Overview

Background The title, *A Raisin in the Sun*, comes from a poem by Langston Hughes called “A Dream Deferred” in which Hughes personifies what happens to unfulfilled dreams. He offers a sequence of images in which the dream dries up like a raisin, sags like a heavy burden, or finally explodes. These images express the frustration and tension that threaten to destroy the dreamer.

Between 1940 and 1960, Chicago’s black population had increased dramatically during the period known as the Great Migration, as many African Americans moved to escape the oppression in the South. As a result, overcrowding became a serious issue in poor black neighborhoods. These living conditions exacerbated the frustrations that many African Americans felt as marginalized members of a segregated society.

Book Summary The play delves into the demoralizing effect that poverty and racism have on African Americans. The Youngers are a poor African American family who live in the projects of Chicago’s Southside. The drama traces the dreams of each member in the Younger family when they receive a large insurance check and must decide what to do with the money.

About the Author

Lorraine Hansberry was born on May 19, 1930. She grew up in Chicago’s Southside projects, but her family moved to a white neighborhood in 1938, despite its restrictions on racial integration. Her father fought for his right to live in this neighborhood, eventually claiming victory in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Hansberry became interested in drama in high school and later attended the University of Wisconsin. She moved to New York City in 1950 and became immersed in the city’s political scene, working as a journalist for Paul Robeson’s *Freedom* magazine.

*A Raisin in the Sun* debuted on Broadway on March 11, 1959. It was the first play written by an African American woman that was produced on Broadway. At twenty-nine, Lorraine Hansberry was the youngest playwright given the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Critics lauded her as the progressive new voice of her generation.
**Reading the Book**

There are several options for reading *A Raisin in the Sun*. They include:

- **Whole Class** Assign sections of the book and discussion dates using the planner on [Student Journal, page 1](#). After students read a section and respond to the corresponding [Student Journal](#) pages, have a class discussion. At the end of the book, the class meets for [The Exchange](#).

- **Small Groups** Read the book [Introduction](#) with the group. Group members then read an agreed-upon number of pages, complete the corresponding [Student Journal](#) pages, and meet to discuss. When they finish the book, they meet again for [The Exchange](#). Use the planner on [Student Journal, page 1](#) to establish meeting times.

- **Independently** Students read the book on their own and then meet as a group for [The Exchange](#). Use the planner on [Student Journal, page 1](#) to establish the meeting time.

- **Guided Reading** Have students read [Student Journal, page 2](#) and monitor their discussion of the [What If?](#) scenario. Read aloud the book [Introduction](#) to give students background on the book. As students read, use the [Before You Move On](#) questions to guide comprehension. Use the [Look Ahead](#) to set a focus for reading the next set of pages. At the end of each section, assign the appropriate [Student Journal](#) pages. Discuss the pages before starting the next section. Establish a date for [The Exchange](#) and record it on the planner.

**Getting Started**

Have students read [What If?](#) on [Student Journal, page 2](#) and discuss the scenario. Encourage students to describe the similarities and differences between the scenario and their lives and imagine how the situation would affect them.

- Have students write their responses to the three questions below the scenario and compare answers with a partner or the group.

- Have students discuss how the situation might relate to [The Exchange](#) question and then write a brief summary of their discussion in the [Student Journal](#).
Introduction

Have students read the book **Introduction**. Check their comprehension with the three follow-up questions on **Student Journal, page 3**.

**Introduction**

Read the Introduction on pages 7–9 in *A Raisin in the Sun*. The Introduction will help you understand key concepts in the book. Knowing them will help you discuss and write about the book.

The Introduction includes information about:
- the setting of the story—Chicago’s Southside in the 1950s
- Lorraine Hansberry’s writing style
- the historical importance of *A Raisin in the Sun*

After you read the Introduction, answer these questions to check your understanding.

1. What were the living conditions like for African Americans on the Southside of Chicago during the 1950s?

   African Americans often lived in poor conditions. Their apartment buildings were old, unsafe, and crowded. Many white Americans thought of them as second-class citizens.

2. How did Hansberry try to make her plays seem realistic?

   She wrote about the daily struggle of African Americans against prejudice. She used the slang and phrases of African Americans on the Southside. She included important aspects of their culture and religion.

3. Why is *A Raisin in the Sun* historically important?

   It was the first play produced on Broadway written by an African American woman. It showed her characters, the Younger family, in a realistic light. All audiences could see how a typical African American family dealt with prejudice in their daily lives.

**Introduction: Key Concepts**

Have students study the first **Key Concept** with the help of the graphic organizer on **Student Journal, page 4**. After studying the example, they should create similar graphic organizers to focus their understanding of the remaining **Key Concepts**.

**Personal Experience Chart**

Study the **Personal Experience Chart** for ambition. Write a sentence using the word ambition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept: ambition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define or review:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specific Examples**

- People work hard to achieve their ambitions.
- Many students have an ambition to go to college.
- If an athlete has talent and ambition, he or she might compete in the Olympics.

