

A Raisin in the Sun

(Drama/Classic) (1960)

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Major Characters

- Walter Lee Younger.....Sidney Poitier
A frustrated 35 year old chauffeur (driver) who lives with his poor African-American family in a small apartment in Chicago, who is always dreaming of ways to make money and improve their lives.
- Ruth (“Mama”) Younger.....Ruby Dee
Walter Lee’s mom, a very loving, religious and hard working woman who is always struggling to keep her family together.
- Lena Younger.....Claudia McNeil
Walter Lee’s very sweet wife, who works as a cleaner and does her very best to raise their child.
- Beneatha (Bennie) Younger.....Diana Sands
Walter Lee’s younger sister, a spirited young woman who is determined to explore her African-American identity, and who is going to school so that she can one day be a doctor.
- Travis Younger.....Stephen Perry
Walter Lee and Ruth’s eight year old son.
- Mark Lindner.....John Fiedler
A representative from the “Claybourne Park Improvement Association,” a group that tries to convince the Youngers that it would be better if blacks did not move into their white neighborhood.
- Asagai.....Ivan Dixon
A very friendly and educated young man from the African country of Nigeria who is romantically interested in Beneatha.
- George Murchison.....Luis Gossett Jr.
A college student who is the son of a wealthy businessman, and who is casually dating Beneatha.
- Bobo.....Joel Fluellen
A friend of Walter Lee’s who decides to go into business with him.
- Willie Harris.....Roy Glenn
A businessman who Bobo and Walter Lee know, who convinces them that they can make lots of money by investing in a liquor store.

Plot Summary

This film is the story of the Youngers, a poor African-American family who live in a small and dark Chicago apartment in the late 1950s. Mr. Younger had died several months earlier, but in theory, things should be getting better since Mama is about to receive a life insurance check for \$10,000 (which at that time was a huge amount of money, perhaps enough to buy a small house). Unfortunately, the money arrives, but things soon get worse.

Walter Lee is determined to use the insurance money to invest in a liquor store, in part because he is convinced that black people must own businesses in order to improve their lives. Mama, however, does not want that money to be involved with alcohol, and regardless, wants to save a big share of it so that she can help pay for Beneatha's studies at medical school. Ruth simply dreams of living in a nicer home, where her and her family can enjoy the sunlight, and where Travis can even have his own bedroom, instead of sleeping on the living room couch.

Eventually, Mama seems to find the perfect compromise, by deciding to use a third of the money for Beneatha's schooling, a third for a first payment on a new house, and the rest for whatever Walter Lee thinks is the best way to invest it. Unfortunately though, Walter Lee has his own plans, and soon most of the money looks as if it has been lost forever. Even worse, the Youngers must face the realities of racism in America, and decide whether they will move to a neighborhood where black people are still not wanted.

A Raisin in the Sun is based on a Broadway play by Lorraine Hansberry. It takes place in 1959, during the first years of the American Civil Rights Movement, when African-Americans began to fight for equal rights under the law. That is the historical background for this film, which is ultimately a moving look into the strength of the human spirit as it faces the challenges of poverty, corruption and racial intolerance.

A Brief Note on the Use of Non-Standard English Used in this Film:

Poor African-Americans and some others in the United States often speak with a "Black English" dialect, which differs a little from standard English in both grammar and vocabulary. Still, you should be able to understand the Youngers with just a little extra effort. The following examples are things you should be aware of, but which you should generally try to avoid using:

"Ain't he out yet?"

A common word among many people. Instead, you should use the conjugated form of "to be" (In this case, "isn't").

Better get out of here, before you be late.

Another example where standard English conjugates “to be.”

Golly grandma, you rich.

Note that in this case, “to be” is not used at all!

I don't want nothing from you.

This film is filled with double (and even triple) negatives.

He sure tries, don't he?

Another non-standard (although arguably more logical!) conjugation.

What's done got into you, girl?

Note that both auxiliary verbs and past participles are often changed (“What has gotten into you?” is standard).

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

Walter Lee tells Ruth and Beneatha that there is a better life for the family, if they are willing to take a risk.

Come on, get up!

The most versatile phrasal verb in English, meaning everything from be serious to stop! Here, meaning hurry up!

You'll be fussing and cussing like a madman, and be late.

“To fuss” is to complain or whine, and “to cuss” is to use dirty words, like shit or fuck. A “madman” is a crazy person.

I can't afford to be late for work on account of messing around in there.

If a person “can't afford to be late,” they must be on time or face very bad consequences, such as being fired. “On account of” means because of, and to “mess around” means to act in a silly or not serious way, often just to pass the time for no particular reason.

It's not his fault; He's got a bunch of good-for-nothing clowns running their mouths in what is supposed to be his bedroom.

“Good-for-nothing” is a powerful adjective phrase that literally means useless. People that are “running their mouths” are constantly talking, though this is an old-fashioned expression that is rarely used.

You are all some evil creatures at eight in the morning.

“Evil” means extremely bad or immoral, perhaps even in God’s eyes.

A “creature” is any living animal or being, but it’s often used in a negative way. This is Walter’s way of saying women can be very mean.

Ah, mama! :: Hush!

One way of saying be quiet. Commonly used with children.

I wouldn’t kiss that woman goodbye this morning, not for nothing in this world.

A poetic way of saying “no matter what people offered me to do it.”

Oh golly, mama.

A very old-fashioned and innocent word for expressing emotion such as surprise or perhaps frustration.

Let him go; It’s good for him to be business-minded.

One way of saying to be interested in business or making money.

Willis Horton is a good-for-nothing loud mouth.

A person who is always speaking or never shuts up.

He was a good-for-nothing loud mouth when he wanted me to go into the dry cleaning business. Now his dry cleaners gross \$100,000 a year.

“Dry cleaning” is a popular way of cleaning clothes, done with chemicals. A business that “grosses” \$1,000 makes that much, before it counts expenses (After expenses, the money made is called the net).

You’re tired of me, the boy, the way we live in this beat up hole.

Lena’s way of referring to their apartment, because it’s small and ugly.

Moaning and screaming all the time.

