

A Raisin in the Sun: Strong Women

Museum Connection: Family and Community or Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will examine strong female characters from *A Raisin in the Sun* and compare them to real-life inspiring females.

Course: American Literature

Time Frame: 80-minute period

Correlation to State Standards:

Standard 1: The student will comprehend and interpret a variety of print, non-print and electronic texts, and other media.

Indicator 1.2 the student will comprehend and interpret a variety of texts, including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and informational texts (e.g., articles, editorials, essays, speeches, literary criticism).

Objective 1.2.4 The student will interpret a literary work by using a critical approach (e.g., reader response, historical, cultural, biographical, structural).

Standard 3: The student will compose in a variety of modes by developing content, employing specific forms, and selecting language appropriate for a particular audience and purpose.

Indicator 3.1 The student will compose written, oral and multimedia presentations in a variety of formats and for a variety of audiences and purposes.

Objective 3.1.2 The student will compose effective persuasive essays and arguments that advance, modify, or refute a position; use logical structure; provide relevant and complete support; and employ effective rhetorical strategies.

Common Core State Reading Standards for Literature 6-12:

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail 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.
- 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).

Objective: Students will compare strong female characters from *A Raisin in the Sun* to real-life inspiring women in order to compose an SAT-style persuasive essay.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Word or Concept	Definition
Philosophical Chairs	a deliberation strategy emphasizing careful listening and mastery of diverse points of view.
Brainstorming	to generate creative ideas spontaneously, usually for problem-solving, and especially in an intensive group discussion that does not allow time for reflection.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Quotations from Inspiring Women

For the Student:

Student Resource Sheet 1: Timed Writing

Student Resource Sheet 2: Timed Writing

Student Resource Sheet 3: Prewriting for an SAT Essay

Resources:

Publications:

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun: a Drama in Three Acts*. New York: Random House, 1959. Print.

Web Sites:

For quotations from inspiring women:

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Inspiration/2010/01/Inspiring-Quotes-from-Great-Women-in-History.aspx>

For information about the SAT essay: <http://sat.collegeboard.com/practice/writing/sat-essay>

For information on Philosophical Chairs:

www.sdcoe.net/lret/avid/Resources/Philosophical_Chairs.pdf http://www.avidregion4.org/resources/documents/teacher_counselor/philo_chairs/DirectionsForPhilosophicalChairs.doc

For information on the history of African American

women: http://womenshistory.about.com/od/africanamerican/African_American_Womens_History.htm

For information on gender roles in *A Raisin in the Sun*:

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/270170/man_i_feel_like_a_woman_gender_in_a.html?cat=38

Historical Background:

African American Families

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American_culture#Family

When slavery was legal in the United States, it was common for families to be separated through sale. Even during slavery, however, African American families managed to maintain strong familial bonds. Free African men and women, who managed to buy their own freedom by being hired out, who were emancipated, or who had escaped their masters, often worked long and hard to buy the members of their families who remained in bondage and send for them.

Others, separated from blood kin, formed close bonds based on fictive kin; *play* relations, *play* aunts, cousins, and the like. This practice, a holdover from African oral traditions such as *sanankouya*, survived Emancipation, with non-blood family friends commonly accorded the status and titles of blood relations. This broader, more African concept of what constitutes family and community, and the deeply rooted respect for elders that is part of African traditional societies may be the genesis of the common use of the terms like "aunt," "uncle," "brother," "sister," "Mother," and "Mama" when addressing other African American people, some of whom may be complete strangers.

Immediately after slavery, African American families struggled to reunite and rebuild what had been taken. As late as 1960, when most African Americans lived under some form of segregation, seventy-eight percent of African American families were headed by married couples. This number steadily declined over the latter half of the 20th century. A number of factors, including attitudes towards education, gender roles, and poverty have created a situation where, for the first time since slavery, a majority of African American children live in a household with only one parent, typically the mother. These figures appear to indicate a weak African American nuclear family structure, especially within a large patriarchal society.

This apparent weakness is balanced by mutual aid systems established by extended family members to provide emotional and economic support. Older family members pass on social and cultural traditions such as religion and manners to younger family members. In turn, the older family members are cared for by younger family members when they are unable to care for themselves. These relationships exist at all economic levels in the African American community, providing strength and support both to the African American family and the community.

Female characters in A Raisin in the Sun

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/848785/a_raisin_in_the_sun_the_idea_of_female.html?cat=9

There are three female characters in Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Each woman encounters different issues as she struggles for freedom. This African American family lives in a cramped two bedroom household in a dilapidated apartment building located in Chicago's south side. As they struggle against various obstacles, all they want is harmony and unity for their family.

Lena, the matriarch of the family, wants to save her family from economic pressures which are causing the family members to develop resentment towards each other. Ruth, Lena's daughter-in-law, wants her son Travis to grow up in a good neighborhood. Lena's daughter Beneatha wants to become a doctor.

