

# *A Raisin in the Sun*

Lorraine Hansberry

About the author. . .

- Deeply committed to the black struggle for equality and human rights, Lorraine Hansberry's brilliant career as a writer was cut short by her death when she was only 35.
- *A Raisin in the Sun* was the first play written by a black woman to be produced on Broadway. It won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award - Hansberry was the youngest and the first black writer to receive this award.

## Purpose for writing. . .

- Hansberry's *purpose* was to show "**the many gradations in even one Negro family.**" The characters suffer, hope, dream, and triumph over the enormous barriers erected by the dominant culture. \
- *Think*: Do they achieve their [American] dream(s)?

## Themes in *ARINS*

- pursuit of the American dream (illusion or reality)
- American beauty & identity (and how race & gender contribute to these)
- class and generational conflicts
- marital relationships
- feminism (of the daughter in particular)
- stereotyping, misconceptions, inequality  
myths regarding race, class, and gender
- universality of the human race

## Setting/Background:

- The entire action of the play takes place in the Southside of Chicago sometime between WWII and present (1958): namely the 1950's.
- During this era, Chicago was strictly divided by race and segregation. The 1950's are often considered a prosperous time for the United States; a time where blacks were content with their inferior status, and women were happy to stay at home and be housewives.

## Setting/Background:

- This of course caused great tension in both blacks and women and ultimately led to the great civil rights and feminist movements in the 1960's.
- *A Raisin in the Sun* predates both of these movements, but provides great insight into life during this time period and how it erupted into the 60's.

## Harlem Renaissance...

- 1) war generates new opportunities for industry
  - 2) much of existing labor supply leaves workforce
  - 3) immigrant labor pool evaporates
- Result = The Great Migration (escaping harsh segregationist laws, difficult rural economy, hoping for industrial jobs, new lives)
  - congregated black populations in northern cities like Chicago and New York in unprecedented numbers.
  - The concentration, in New York city, occurred on the upper west side, in Harlem.

## Harlem Renaissance

- When Harlem was built in 1904 it was designed for the upper class white community; it consisted of townhouses, luxury apartment buildings and single-family homes.
- In its youth, Harlem was a somewhat fashionable section of the city with a large black, middle class population. Because New York is a port city, blacks from the south, Africa and the West Indies also found their way to Harlem making it a truly cosmopolitan area.



## Harlem Renaissance

### ● Important Features of the HR:

- more than just a literary movement
- racial consciousness & integration (assimilation vs. pride in heritage)
- the explosion of art & music--jazz, spirituals and blues (and tension with dreams being "deferred")

## Harlem Renaissance

### Common themes:

- Alienation
- Marginality
- the use of folk material
- the use of the blues tradition
- the problems of writing for an elite audience.

# The Characters: 1st Period

Ruth Younger-

Travis Younger-

Walter Lee Younger-

Lena Younger (Mama)-

Joseph Asagai-

George Murchison-

Karl Lindner-

Bobo-

Moving Men-

Joseph Asagai-

Willy-

Mrs. Johnson

# Characters: 2nd Period

Ruth Younger-  
Asagai-

Joespeh

Travis Younger-

Willy-

Walter Lee Younger-

Mrs. Johnson

Lena Younger (Mama)-

Joseph Asagai-

George Murchison-

Karl Lindner-

Bobo-

Moving Men-

## *A Raisin in the Sun*

- The action of the play is set in Chicago's Southside, sometime between WWII and the present.

# A Raisin in the Sun: 3 Acts

## Act I

Scene 1: Friday morning

Scene 2: The following morning

## Act II

Scene 1: Later, the same day

Scene 2: Friday night, a few weeks later

Scene 3: Moving day, one week later

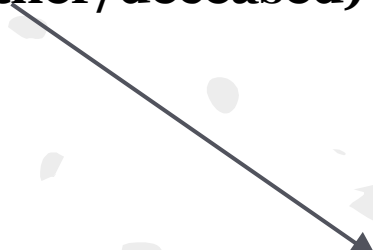
## Act III

An hour later

The Younger's family tree. . .

