***A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry**

**Act I Scene 1: Beneatha, Walter, Ruth, Travis, Mama**

1. Discuss the description of the apartment. What literary techniques contribute to the feeling generated by the visual impact of the setting?

2. Would the visual or the verbal description be more effective?

3. What is important about Mama’s plant? Collect quotes throughout the play that reference the plant.

4. Come up with a single quote that represents the personality of each of the main characters.

5. Which character is most likely to get what he/she wants by the end of the play?

**Act I Scene 2: Travis, Mama, Beneatha, Walter, Ruth, Joseph Asagai** *Dungarees are blue jeans.*

1. To what extent are Mama’s and Walter’s arguments about money and freedom legitimate?

Explore their argument. Who has good points? What are they?

2.  What do Beneatha and Joseph Asagai argue about? What are each of their positions?

Why does he laugh at her so much? Why isn’t she bothered by it?

3. Where do you think Mama is going at the end of this scene?

4. Will Ruth terminate the pregnancy?

5. Will Mama give Walter the money?

**Act 2 Scene 1: Ruth, Beneatha, Walter, George, Mama, Travis**

*In Greek mythology, Prometheus is a Titan, a culture hero and a trickster figure, credited with the creation of man from clay. He defies the gods by stealing fire to give to his beloved creations, which leads to civilization. As punishment, Zeus, the king of Olympian gods, sentences him to eternal torment. Bound to a rock, each day an eagle (Zeus’ emblem) would eat out his liver. During the night, the liver would grow back and be eaten again the next day. Ancient Greeks believed that emotions occurred in the liver.*

*In Western classical tradition, Prometheus represents human striving, especially in science, and the risk of overreaching or ending up with unintended consequences.*

1. How does the Prometheus reference make sense?

2. Based on specific comments, what kind of a man is George Murchison?

3. Evaluate the posturing going on between Walter and George. What do their behaviors indicate?

3. How do you feel about Mama’s big decision?

4. Which character has the greatest focus during the big reveal? Why do you think so?

Why might Hansberry have done this?

**Act 2 Scene 2: George, Beneatha, Mama, Ruth, Walter, Travis**



*Greta Garbo was Greta Lovisa Gustafsson, born in 1905, in a Stockholm slum in Sweden, to an itinerant (wandering) laborer. When MGM contracted director Mauritz Stiller, Stiller convinced them to take Greta, whom he had renamed Greta Garbo. Louis B. Mayer (MGM chief) was skeptical but later pleased with Garbo’s mysterious, compelling image in silent films. With her husky voice and Swedish/British accent, she also made a splash in talkies. The talkies also allowed Garbo to show her talent as an actress.*

*She was paired with John Gilbert and began a romance. One of their films was called Love, renamed because the original title didn’t play well in ads: Garbo and Gilbert in* Heat*. Fan’s were enamored of their relationship but Garbo, illusive as ever, didn’t show up for her wedding with Gilbert. She never married. Garbo’s film career lasted about 20 years. She retired and lived a long life in New York City.*

*She was one of the most glamorous and popular motion-picture stars of the 1920s and 1930s, best known for her portrayals of strong-willed, glamorous heroines, most of them as compellingly*[*mysterious*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enigmatic)*as Garbo herself.*

*Walter describes a sax player at the bar called the Green Hat as having a conked head. The conk (derived from congolene, a hair straightener gel made from lye) was a hairstyle popular among African-American men from the 1920s to the 1960s. Conks were often styled as large pompadours although other men chose to slick their straightened hair back, allowing it to lie flat on their*heads*.*

[20's conked hair](https://www.google.com/search?q=images+of+1920%27s+conked+hair&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS778US778&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjZlZHJ58HfAhWJ11QKHU69A3gQsAR6BAgFEAE)

[](https://www.google.com/search?q=images+of+1920's+conked+hair&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS778US778&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=4My8-iheasQfrM:,rTYBShgZqmsfDM,_&usg=AI4_-kQj0U89vOgTdCFMxuBmT6F11N8b2g&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjZlZHJ58HfAhWJ11QKHU69A3gQ9QEwAHoECAUQBA#imgrc=4My8-iheasQfrM:)

1. Beneatha thinks George is a fool? Is she correct?

2. Was Mama completely honest with Walter?

3. What do you think of Mama’s arrangement with Walter? What does she expect?

4. Evaluate Walter’s offer to his son.

**Act 2 Scene 3: Ruth, Beneatha, Walter, Man/Karl Lindner, Mama, Travis, Bobo**

*From their website: “The mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.”*

*When Judas betrayed Jesus Christ, he accepted*30 pieces*of silver to turn Jesus over to Pilate's soldiers of the Roman Empire in the Garden of Gethsemane.*

*Cracker – a late 1500’s term (craker) meant “obnoxious bloviator”*

*It described Celtic immigrants: the Scots and Irish settling in the American South, Carolinas and Florida prior to the 1800’s. Poor and considered unruly, the term was not a compliment. Crackers appropriated the term to indicate pride and affection for their culture, lifestyle and cuisine.*