**Personal Connection:**

On a separate sheet of paper, create a similar **Personal Experience Chart** for each of the **Key Concept** words.
**A Raisin in the Sun**

**Answers for Before You Move On**

**Act I**

**Page 35**

1. **Text Features** What does the description of the Youngers’ apartment on pages 13–14 tell you about the family? They are poor and live in a small, crowded apartment.

2. **Conflict** How do Ruth and Beneatha feel about the check? How does Walter feel the money should be used? Both women feel Mama should spend the money the way she wants to. Walter wants the money to invest in a liquor store.

**Page 53**

1. **Character** Mama wants to use most of the money to buy a new home. What does this tell you about her? Mama is the wise head of the family. Her home and family define her identity.

2. **Comparisons** Reread pages 45–49. How is Beneatha different from Ruth and Mama? Beneatha is educated and more modern. She questions and challenges Mama's beliefs. She will not marry a man simply because he is wealthy.

**Page 70**

1. **Character's Point of View** Reread pages 59–60. Why might Ruth be unhappy about her pregnancy? Ruth feels the family does not have enough money or space for another person.

2. **Paraphrase** Asagai explains Beneatha’s nickname as “One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough.” What does it mean? Asagai understands that she wants to feel connected to her heritage. She wants more than money.

**Page 84**

1. **Cause and Effect** Reread pages 80–81. Walter wants a better life. What makes him feel this way? Walter feels oppressed by poverty and racism. He hates his job as a chauffeur; he wants a better future.

2. **Conclusions** On page 82, what difference does Mama finally see between herself and her children? Mama’s generation was concerned with freedom, safety, and other basic needs. Her children want to be acknowledged by all of society.
Act II

PAGE 98

1. Character’s Point of View  Reread pages 91–92. Why does George get angry about Beneatha’s connection to African culture? George thinks Beneatha’s beliefs about her identity are silly. He feels that African culture is simple and primitive.

2. Predict  Which man do you think Beneatha will choose to marry? Explain your answer. She would likely choose Asagai because he shares her respect for heritage.

PAGE 110

1. Character’s Motive  Reread pages 104–105. Why does Mama choose to tell Travis first how she spent the money? Travis represents Mama’s hope for a brighter future.

2. Irony  Why is Walter’s comment about peace and comfort on page 107 ironic? Walter doesn’t think living in a white community will bring peace or comfort.

PAGE 129

1. Inference  Reread pages 115–121. What is the purpose of Mrs. Johnson’s visit? While she pretends to be concerned, her real purpose is to tell them about the bombing.

2. Character  On pages 126–129, what dream does Walter have for himself? What does he want to give Travis? Walter dreams of material success. He wants his son to have a future.

PAGE 143

1. Cause and Effect  How does Walter change after Mama gives him control over the rest of the insurance money? He feels optimistic and responsible. He acts more loving.

2. Summarize  Reread pages 136–141. How does Lindner try to convince the family not to move into Clybourne Park? Lindner bribes them by offering to buy their home.

PAGE 157

1. Mood  Reread pages 152–155. How does Bobo’s news affect the mood of the play? Despair replaces the hope and excitement the family felt when they received the check.

2. Inference  Reread page 156. What did the insurance money represent to Mama? The money represented a lifetime of hard work and all her husband tried to give them.
**A Raisin in the Sun**

**Page 171**

1. **Summarize** Reread pages 165–166. What is Asagai’s dream? How is Beneatha a part of his dream?  
   Asagai’s dream is to go to Nigeria to help his people. He wants Beneatha to join him and become a doctor in Africa.

2. **Character’s Point of View** Mama has always been strong. Why does she want to give up her dream now?  
   Mama begins to fear that her dreams were too grand, and too many things have gone wrong. She no longer thinks she has the strength or ability to fulfill her dream.

**Page 185**

1. **Conclusions** Reread pages 180–181. What inspires Walter to stand up for his family and refuse Lindner’s offer?  
   Walter cannot accept Lindner’s bribe in front of his son. Despite his desperation, pride and dignity are more important to him than the money.

2. **Inference** On page 185, Mama returns to take her plant with her. Why is this plant so important to her?  
   The plant represents the family’s dreams that Mama has nurtured all these years. Just as she refuses to give up on the plant, so does she refuse to give up on her family.

**Respond to Act III**

1. **Personal Response**  
   Walter tells Mr. Lindner that he and his family have worked hard all of their lives. This shows his pride. What are you proud of that took a lot of hard work?  

2. **Conclusions** Reread pages 174–176. How does Mama’s speech about earlier generations of her family express her identity? What does she suggest about Walter’s identity? Use the word identity in your response.  
   Mama’s identity is connected to the generations of slaves and sharecroppers who were poor but never compromised self-worth for money. She thinks Walter’s willingness to take a bribe shows that he has forsaken his identity.

3. **Symbolism** What does Mama’s plant symbolize? Why does she continue to care for it, even though it looks sick and will not grow?  
   The plant symbolizes the struggle and survival of the family. Mama continues to nurture it, even though it is small and sick, because she refuses to give up on it.

4. **Connect** Look at your notes on Student Journal, page 2. Think about what might happen if you were part of a group that was divided over an issue. Compare this to A Raisin in the Sun. How do the Youngers keep the community from tearing them apart?  
   Walter regains his pride by confronting Mr. Lindner. They decide to move anyway. She respects Walter.