“To moan” is to make a low sound of pain or suffering.

A man needs a woman to back him up.

“To back up” a person is to support them, either physically or emotionally.

Tell her you’re interested in this deal that Walter Lee is so interested in, about the store.

An important word for a business agreement.

Sip away at your coffee like what you’re saying ain’t that important to you.

“To sip” is to drink only a very little at a time, but “sip away” isn’t used.

When I come home, I'll fill in the details.

"To fill in" the details or facts of a deal is to clearly discuss them.

This ain't no fly-by-night operation. We got this figured out, me, Willie and Bobo.

A "fly-by-night operation" is an interesting expression for a business that is new or unknown and likely to be go out of business in a short time. "To figure out" something is to understand it (in this case, how to run a liquor store).

We figure the initial investment to be about \$30,000. That's \$10,000 apiece.

An "initial investment" is the amount of money a person will need at the beginning to start up a business. \$100 "apiece" means per person.

Of course, we've got to spread around a few hundred so you don't spend your life waiting for your license to be approved.

In this case, to "spread around" money means to pay people who have power, so that they can quickly get the liquor license they want.

You mean graft.

An official word for bribes, payoffs or general corruption.

Nothing happens for you in this world unless somebody gets paid off.

"To pay off" a person is to pay them for a service.

It often has a connotation of bribery or corruption.

That ain't our money and I ain't going to be harassing your mama about it.

"To harass" a person is to strongly bother or annoy them.

Damn these eggs!

A common word for expressing anger or frustration.

So you'd rather be Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur.

So, I'd rather be living in Buckingham Palace.

The Palace in London where the British Royal Family lives.

That's what's wrong with the colored women in this world today.

Note that until the 1960s, black people were called colored or Negro.

You don't understand about building your man up, making them feel like they're somebody and they can do something.

In this case, "to build up" a person is to make them feel good about themselves by praising and encouraging them.

I'm going to start timing those people.

"To time" a person is to see how they long they take to do something.

How is school? :: Lovely.

A British word meaning pretty, or here, fine or Ok.

Biology is the greatest. I dissected something that looks just like you yesterday.

“To dissect” an animal is to cut it open to study its body on the inside.

Don't be so nasty!

A powerful little adjective meaning abusive or mean.

You got your mother's interest at heart, ain't you?

To have another person's “interest at heart” is to be most concerned about how some action you take will effect them.

I don't want nothing from you except for you to stop acting holy around here.

To act “holy” is to act as if you are doing something only to help another person, like a saint, rather than for yourself. A more common way of saying this is to act self-righteous, or “holier-than-thou.”

Don't be dragging me in it!

“To drag” a person into a situation is to force them to get involved in it (“To drag” something means to literally pull it on the ground).

Thank you, Travis, for wearing the same pair of shoes for the last two semesters.

The period of time in which a school year is divided. There are usually two semesters per year.

Who the hell told you that you had to be a doctor?

A common addition to WH questions which is used in order to show emotion such as anger or frustration.

If you're so interested in messing around with the sick, go on out and be a nurse, like other women.

In this case, “to mess around” means to pass time with. Note that Walter Lee can be as *sexist* as others are racist!

Give up and leave me alone.

An important phrasal verb meaning to surrender, or stop trying.

Picking on me isn't gonna make her give money to you to invest in any liquor stores.

“To pick on” a person is to harass or make fun of them.

God bless mama for that.

A common expression in which God is asked to treat a person well.

Nobody in this house is ever going to understand me. :: Because you're a **nut**.
A fun and common word for a person who is crazy or very strange.

Thee is **mad**, boy.

In this case, "mad" is a colloquial way of saying crazy
(Thee means "You" in the English of Shakespeare's day).

The world's most **backward** nation of women. :: Then there are all those **prophets** who would lead us out of the **wilderness** and into the **swamps**!

If a nation is "backward," it is uncivilized or perhaps pre-modern.
A "prophet" is a great religious leader, "wilderness" is the state of nature outside cities, and "swamps" are areas of soft land covered with mud and water (This is Beneatha's way of making fun of Walter Lee).

Mama returns home to find that her son is dreaming of liquor stores and her daughter has values that are far from her own.

Who **in the world** is that **slamming** doors at this hour?

"In the world" is an interesting expression added to WH questions in order to show surprise, frustration or other emotion. "To slam" a door is to shut it forcefully or angrily so that it causes a lot of noise.

He and Bennie was **at it** again. :: My children and their **tempers**.

If two people are going "at it," they are often arguing with great emotion. A person's "temper" is their tendency to get angry.

Lord have mercy.

A favorite expression among religious people in which they ask God to forgive a person who has behaved badly.

It's too **drafty** to be sitting around here **half dressed**.

If a room is "drafty," it is often cold because a breeze is blowing in from the outside. A person who is "half-dressed" is only wearing some of the clothes that they should be (perhaps a T-shirt, but not a sweater).

Now that you're gonna be home, that boy is going to be **spoiled**.

A child who is "spoiled" is treated too well by their parents, often by being given anything they want. Note that "going to"---->gonna in rapid speech.

Big Walter always hated the idea of being a **servant**.

A person whose job it is to help a rich person take care of their house.

Man's hands weren't meant to carry nobody's slop jars.

"Slop" is food waste that is fed to animals, and jars are small glass containers. A way of saying men should not be slaves to others.

No, no, I can manage.

To be able "to manage" something is to be able to take care of it.

I bet you got a touch of that virus going around.

A "virus" is a tiny living organism that causes diseases as well as the common cold and the flu.

She'd have a fit if I don't show up.

"To have a fit" is to get extremely angry, and often means to lose control of one's emotions and even start to yell and scream.

"To show up" at a place is a common way of saying to arrive there.

They know the flu. Otherwise, they think you been cut up or something if you tell them you're sick.

In this case, to be "cut up" means to be physically attacked, perhaps by a knife. This is Mama's way of saying that white people think that blacks are always involved in some kind of violence.

It's awful hot to be cooped up there with a pile of books.

Note that "awfully" is a common adverb that means very. To be "cooped up" in a place is to be in a place that does not have enough room to move around and be a comfortable.

