligned with? Why do you feel that way? Perform a "mock debate" with Lena and Walter trying to persuade an audience to side with their particular worldview.

5. In one of the play's sub-plots, we learn about the similarities and difference of the character Joseph Asagai's experiences in Nigeria and those of Beneatha in America. Do some research on the lives and experiences of young people in another country. Discuss the similarities and differences between their lives and yours.

6. Travis is the youngest member of the family, and, while he doesn't say much, he is aware of what is taking place with the adults around him. Imagine Travis 20 years into the future. What were his experiences when the family moved to their new home? How did he feel about the move? What might be some of the things he missed about his own home? Compose a **two-page one person show** in which an adult Travis is talking to his own son about his childhood experiences.

Social Studies Standards (9-12)

SSSocSC4 Analyze the function of social institutions as agents of social control across differing societies and times.

- a. Analyze the function of social institutions in society, include: family, education, religion, economy, government/politics, health care, and media.
- b. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various social institutions.
- c. Evaluate other possible social institutions such as sports.
- d. Analyze the functions and inequalities of the criminal justice system in relationship to a society's construct of crime and punishment.
- e. Explain the role of total institutions.
- f. Analyze the re-socialization process.

SSSocIC1 Analyze forms of social inequality.

- a. Explain how unequal distribution of power and resources affects the life chances of individuals in that society.
- b. Analyze the sources and effects of stratification on the basis of social class, race and ethnicity, gender, age, and emotional, mental, and physical disabilities.
- c. Analyze the sources of global stratification and inequality.
- d. Evaluate the impact of global stratification and inequality on global relations.

Dramatic Writing Standards (9-12)

TAHSTL.RE.1 Evaluate various aspects of dramatic arts literature using appropriate supporting evidence.

- a. Compare and summarize theatre literature from various historical periods, cultures, and styles.
- b. Develop and apply a set of comprehensive criteria for theatre text analysis.
- c. Compare and contrast theatre texts to live/film performance.
- d. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices

on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone.)

e. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

English Language Arts Standards (9-12)

ELAGSE9-10RL9 Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work.

ELAGSE9-10W9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

ELAGSE11-12RL3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

ELAGSE11-12RL4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

Performing Standards (9-12)

TAHSA.PR.1 Act and direct by communicating and sustaining roles within a variety of situations and environments.

a. Examine and implement the voice, body, observation, and imagination as tools of the actor in presentations of formal and informal theatre.

b. Research and assess the development of acting skills for character creation and performance including historical movements, personal experience, and cultural influences.

c. Act by developing, communicating, and sustaining roles within a variety of situations and environments.

d. Identify and examine the responsibilities and tasks of an actor in relationship with directors, designers, and technical crew.

e. Use the skills and tools of a director to conduct rehearsals for performance.