*Cracker is a mid-18th century term referring to poor whites, probably based upon the term “whip-cracker,” which suggests the manual labor of driving livestock with a whip. This connection may have been constructed by Northern writers, considering slave drivers moving human chattel in the same way.*

*It came to mean a person of low social status or a criminal.*

*By the 1940s, the inner-city Blacks (migrating in huge numbers from the racist south) used this term “as a shorthand for whites back in the Jim Crow South.” It came to mean white bigots.*

[*www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/07/01/197644761/word-watch-on-crackers*](https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/07/01/197644761/word-watch-on-crackers)

*Jim Crow is a caricature of a foolish black slave made popular in vaudeville in the 1800s. After the Civil War, Jim Crow became the name of segregation laws that prohibited interracial marriage, disenfranchised Black men (women didn’t get the right to vote until 1920), limited access to public spaces. After the Civil War, Southern states enacted state constitutions that limited Black people’s rights (no firearms, must be under a labor contract or be considered a vagrant, etc.). Federal troops were sent to occupy those states until they rewrote their constitutions to include the 14th amendment. The Compromise of 1877 to end the election battle between Hayes (Republican, who won the electoral college vote) and Tilden (Democrat, who won the popular vote). The Compromise was to give Hayes the election but make the troops in the south leave. The Northerners were weary of the occupation, exacerbated by a widespread economic downturn, and the influx of other immigrants. When the military left, the Jim Crow laws were enacted by all Southern states.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNTYeqwCDM8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlqI-tx7zwA>

[www.tcm.com/mediaroom/video/1110731/Mrs-Miniver-Movie-Clip-The-Most-Beautiful-Rose.html](http://www.tcm.com/mediaroom/video/1110731/Mrs-Miniver-Movie-Clip-The-Most-Beautiful-Rose.html)

Mrs. Miniver*depict rural English life, prior to WWII. The community continues to raise flowers and persevere in spite of the German attacks on their region. In the culminating garden show, Lady Beldon gives up the prize she always wins to commoner, Mr. Ballard, who has named his lovely creation “The Mrs. Miniver.” The Germans strike just as Mr. Ballard returns to his seat with his trophy, and Lady Beldon explains that the Axis powers do not value garden shows. Lady Beldon is the grandmother of Carol Beldon, the eventual bride of Mrs. Miniver’s son. Lady Beldon objects to her granddaughter hobnobbing with commoners.*

*Scarlet O’Hara of* Gone with the Wind *is a southern belle in a wealthy, prominent plantation family, coming into her womanhood just as the Civil War begins. She ruthlessly manipulates people with her beauty and charm to get what she wants.*

1. Evaluate Lindner’s argument to Walter, Ruth and Beneatha.

2. Explain Beneatha’s remark, “Thirty pieces and not a coin less!” (1571).

3. To what extent is Lindner warning or threatening the Youngers with the comment about “how people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they’ve ever worked for is threatened” (1571)?

4. Why would people’s “way of life” be at risk if the Youngers moved into Clybourne Park?

5. Comment on Mama’s reference to her plant (1572).

6. Explain referring to Mama as Mrs. Miniver.

7. Walter does not want to answer the door because “sometimes it hard to let the future begin!” (1574). To what extent is this true? Knowing only what you know at this point in the story, do you feel anticipation or dread?

8. Explain why Beneatha stops Mama from beating Walter.

**Act 3:** **Asagai, Beneatha, Ruth, Mama, Walter, Travis, Lindner**

*Ofay – offensive term for a white person; some believe it is pig Latin for “foe,” but international use suggests otherwise. Some believe this term came from African sources: perhaps the Ibibio word “afia,” which means white or light colored or the word “ofe” from Yoruba, which is uttered for protection when facing danger.*

1. Mama explains the problem. She talks about how people used to say that she “aimed too high.” She remembers: “That’s what they always used to say down home—‘Lord, that Lena Eggleston is a high-minded thing. She’ll get her due one day!’” To what extent does this make sense in their current situation?

2. What is Asagai’s best argument?

3. What is Mama’s best argument?

4. Why is Ruth the most visibly desperate?

5. Why does Ruth seem closer to Mama than her own children?

6. Why does Mama leave without her plant and then come back for it?

**Eggleston** comes from a place in County Durham in England. The name is old, pre-7th century, Ecgwulf from “agil” meaning edge or point (of a weapon), “wolf,” and “tun,” meaning settlement.

**Lena** comes from Alina and Helena. It means (Arabic) generous and kind, (Latin) alluring, (Greek) sunlight and moonlight.

**Walter** (Germanic) means “ruler of the army”

**Beneatha** – no origin listed

**Ruth** – (Hebrew) companion, friend, vision of beauty

**Travis** – comes from the word “traverser” or “to cross”

**Joseph** – “he will add” – Biblical reference: Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery and later rose to become a supreme power in Egypt.

**Asagai** – a slender iron-tipped, hardwood spear used by southern Africans, a South African tree of the dogwood family that yield hard timber.