I ain't meddling.

"To meddle" in the affairs of another person is to get involved and give advice about their personal life, when they prefer that you don't.

His eyes been looking sort of strained lately.

If a person's eyes are "strained," they look tired, red and under stress.

I don't believe this plant's had a speck of sunlight all day.

A "speck" is a tiny spot or mark, or in this case, a very small amount.

That's your money; It ain't got nothing to do with me.

This is Lena's way of telling Mama that the insurance money is hers (Mama's), and she should spend the money how she wants.

Have yourself a ball for once in your life.

"To have a ball" is to have a great time, often at a dance or party.

What would I look like wandering all over Europe by myself?

“To wander” is to travel from place to place, with no particular aim or destination where you want to end up.

These white women do it all the time...pack up on those big steam ships, and swoosh, they're gone.

An interesting little word that is the sound of a car or ball rushing by extremely quickly, and thus a good colloquial way to imply great speed.

I was thinking....we could maybe meet the notes on a little old two story somewhere.

In this case, “to meet the notes” means to have enough money to make the monthly loan payments or mortgage on a (two-story) house.

If we used some of the insurance money for a down payment and everybody pitched in.

A “down payment” is the money that is paid, often 10-20% of the total price and usually for a house or car, before monthly payments begin.

“To pitch in” on the cost of something is to contribute money for it.

Lord knows we put enough rent into this here rat trap to pay for four houses by now.

“Lord knows” is an interesting expression which means that something is true and pretty obvious (in this case that they've wasted a lot of money on rent). A “rat trap” is good word for an ugly house or apartment that's in very poor condition (and indeed, may have rats),

We even picked out the house. Looks right dummy today.

“To pick out” something is to choose or select from a big selection.

If a house is “dummy,” it is old and in generally poor condition.

Big Walter would come in, and he'd slump down there on that big couch.

If a person “slumps down,” they sink or slowly fall downward, often into a couch, and sometimes with very bad physical posture.

I knew he was down then, really down.

A person who is “down” is often very emotionally depressed.

That man grieved himself so.

“To grieve” is to suffer from great sadness and loss (or grief).

God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger. Mean, hardheaded.

If a person is “hardheaded,” they're stubborn and refuse to change.

I guess that's where brother gets all them notions from.

A "notion" is a general belief or idea.

He said "God...did give us children to make all them dreams worthwhile."

If something is "worthwhile," it is worth the cost in time or hardship.

I don't flit. I experiment with different forms of expression.

"To flit" means to move lightly from one place to another like a butterfly, but it's rarely used. This is Beneatha's way of explaining why she moves from photography to music to other forms of art.

I like him enough to go out with him and stuff.

In this case, "and stuff" is a way for Beneatha to be intentionally vague and unclear as to what kind of romantic relationship she has with George. In general, "stuff" is any group of physical things or materials.

What does "and stuff" mean? :: Mind your own business.

A common and important way of telling a person to stop asking so many personal questions.

He's too shallow.

This literally means not deep. If a person is "shallow," they are not very intellectual, or do not think very deeply about emotions.

Honey, you mustn't dislike folks cause they're well off.

Note the contraction of "must+not," which is rare, but still used.

If a person is "well off," they usually have a good economic situation.

Don't worry; She'll get over this. That's her youth talking.

"To get over" something is to emotionally or physically recover from it, or to get better over a period over time.

Does he pay tuition?

The money a student needs to pay to go to a university.

You about to get your fresh little jaw slapped.

If a person is "fresh," they are defiant and rude to people with authority (such as their parents). "To slap" a person is to hit them with a hand.

I get so tired of him getting the credit for things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort.

"To get credit" for something is to be thought of as the person who did something good or appreciated. "To achieve" something is to accomplish it. This is Beneatha talking about God.

There's only man, and it's he who makes miracles.

An amazing event that seems to be a violation of physical law, and the result of an act by God (such as a person suddenly curing themselves from an incurable disease, or a weaker team beating a stronger one).

You got good children; They just a little off sometimes.

If a person is a little "off," it means that they are a bit strange or think in a very strange or odd way.

There's something come down between them and me.

If something "comes down" between two people, there is a change in the relationship, usually for the worse.

You got some strong-willed children and it takes a strong woman like you to keep them in hand.

If a person is "strong-willed," they work hard to get what they want. To keep a person "in hand" is to make sure they do not get out of control, and that they do what they are supposed to.

They're spirited, all right, my children.

A good word for a person who has a lot of energy and determination.

I'm getting too close to the time for me to be meeting my maker, and I don't want that on my ledger.

"To meet your maker" is a colloquial way of saying to die and meet God afterward. A "ledger" is an accounting book showing what is owed and what has been paid, or more colloquially as in this case, a way for God to see what a person has done that is good and bad in their life.

Besides, we ain't no business people, Ruth. We're just plain working folks.

A sweet expression for simple and perhaps poor workers.

Walter Lee says colored people ain't never start getting ahead, until they start taking chances on different things in this world.

In this context, to "get ahead" means to start making enough money to save, or even to invest it in a business, in order to become wealthy.

Investments and things? What's done got into you, girl?

An "investment" is the money that is put into a business or the stock market in hopes that it will make more money.

There ain't nothing as dreary as the view from this window on a dreary evening, is there?

An interesting little adjective meaning dark and depressing.

That always lifts me up so.

Here, to “lift up” a person is to make them feel better emotionally.

Walter Lee prepares to take a big gamble as Beneatha and Asagai discuss Africa, black identity and women’s liberation.

People will be drinking themselves some booze when they can’t even make the rent.

“Booze” is a colloquial word for liquor or alcohol. This is Wille’s way of saying people always drink, even if they have little or no money.

Man, I’m straight.

In this case, Walter Lee’s way of saying he’ll have the money to be part of the deal. “I’m telling the truth and I’ll do what is necessary.”

Bobo has come up with his part of the money.

“To come up” with something is to physically produce or obtain it.

We got a date to see this guy in Springfield about the license Friday.