## Family Tree

**Lena Younger  
(Mama) &  
"Big Walter" Younger (father/deceased)**



**Walter**

**Beneatha**

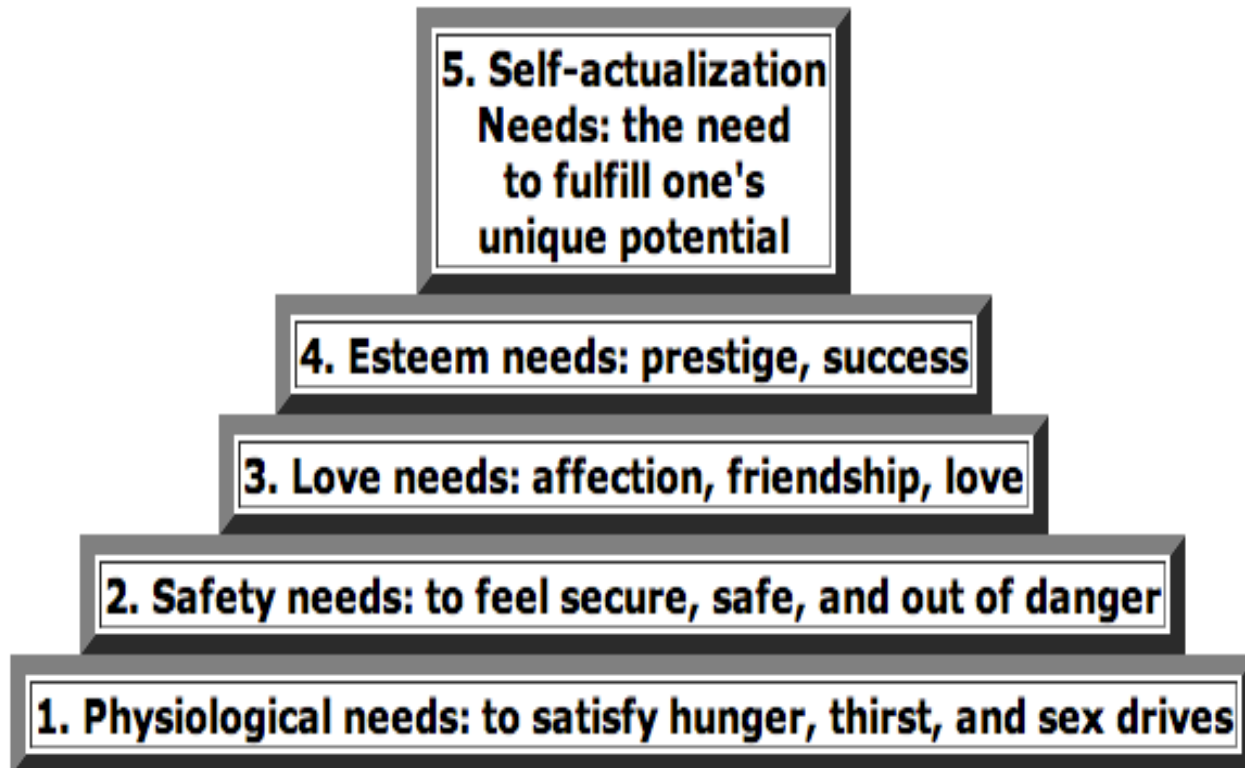
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**Ruth**

=

**Travis**

# Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" Theory and the Younger Family in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*



(Abraham H. Maslow, *Personality and Motivation*. New York: Harper, 1954.)



# Types of Characters

- Round= many traits, faults as well as virtues
- Flat= one dimensional
- Dynamic= develops and grows over the course of the story
- Static= never changes
- Foil= a character who is contrasted with another character