Despite Lena's son Walter Lee wanting to invest in a liquor store against her wishes, she still gives him the money. Due to their poor financial status, Walter Lee is frustrated and feels as if he is less than a man because he cannot provide a better life for his family. Lena gives Walter Lee the money to prove that she has faith in him and trusts him as the new head of the household.

Although Lena is a woman of the 1950's, her mindset is progressive. With the \$10,000 she received from her husband's life insurance policy, she decides to buy a house in a white neighborhood because she wants a better life for her family. Her goal is to live in a home all her own; racist encounters were not on her mind.

Ruth, Walter Lee's wife, is disappointed because life has not treated her kindly. Walter's salary as a limo driver and her salary as a domestic are not enough for them to afford a house of their own. Ruth wants her son Travis to live in a nice home instead of a run-down crowded apartment. To add to her situation, she discovers that she is expecting a baby which will make their living quarters even more cramped. Also, she is deeply concerned about her husband's state of mind.

Walter Lee's sister, Beneatha, is the third female character in the play. As a feminist, her goal is to pursue her education and become a doctor—a lofty goal for an African American woman in the 1950s. She is radical and independent. Not only is there an age difference between Walter Lee and Beneatha, but there is also a difference in their dreams. In the beginning, Walter Lee is not in agreement with a part of the insurance money going towards Beneatha's education because he is critical of her wanting to become a doctor. Asagai, a native of Africa, is the only male in the play who really supports Beneatha's dream. He makes Beneatha feel special because he encourages her intellectual abilities.

Lesson Development:

Motivation:

1. As an anticipation guide, direct students to write a quickwrite or journal entry about a strong female that they have encountered in their own experience, in their readings, or in a movie. Then, turn to a partner and describe this woman. Encourage a few students to share their thoughts and impressions with the class.

Procedures:

2. Lead the class in brainstorming of characteristics of strong women. List these characteristics on the chalkboard for consideration throughout the period.
3. Review the female characters in the play. List them on the board.
4. Direct each student to select the female character whom he/she believes is the strongest character in the play. Or, the teacher may choose to assign the students to particular characters for the following activities.
5. Direct students to write a response to each of the quotations on **Teacher Resource Sheet 1** as if they are the characters they have selected. They should write in first person as if they are the characters responding to the quotation, perhaps answering the speaker of the quotation in a conversation. Encourage them to use language that would be typical of that character. The teacher may wish to model this process for the first quotation and may choose several quotations from the list rather than using them all.
6. After students have responded to the quotations, ask them if they still believe that this character is the strongest woman in the play. If not, they may change their mind.
7. Label an area of the room with the name of each female character in the play. Direct the students to move to the space in the room that designates the character who they feel is the strongest.
8. Engage students in a Philosophical Chairs style of debate where they are defending their choice of character and trying to convince other students to move to their area. Designate times during the debate where students may move from one area to another to signify that they have changed their minds. The teacher should lead the discussion by asking questions and calling on students to respond.

Assessment:

9. Introduce one or both of the timed-writing questions on **Student Resource Sheet 1 and/or Student Resource Sheet 2**. Direct students to answer this SAT-style writing question in 25 minutes. Effective SAT essays include examples from history or literature, so students should include appropriate references to *A Raisin in the Sun* in their essays. For students that need scaffolding to prepare for the essay writing, distribute **Student Resource Sheet 3: Prewriting for an SAT Essay**. Also, to increase academic rigor, require students to return to the text of the play and find quotations that support their claims about the characters that will be

included in their essay. Be clear with students, though, that the real SAT will not require or allow students to revisit a text in order to include quotations. Therefore, on the real SAT, they should use references to books that they know well.

Closure:

10. Define a strong woman. Which character from *A Raisin in the Sun* exemplifies this woman? Defend your choice with evidence from the play.

Thoughtful Applications:

- Students will relate one or more of the quotations from the lesson to their own lives considering which piece of advice is most applicable to their own situations and experiences.
- Students will research the differences among expectations and experiences of women in a variety of cultures around the world from many different eras.

Lesson Extensions:

- Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum and locate exhibits on African American women. Research the life and achievements of one woman. Cite examples from her life that makes this woman strong.
- The Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.
 - *Journey in History Theater* provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum's gallery.
 - Take the theme tour, *Heritage* and experience the rich, cultural heritage of Maryland's African American community. Learn how African Americans established and influence Maryland's historic communities, social organizations, work traditions and artistic customs.
 - Contact group reservations for schedule updates.
- Upon visiting the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, students will find examples of strong females and compare them to the strong women figures in *A Raisin in the Sun*.
- Upon visiting the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, students will collect significant quips and quotations from females who are represented in the museum. Then, they will write a response to each quotation stating whether they agree or disagree with the person's viewpoint.
- Students will research one of the real life women who are featured in the quotations in this lesson and describe their contributions to society and create a multimedia presentation about this person.

- Students will consider the SAT scoring rubric and score their essays on the SAT scale of 1-6.

Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Quotations from Inspiring Women

- “I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.”—Rosa Parks, African American Civil Rights activist
- “The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”—Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*
- “You have to imagine it possible before you can see something. You can have the evidence right in front of you, but if you can’t imagine something that has never existed before, it’s impossible.” —Rita Dove, first African-American poet laureate of the U.S.
- “Don’t let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity. It’s your place in the world; it’s your life. Go on and do all you can with it, and make it the life you want to live.” —Mae C. Jemison, first African American astronaut
- “I rejected the notion that my race or sex would bar my success in life.” — Constance Baker Motley, first African American woman to serve as a federal judge
- “If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again.” —Sojourner Truth, African American abolitionist
- “It is better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret.” —Jackie Joyner-Kersey, first woman to win back-to-back gold medals in the Summer Olympics
- "I'm fulfilled in what I do. I never thought that a lot of money or fine clothes—the finer things of life—would make you happy. My concept of happiness is to be filled in a spiritual sense." — Coretta Scott King, wife of Martin Luther King Jr.
- "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." — Maya Angelou, African-American poet
- "I think about how one day, [my daughters will] have families of their own. And one day, they—and your sons and daughters—will tell their own children about what we did together in this election. They'll tell them how this time, we listened to our hopes, instead of our fears. How this time, we decided to stop doubting and to start dreaming. How this time, in this great country—where a girl from the South Side of Chicago can go to college and law school, and the son of a single mother from Hawaii can go all the way to the White House—we committed ourselves to building the world as it should be." —Michelle Obama

Student Resource Sheet 1: Timed Writing

ESSAY

Time—25 minutes

The essay gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can develop and express ideas. You should, therefore, take care to develop your point of view, present your ideas logically and clearly, and use language precisely.

Your essay must be written on the lines provided on your answer sheet—you will receive no other paper on which to write. You will have enough space if you write on every line, avoid wide margins, and keep your handwriting to a reasonable size. Remember that people who are not familiar with your handwriting will read what you write. Try to write or print so that what you are writing is legible to those readers.

Important Reminders:

- **A pencil is required for the essay.** An essay written in ink will receive a score of zero.
- **Do not write your essay in your test book.** You will receive credit only for what you write on your answer sheet.
- **An off-topic essay will receive a score of zero.**
- **If your essay does not reflect your original and individual work, your test scores may be canceled.**

You have twenty-five minutes to write an essay on the topic assigned below.

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following quotation and the assignment below.

“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never have enough.”

—Oprah Winfrey, first successful African American woman in media

Assignment: Is it more important for strong women to be thankful for what they have or to be focused on what they want for the future? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from *A Raisin in the Sun* as well as your studies, experience, or observations.

Student Resource Sheet 2: Timed Writing

ESSAY

Time—25 minutes

The essay gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can develop and express ideas. You should, therefore, take care to develop your point of view, present your ideas logically and clearly, and use language precisely.

Your essay must be written on the lines provided on your answer sheet—you will receive no other paper on which to write. You will have enough space if you write on every line, avoid wide margins, and keep your handwriting to a reasonable size. Remember that people who are not familiar with your handwriting will read what you write. Try to write or print so that what you are writing is legible to those readers.

Important Reminders:

- **A pencil is required for the essay.** An essay written in ink will receive a score of zero.
- **Do not write your essay in your test book.** You will receive credit only for what you write on your answer sheet.
- **An off-topic essay will receive a score of zero.**
- **If your essay does not reflect your original and individual work, your test scores may be canceled.**

You have twenty-five minutes to write an essay on the topic assigned below.

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following quotations and the assignment below.

“Just don’t give up trying to do what you really want to do.”
—Ella Fitzgerald, African American jazz singer

“Make a difference about something other than yourselves.”
—Toni Morrison, first African American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature

Assignment: Is it more important for strong women to focus on their own success or to focus on making a difference for others? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from *A Raisin in the Sun* as well as your studies, experience, or observations.

Student Resource Sheet 3: Prewriting for an SAT Essay

Step 1: All SAT questions can be answered in three ways: Yes, No, and Depends. Identify both sides of the issue—the “yes and no” or “pro and con” of the question—and write them on the top of the two-column chart.

Side 1:	Side 2:

Step 2: Now, brainstorm supports for BOTH sides of the argument. You should include references to famous historical figures, literary characters (Think: *A Raisin in the Sun*), current events, characters in “smart” movies, and people from your own experiences. Even if you choose to support one side of the argument, you will want to use information and examples from the other side as you recognize the opposition.

Step 3: Review the supports on both sides of your chart. Decide which side you will take in your essay. Place a star next to two or three examples or supports that you will include in your essay.

Step 4: Now, using the margins of the chart, make a small web coming from each of the examples that you have chosen. On this web, brainstorm details about this person or example that will provide enough information for you to write a solid paragraph—about eight sentences—that shows how this example supports your thesis. Remember that your thesis must answer the question posed in the prompt.

Step 5: Using the information on your chart, write an essay using about 50 lines on notebook paper that completely answers the question. Your introduction should be clear but brief. Your body paragraphs should thoroughly explain your examples and connect them to the thesis. Your conclusion should be brief but insightful.