Springfield is the Capital of the state of Illinois, where Chicago is located. State capitals are where business licenses are obtained.

If you can get off of your glute, we got this thing made.

“Glute” is a never used way of saying “gluteus Maximus,” which is your ass or butt. Of course, “get off of your ass” is a common way of telling somebody to stop being so lazy and get some work done.

Everything is gonna be cool. All I need is another day to swing the situation at home.

“Cool” is a common slang word for good. This is Walter’s way of saying he needs more time to convince his mother to give him the money.

I got these three women at the barricades.

A quickly built wall, often made of bricks or trees, to prevent people or soldiers from passing. Walter’s way of saying it may be hard to convince Mama, Bebie and Ruth that he should invest in the stores.

Man, if there is anybody you can’t persuade to take a larger view of life, it’s a woman.

“Man” at the beginning of a sentence is a common filler word to show frustration or other emotion. “To persuade” a person is to change their mind. This is Walter’s way of saying women don’t think of “the big picture” in life, and that they are too conservative and don’t take risks.

That's why I say it's time to break out.
In this case, "to break out" means to start.

It's a deal.

A good way of saying that a business agreement has been made.

Howdy-do to you, too.

"Howdy" is a common way of saying hi, but "howdy-do" is never used.

What the heck; You just come right over.

A softer and more old-fashioned version of "what the hell," but still used to mean more or less "Why not?"

You ain't got the pride you were born with.

An important word meaning integrity, self-respect, or satisfaction with yourself as a person and what you can do.

If you think we're so ignorant, maybe you shouldn't invite him here.

A key word for a person who does not know very much.

All anyone seems to know about Africa is Tarzan.

A famous fictional character who lives in Africa and is famous for swinging from tree to tree on branches or vines.

Why do you give money to the church to do the missionary work?

Projects that are done by churches to both help poor people and to try and convince them to become Christians.

That's to help save folks. :: You mean save them from heathenism.

A "heathen" is a person who believes in a God that is not part of the major religions such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam.

They need more salvation from the foreigners on their land.

The act of being saved (In this case, from sin or Godlessness, which means to be perused to become a Chrisitan).

You seem disturbed too.

A useful alternative for upset, angry or emotionally distressed.

Is there something wrong? :: Yeah, we all got acute ghettoitis.

A very clever exchange of words! In medicine, if a disease is "acute," it very serious. A "ghetto" is a very poor neighborhood, and "itis" is a syllable that ends many words that describe a disease, and thus this is Beneatha's way of saying that they're suffering from being poor.

I shall have to teach you how to drape it properly.

“To drape” a piece of cloth is to hang it over something so that the bottom of the cloth falls toward the ground.

Tuck it here.

“To tuck in” a shirt is to put it underneath another layer of clothing.

You wear it well, very well.

An old but nice way of saying “those clothes look good on you.”

You said “You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity.”

In this case, ethnic or national identity (which is to say some blacks in the US may feel more African than American, and others the reverse).

Assimilationism is so popular in your country. I am not an assimilationist.

“To assimilate” into a country is to mix in or become a part of it (Those against assimilating prefer to keep their previous identity).

They’re from my sister’s personal wardrobe.

A collection of clothes, or the closet where the clothes are stored.

I have that feeling for you, right now. :: I know, and by itself, it won’t do; I can find that any place.

“It won’t do” is another way of saying that something isn’t good enough. This is Beneatha talking about Asagai’s romantic feelings.

I’m not interested in being someone’s little episode in America.

An “episode” is a single event or story, or in this case, a short sexual or romantic relationship.

The world’s most liberated women are not liberated at all---you all talk about it too much.

A “liberated woman” is one who feels that women should be equal to men, and has a life that shows this by doing such things as having their own career.

Please forgive me for coming at such an outrageous hour on a Saturday.

A useful adjective that means ridiculous, shameful or unacceptable.

I think it’s so sad the way our American Negroes don’t know nothing about Africa except Tarzan and all.

Until the 1960s, the word used for black Americans.

They ought to be helping you folks drive out them foreigners that took away your land.

“To drive out” a group of people is to physically force them to leave.

Alaiyo, I hope you **don't mind**. It's what you would call a nickname.

A person who "doesn't mind" about something is not bothered by it.

A "nickname" is a name that is used informally among friends.

For all I know, you might be calling me a little **idiot**.

"For all I know" is an excellent way of admitting that you are not sure about the facts of a particular situation. An "idiot" is the most common way of referring to a very stupid person.

The sense of the thing is quite different when it changes languages. :: You're evading.

The "sense" of a word is the general meaning, or connotation. "To evade" something is to avoid it, often by talking about something else.

You **cracked up**? :: You shut up!

If a person "cracks up," they go crazy or start to act very strangely.

He'll be ringing that bell soon, just like he's been doing everyday for the last umpteens years.

An interesting slang word that means very many.

Where did Bennie go? :: Far as I could make out, to Egypt.

In this case, "to make out" means to see or know, and thus this is a way of saying "I think..."

The \$10,000 check arrives, but Mama soon learns that Lena is pregnant with an unwanted baby as Walter Lee grows angrier,

You reckon it's done come already.

An old-fashioned and rarely used word meaning to think.

We never been a people to act silly about money. :: We ain't never had none before!

This is one of the funnier exchange of words in the movie.

Golly grandma, you rich.

A very old-fashioned and gentle word that expresses emotion such as surprise or amazement.

Old Doctor Jones is peculiar in his way, but nothing to make nobody slip and call him "she," like you done.

"Peculiar" is an interesting word that means strange, odd or bizarre.

That's just what happened; My tongue slipped.

If a person has a "slip of the tongue," they accidentally say something that might be embarrassing, or that shows what they're really thinking.

I made Willie Harris put everything on paper; The lawyer looked it over.

"To look over" an official contract or paper is to read it carefully.

I don't allow no yelling in this house...

and they'll be no investing in liquor stores.

"To yell" is to scream or shout.

I don't aim to speak on it again.

"To aim" is to direct a gun at a particular point, though here

Mama used it to mean intend. This usage is rare but still used.

You tell it to me....when you sneak out

of here and go to work in somebody's kitchen.

"To sneak out" of a house is to leave quietly so that nobody notices.

You're in my house and my presence, and as long

as you are, you'll talk to your wife civil. Now sit down!

"To talk civilly" to a person is to talk politely.

You make me sick to my stomach. :: Well, you turn mine, baby!

A person who is "sick to their stomach" may either be physically sick or completely disgusted by what they have seen. "To turn a person's stomach" is to make a person sick.

There's something that's eating you up like a crazy man!

If there is something that is "eating up" a person, it is making them extremely upset, angry or even crazy.

I don't need your nagging at me today! :: How's that?

"To nag" at a person is to constantly criticize, bother or harass them.

It seems like you always tied up in some kind of knot or something.

In this context, to be "tied up in a knot" is to be extremely frustrated or angry, with no obvious solution for how to solve the problems of life.

A job? I drive a man around in his limousine and I say "yes, Sir, no, Sir."

A "limousine" is a long car that is driven by a chauffeur.

I see my future...full of nothing...just hanging

at the edge of my days waiting for me.

This is Walter's poetic or philosophical way of saying he has nothing to look forward in the future, because he has no economic hope.

In my time, we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North and how to stay alive, and still have a pinch of dignity, too.

A person who has been “lynched” has been attacked and killed by being hung from a tree. This was a horrible but not uncommon practice that white racists did to blacks in the American Southern States, up through the 1930s. A “pinch of dignity” is a tiny amount of self-respect.

I think Ruth is thinking about getting rid of that child!

“To get rid of” something is to destroy or eliminate it.
Here, Mama is talking about the possibility of an abortion.

We don't give up one baby to poverty.

“Poverty” is the state of being very poor. This is Mama's way of saying that no matter how poor they are, another child is always welcome.

You're a disgrace to your father's memory.

A person who is a “disgrace” is a person who is seen as shameful, or who has lost all grace and dignity.

Enough of that assimilationist junk!

Another word for trash, or in this case, Beneatha's way of saying that the music Ruth is listening to is trying too hard to sound white.

It's a folk dance. :: What kind of folks do that?

“Folk dance” refers to the dance of native or common people in a culture. “Folks” is just another word for people.

I'm digging them drums.

“To dig” something is a very slangy way of saying to really like it.

That's my man, Kenyatta. Flaming spear!

Kenyatta was a major African leader fighting for the independence of Kenya. A “spear” is a pole with a sharp point at the end that is used as a weapon,” and if it's “flaming,” it's on fire. For some, a symbol of Africa.

That's up to George, if he's ashamed of his heritage.

If a decision is “up to” a person, they are the one that should decide.
A person's “heritage” is their cultural or ethnic background (As a black American, Beneatha is very interested in her African heritage).

We'll hear about the great Ashanti empires, the Songhai civilization, the sculpture of Benin, poems in Bantu.

These are all references to peoples and countries in Africa.

The whole monologue is going to end up with the word heritage.

A “monologue” is a long speech, often heard in a play or film.

Your heritage ain’t nothing but a bunch of raggedly spirituals and some grass huts.

“Raggedly” means old, torn or in poor condition, and “spirituals” are religious songs popular among black Americans. A “grass hut” is a tiny house or shack that is, naturally, made of grass.

You would rather stand there in your splendid ignorance and know nothing about a people who were the first to smelt iron on the face of this earth!

“Splendid ignorance” is a poetic way of saying complete lack of knowledge (Splendid means wonderful or majestic). To “smelt iron” is a way of making steel (Iron is a common metal for making steel).

The Ashantis were performing surgical operations....when the English were still tattooing themselves with blue dragons.

The Ashantis are another people from Africa. A “tattoo” is a painting that is permanently drawn on people’s skin.

In New York, standard curtain there is always 8:40.

A way of referring to the time that the curtain is raised to start a play.

New York ain’t got nothing Chicago ain’t got, except a bunch of hustling people all squeezed up together being Eastern.

A “hustler” is a person who’s always trying to make money by cheating or manipulating other people (the adjective, seen here, is rare). If people are “squeezed together” they are physically forced to be very close to each other because there are too many people in too little space.

How come all you college boys wear them faggoty looking white shoes?

Today, this is a very crude slur to refer to homosexuals.

They look funny as hell....bad as those black knee stockings Beneatha wears all the time.

“As hell” added after an adjective means “very,” though this construction is now old fashioned. “Knee stockings” are either nylon stockings or socks that come up to a person’s knees.

How is your old man making it?

A person’s “old man” is their father. Very slangy, and a little dated.

That’s a shrewd move, boy.

“Shrewd” is an excellent adjective which means very smart or clever. In this case, a “move” is a business decision.

You invest big, you gamble big, and you lose big if you have to.

This is Walter Lee's new philosophy, which basically says that you have to take a lot of risk if you want to make a lot of money.

Your fraternity pins and your white shoes.

A "fraternity" is an organization of male college students, who usually live together in one big house. In this case, a "pin" is a button or badge that is fastened to a shirt, probably with a fraternity symbol on it.

Are they teaching you how to run a rubber plantation or a steel mill or something?

A "rubber plantation" is where rubber material is produced and processed. A "steel mill" is a factory where iron is turned into steel.

I'm a volcano, a giant, and I am surrounded by ants.

Walter Lee's view of himself, who wants to get rich, and the women in his family, who he thinks won't take a risk to improve their lives.

Good night, Prometheus.

A major titan (giant) in Greek mythology who is credited with giving fire to man.

How do you know it's an insult? Maybe Prometheus is a nice fellow.

A "fellow" is a British word for a man or guy.

I bet that simple minded clown just made it up out of his head.

"I bet" is a very common way of saying "I think." A person who is "simple minded" is either stupid or perhaps uneducated. If a person "makes up" a story or fact, they are lying about it.

Mama announces that she has bought a small but beautiful house, and soon gets Walter Lee's approval with a plan to share the money between the new house, Beneatha's schooling and however he wants to spend the rest.

Don't you start....your nagging.

"To nag" a person is to bother or harass them.

Boy, is he gonna get it.

In this context, if a person is "gonna get it," this means they are going to have a very big problem as a result of something they did. Note that "he is" becomes "is he" for stylistic effect.

I went downtown to tend to some business.

"To tend to" something is to do it, or take care of it.

1,000 times I told you not to go off like that.

“To go off” somewhere is a colloquial way of saying to leave.

He’s the one who give it to you in his way. You be glad.

A good word for happy or satisfied.

You went and did it! Praise God!

Words that a religious person says to thank God

(“To praise” is to honor or speak highly of).

It makes a difference to a man when he can walk on floors that belong to him.

This is mama’s way of saying people would always prefer to own the home that they live in, rather than to rent it.

Clyborne Park.

The white middle class neighborhood where mama bought a house.

Is that the peace and comfort that you went out and spent that money on today?

Note the more common version people use is “peace and quiet.”

I’ve never been afraid of no crackers, much.

A slang word used by some blacks to refer to white people.

Say goodbye to those marching cockroaches...and this cramped little closet which ain’t now and never has been no kitchen.

“Cockroaches” are large and unpleasant insects that are often found in poor people’s apartments. If an apartment is “cramped,” it is too small for all the things (including people) that are in it.

Hallelujah!

An old religious word that people use to express great happiness.

I sure don’t feel like whipping nobody today.

“To whip” a person is to strike them with a whip or rope

(Some parents may whip their kids if they behave very badly).

I seen my family falling apart today...falling to pieces in front of my eyes.

If a family “falls apart” (or “falls to pieces”), it begins to break up because of great tension between its individual members.

Why you want me to say you done the right thing for? Because you butchered up a dream of mine?

“To butcher up” something is to destroy it, but this is rarely used (A “butcher” is a person who cuts up meat).

Mr. Arnold has had to take the cab for three days.

Another word for a taxi (Mr. Arnold is Walter Lee's boss).

How long before I have to come and pick you off the sidewalk?

The cement walkways that are next to city streets.

Your daddy died with **dignity**! There wasn't no bum in him!

"Dignity" refers to proper or serious behavior and self-respect.

A "bum" is a homeless person who often drinks too much.

Mama, why did you leave the South?

A reference to the Southern States of the US, which many blacks left in the early 20th century because there was so much racism.

Why in the name of God couldn't you let me get on my train when my time come?

Adding "in the name of God" to a WH question expresses great emotion, including frustration. This is Walter Lee's way of asking Mama why she wouldn't help him follow his business dreams.

Walter Lee, I paid the man \$3,500 down on the house.

To pay "3,500 down" on a house is to make an initial payment of \$3,500, before beginning to make monthly payments (A "down payment" on a house or car is usually 10-20% of the total price).

Take \$3,000 of this account and put it in a savings account for Beneatha's medical schooling.

A bank account which earns a small interest rate. The other most common type of account is a checking account, which often earns no interest, but on which people can write checks.

From now on, you be the head of this family the way you supposed to be.

The "head of the family" is the person who makes all the major decisions. In many families, it is the father.

She ain't been very **cooperative** around here lately.

A person who is "cooperative" tries to get along with and work with others.

We trying to maker Mama Mrs. Miniver, not Scarlet O' Hara.

Two major characters, from the films *Mrs. Miniver* and *Gone with the Wind*.

You look like you're fixing to go out and chop some cotton.

"Fixing to" do something is an old-fashioned way of saying to think about doing it. "To chop" something is to cut it forcefully.

Don't you pay them no mind.

"Don't worry about them." This is very dated grammar.

Come next Spring, I'll show you how we grow azaleas.

A popular type of flower.

I'll mark it fragile.

"To mark" a box fragile is to write "fragile" on the outside of the box.

Talk about old-fashioned Negroes.

"Talk about..." is a way of expressing amazement or other emotion about the topic under discussion (In this case, Walter Lee's behavior).

You're going to be voted chairman of the committee for unending agitation.

"Agitation" is a powerful word which refers to the process of making people angry, upset or excited.

Race, race, race. You'll be the first person in the history of the world who successfully brainwashed themselves.

Here, "race" refers to ethnicity (African, Asian, etc...). "To brainwash" a person is to use manipulation or propaganda to convince them to give up their basic social or political ideas in exchange for other ideas. This is a powerful verb with a very negative connotation.

Even the NAACP takes a holiday some times.

This is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which is a major civil rights organization that still exists.

You grab your scalpel, you sharpen it, you're getting ready to cut the dude, and you say "By the way, what are your views on civil rights, old baby?"

A "scalpel" is a knife used by surgeons. "To sharpen" something is to give it a fine edge for cutting. "Dude" is a common colloquial word among people that simply means guy or man.

Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

A classic expression that all American children learn, probably to teach them to not be too sensitive if people call them bad names.

The Younger family learns a hard truth about race and housing in America.

I'm a representative of the Clyborne Park Improvement Association.
A group which claims to work on neighborhood problems, but in practice seems most concerned with who moves into the area.

We're cluttered up from packing.
If a room is "cluttered," it is filled with lots of boxes, and various objects, often sitting on the floor (cluttered *up* is no longer used).

It's one of those community organizations set up to look after things like block upkeep and special projects.
A "city block" is the land between streets that usually has houses or other buildings. "Upkeep" refers to the act of keeping a building, or in this case a neighborhood, in good condition.

We have our new neighbors orientation committee.
An "orientation committee" is usually a group of people who try to help those new to an organization get used to the way things are done. (A "welcoming committee" can have a similar function).

We sort of give them the lowdown on the way we do things in Clyborne park.
This is a good slang expression which means important information.

And then we have the category of what the association calls special community problems.
A "category" is a division or class that is used to help divide a system.

You people must be aware of some of the incidents in various parts of the city when colored people have moved into certain areas.
An "incident" is a specific event, and in this case, Mr. Lindner is likely referring to racial violence or tension between blacks and whites. Until the 1960s, blacks were often referred to as "colored."

Not only do we deplore that type of thing, but we're trying to do something about it!
"To deplore" something is to strongly regret or feel very bad about it.

When you come right down to it, most of the trouble exists because people don't sit down and talk.
This is a useful expression which is meant to summarize an entire conversation or situation (In the final analysis, in the end, etc...).

Our community is made up of people who've worked hard as the dickens to build up that little community.
To work "hard as the dickens" is to work extremely seriously.
This is a fun but very old-fashioned expression.

Now, we're not rich or fancy people.

"Fancy" usually means brightly colored or decorated, though here it probably means overly educated or perhaps arrogant or snobby.

At the moment, the overwhelming majority of people out there feel that people get along better...when they share a common background.

This is Mr. Lindner's way of trying to diplomatically say most of the people in his neighborhood don't want to live near blacks.

Believe me...that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it.

"Race prejudice" is a dated expression for racism. If something "doesn't enter into it," it has nothing to do with it.

We've been having a fine conversation;

I hope you'll hear me all the way through.

One way of saying until the very end.

We're prepared to make your family a very generous offer.

These words usually mean a lot of money.

Through our collective efforts, we're prepared to buy the house at a financial gain to your family.

A way of saying "By coming together...."

Lord have mercy!; Ain't this the living gall.

"Lord have mercy" is one way for a religious person to express great shock or emotion. "Gall" means incredible nerve, arrogance or bad manners (An excellent Jewish word for the same thing is chutzpah).

I don't want no exact terms of no financial arrangements.

The "exact terms of a financial arrangement" are most likely the details of a contract, such as the price, interest rate, etc.

People get awful worked up when their whole way of life and everything they've worked so hard for is threatened.

If a person gets "worked up" about something, they become very emotional, angry or excited about it.

You just can't force people to change their hearts, son.

If a person "changes their heart" about an emotional topic such as race relations, they fundamentally change the way had thought about it.

I testify before God....my children got all the energy of the dead.

"To testify" is to say what you saw happened, usually in a court of law, though here it is simply a religious way of saying to tell the truth.

You had a caller.

In this case, a “caller” is a person who stops by your house to visit.

They are simply dying to have out there a fine family of colored people.

If a person is “dying” to do something, they very much want to do it (though here, Walter Lee is obviously saying it in a joking manner).

He talked brotherhood. He said he couldn’t understand why we can’t sit down and hate each other with good Christian fellowship.

Both “brotherhood” and “fellowship” refer to the love and peace between different people. This time, it’s Beneatha who is joking!

Well, that’s the way the crackers crumble. Joke.

“That’s the way the *cookie* crumbles” is an old expression which basically means “that’s just the way life is.” Remember, Lena uses the slang word “cracker” to refer to white people, and “to crumble” means to fall apart into tiny little pieces.

That raggedy looking old thing? :: It expresses me.

Something that is “raggedy looking” looks old, worn and poor.

“It expresses me” is a way of saying it allows you to express yourself.

So there!

A fun way of expressing excitement or other emotion after having just said something very powerful or convincing.

Travis, run on down to the hardware store and get some more string cord.

A “hardware store” is a store that sells tools and house supplies, such as hammers and nails (A “string cord” is never used, but both string and cord are a type of thin rope).

The Youngers face their greatest crisis as Walter Lee learns the hard truth about Willie, and the family soon learns that \$6,500 is gone.

Me and Willie was going to go down to Springfield and spread a lot of money around so as not to wait to get the liquor license.

Again, this is Bobo’s way of saying they were going to Springfield, the Illinois state capital, in order to pay some bribes so that they would be able to get a license to run a liquor store as soon as possible.

When I got to the train station...man, Willie never did show up.

“To show up” is a very common way of saying to arrive.

Man, do you know that money is made out of my father's flesh?!
 "Flesh" is human fat and muscle found just under the skin. This is Walter Lee's way of referring to his dad's life insurance money.

I'm sorry, I had my life staked on this deal too.
 "To stake your life" on something is to risk it on a huge gamble.

I seen him...the red showing in his eyes and veins moving in his head.
 "Veins" are the tiny tubes that carry blood in the body. This is Mama's way of describing how hard her husband had worked.

I love the look of packing crates.
 Containers that are used to transport things when people move.

He made an investment with a man even Travis wouldn't have trusted with his most worn out marble.
 If something is "worn out," it is very used and in poor condition. A "marble" is a small, round and polished stone with which kids play.

By his lights, he did what made sense to him.
 An interesting but dated way of saying "In his own judgement..."

Why would anybody want to be a doctor in this nutty world?
 Another word for crazy.

Oh my, aren't we full of despair.
 "Despair" is a powerful word meaning great sadness or hopelessness.

There is something wrong when all the dreams of this house had to depend on something that might never had happened if a man had not died.
 This is Asagai's way of noting that if Beneatha's father had not died, they never would have had the money anyway.

What is the matter with you?! My family has been wiped out!
 If a person is "wiped out" financially, they have lost most or all of their money.

You, with all of your keen mind, cannot understand the greatness of the thing your mother tried to do.
 A person who has a "keen mind" is very intelligent, and can understand what is and is not important in a situation.

For all of her backwardness, she still believes that she can change things.
 In this case, "backwardness" probably refers to Mama's lack of education, or conservative religious beliefs.

When somebody can get up in the morning, and without consulting you, blithely hand away your future, then life is impossible. It's futile. It's despair.

"To consult" with a person about a situation is to discuss it with them.

"Blithely" means happily, without thinking. If something is "futile," it is not possible to achieve or accomplish. "Despair" is great sadness.

My dear young creature of the new world...

A "creature" is any living being or animal.

You're just getting me all mixed up.

If a person becomes "mixed up," they are confused or disoriented.

Entrepreneur. Titan of the system. Do you dream of the yachts on Lake Michigan?

An "entrepreneur" is an important word for a person who starts their own business. A "titan" is a giant of business or industry, and a "yacht" is a type of large and luxurious boat that rich people love to buy.

All the mighty bald men in America, all halted, waiting breathless for your pronouncements on industry.

"To halt" is to stop. A "pronouncement" is a major statement, usually said to a large group of people or the media.

You, chairman of the board. I look at you, and see the final triumph of stupidity in this world.

The "chairman of the board" is the head of the board of directors, which makes general policy for a corporation. "To triumph" is another way of saying to win or be victorious.

No, I told him he was a sweet kid, full of dreams, and everything was peachy keen.

A funny and dated but still used expression which means perfectly fine or good.

I'll wash all the sheets in America. I'll scrub.

"To scrub" dishes or clothes is to wash them by rubbing very hard.

I've been thinking about some of the things we can do to fix up this place.

"To fix up" a place is to make it much nicer to live in.

I've seen a second hand bureau. It needs some new handles and another coat of varnish.

If a piece of furniture is "second hand," it is used. A "bureau" is a French word for a desk. "Varnish" is a type of coating that is used to protect wood and make it shine.

Sometimes you got to learn to **give up** some things and hold on to what you've got.

In this case, "to give up" something is to let it go.

Like the fellows in the street say, The Man, Old Captain Charlie, Mr. Boss.

Three colloquial but old-fashioned ways to refer to those people who control the financial and political power in society.

He who gets and he who don't get. It's all divided up between the takers and the taken.

Note that the past participle of the verb to take is taken, and not taken! This is Walter Lee's way of saying that people who want to get ahead and make money cannot be concerned with what is morally right or wrong.

And all the time, they are just out there operating.

Note that "to operate" a business or a project is to run it.

In the big scheme of things, Willie don't even count.

A useful expression which means "when you consider everything..."

They're so upset they're willing to pay us *not* to come out there.

A classic line about white fears of black people.

He is going to wake up one day locked in a dungeon, and the takers are going to have the key.

A dungeon is the cellar or underground of a castle, where prisoners were taken in the Middle Ages.

There ain't no causes; There is only taking in this world.

A "cause" is a political or social goal, such as fighting cancer or ending world hunger.

I came from five generations of people that was slaves and sharecroppers.

"Sharecroppers" were former slaves that worked on the land, but who had to give almost all of the profits to the landowner.

...that was a way of telling us that we wasn't fit to walk the earth.

If a person isn't "fit" to do something, they are not morally or physically qualified to do it.

Yes, I want to put some pearls on my wife's neck.

A tiny stone or piece of jewelry that comes from sea oysters.

That's not a man. That's nothing but a toothless rat.

Not common, but a truly great insult for a man without courage.

You were...what is supposed to be my harvest.

A “harvest” is the time of year when crops such as wheat and corn are picked.

You, mourning your brother. ∴ He’s no brother of mine.

“To mourn” a person is to feel great sadness for having lost them.

You done wrote his epitaph, too, like the rest of the world.

An epitaph is a short description of a dead person that is written on a the stone above their grave.

Wasn’t it you who taught me to despise any man who would do that?

“To despise” something is to hate it with great passion.

Have you cried for that boy and what he has gone through?

In this case, to “go through” a difficult period is to experience or survive it.

It’s when he is at his lowest...and he can’t believe in himself because the world has whipped him so.

This is Mama’s way of saying because life has been so cruel to him (“To whip” a person is to brutally hit them with a cord, rope or whip).

When you start measuring somebody, measure him right child.

This is Mama’s way of telling Beneatha to judge a person fairly.

Walter Lee becomes a better man, and the Younger family decides to begin a new life.

The moving men are downstairs. They just pulled up.

If a truck “pulls up” to a house, it parks in front of it.

We are plain people, you know. Real plain people.

A way of saying people who are simple and not too educated.

My father was a laborer...and he almost once beat a man to death because he called him some kind of name, you know.

A “laborer” is a worker, and usually one who works with his hands, such as a construction worker or coal miner.

You see, we come from a long line of proud people.

This is a way of saying that the family has had several generations of proud people.

We've decided to move into our house,
because our father, he earned it, brick by brick.

"Bricks" are hard red clay rectangles that are used to make buildings.

I take it then, you decided to occupy. Then I appeal
to you, Mrs. Younger. You're older and wiser.

"To occupy" an apartment is to live in it. A person
who is "wise" is very smart and thoughtful.

These young folks, nowadays, you can't hardly do a thing with them.

Note that every generation thinks that the
young people of their day are out of control.

For goodness sake, if the moving men are here, let's get the heck out of here.

"For goodness sake" is a mild way to show emotion such as excitement.
Note "the heck" is a gentle version of "the hell," which is added to WH
questions and some sentences to show emotion.

You look like anybody's old hoodlum.

A "hoodlum" is another word for a gangster or violent criminal.

Travis, don't go empty-handed.

One way of saying without carrying anything.

Where's that box with my skillets?

A "skillet" is a type of frying pan.

Darling, that ain't no bale of cotton.

A "bale" of cotton is a tied bundle of material, in this case cotton.

You better get those silly notions out of your head once
and for all, and start looking for a man with some loot.

A "notion" is an idea, belief or opinion.

I'm the head of this family, and I've been
thinking of marrying you off to George Murchison.

If a parent "marries off" their daughter, they find her a
man and force her to marry him, even if she doesn't want to.

He come into his manhood today, kind of like the rainbow after the rain.

A very poetic way for Mama to say that Walter Lee
had become a much more mature and dignified person.

A Raisin in the Sun

Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion

- 1) Why was Walter Lee such an angry person? Did he have a right to be?

- 2) Do you agree that “life is money?” Do you have sympathy for Walter Lee for believing that?

- 3) Was Mama a conservative force that was holding her family back, or was she in fact a progressive force that was both holding the family together and helping it move forward?

- 4) How was Beneatha a young woman who was ahead of her time?

- 5) If you had been Beneatha, would you have been more interested in George or Asagai?

- 6) What are the problems that the Youngers have which all families have, and what are those that are especially common with African-Americans?

- 7) Which member of the Younger family did you like the most? Why?

- 8) Is Mr. Lindner an evil person? Or just ignorant, or foolish? Or is he simply a reflection of a greater problem in society?

- 9) How much have things changed? Would the Younger family still find difficulty moving into a white neighborhood today? Are there minorities in your country that would have such a problem?

- 10) Does this movie have “a happy ending”?