**Student Journal, page 10**

3. **Symbolism** What does Mama’s plant symbolize? Why does she continue to care for it, even though it looks sick and will not grow?  
   The plant represents the family’s dreams that Mama has nurtured all these years. Just as she refuses to give up on the plant, so does she refuse to give up on her family.

**What If?**

5. **Theme** When Walter loses the money, everyone feels as if they have lost what they most wanted. Use the Table below to list what Walter, Mama, and Beneatha lost and how each of them resolved their problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Things He/She Lost</th>
<th>Walter</th>
<th>Mama</th>
<th>Beneatha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The money to open the store; respect of his family</td>
<td>the money to pay for a home; respect for her son</td>
<td>the money to pay for medical school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter regains his pride by confronting Mr. Lindner</td>
<td>They decide to move anyway. She respects Walter.</td>
<td>Asagai convinces her that she can be of more help to people in Africa.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table**

How does the conclusion of the play connect to the theme of Where We Belong?  
In the last Act, the characters struggle with different ideas of where they belong. Walter thinks he needs respect in the business community but finds it at home. Mama thinks she dreamed too big, but Walter convinces her otherwise. Beneatha realizes she belongs in Africa with Asagai.
Exchange Discussion

THE QUESTION

How do communities unite and divide us?

- How does Lindner’s offer threaten to divide the Younger family? After Walter loses the insurance money, he decides to take Lindner’s offer and sell the house to the association. Beneatha and Mama are disappointed that Walter would give in to Lindner. They feel he is destroying their family pride.

- The play demonstrates how an entire family can work together to fulfill a dream. How does your family or community unite to support a dream? What have you sacrificed to make a dream come true?

- Walter disagrees with the rest of the family about how to spend the money. Have you ever disagreed or made a decision that was unpopular with a group you belonged to? What was the outcome? How did it divide or unite the group?

Evaluate the Discussion

Use the reproducible master from page 8 of this Teacher’s Guide to evaluate The Exchange discussion. The form may also be used by students for group assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluate the Discussion</th>
<th>Discussion Rubric</th>
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</table>

- Everyone participated. | Most people participated. | Only a few people participated. |
- Everyone spoke clearly. | Most people spoke clearly. | Some people did not speak clearly. |
- Everyone listened carefully. | Most people listened carefully. | Some people did not listen carefully. |
- We stayed on the topic throughout the discussion. | We stayed on the topic most of the time. | We did not stay on the topic all the time. |
- We responded to each other’s thoughts and ideas. | We commented on each other’s thoughts and ideas. | We did not make many comments on each other’s thoughts and ideas. |
- Most people used examples from the book to support their points. | Many people used examples from the book to support their points. | Only a few people used examples from the book to support their points. |
- Most people gave detailed answers using their experiences and even other texts. | Many people gave detailed answers using their experiences. | Only a few people gave detailed answers. |

Notes:
## Evaluate the Discussion

<table>
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<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
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<td>☐ Everyone participated.</td>
<td>☐ Most people participated.</td>
<td>☐ Only a few people participated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Everyone spoke clearly.</td>
<td>☐ Most people spoke clearly.</td>
<td>☐ Some people did not speak clearly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Everyone listened carefully.</td>
<td>☐ Most people listened carefully.</td>
<td>☐ Some people did not listen carefully.</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ We stayed on the topic throughout the discussion.</td>
<td>☐ We stayed on the topic most of the time.</td>
<td>☐ We did not stay on the topic all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ We responded to each other’s thoughts and ideas often.</td>
<td>☐ We commented on each other’s thoughts and ideas sometimes.</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________
A Raisin in the Sun

Assessment

Assess students’ understanding of A Raisin in the Sun by administering the multiple-choice test and essay questions. (Teacher’s Guide, pages 10–12)

How you administer the Assessment depends on your objective. You may choose to use the test as:

- an open-book test to allow students to continue practicing reading strategies and/or become familiar with a typical standardized test format
- a closed-book test to check students’ comprehension of the book and their abilities in various reading skills
- a take-home test to allow students to practice reading strategies as well as test-taking skills

Suggested point values are as follows:

Assessment Part I: 5 points per question for a total of 50 points
Assessment Part II: 40 points possible (see Scoring Guide, page 13)

Assessment Part I

Circle the best answer.

1. The Clybourne Park residents do not want the Youngers to move in because of their race. This attitude is an example of
   A. prejudice
   B. poverty
   C. religious practice
   D. view of herself

2. Beneatha explores an African identity by changing her clothing. In this sentence, what does identity mean?
   A. religious practice
   B. academic degree
   C. view of herself
   D. unfulfilled dreams

3. Which sentence supports the idea that Walter is not satisfied with his life?
   A. "Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?"
   B. "Done, what you mean Billy is gone?"
   C. "You need me, I'll be back, Mama."
   D. "I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy..."

4. The entire play takes place in a small, crowded apartment. This setting adds to—
   A. the conflict between the characters’ dreams and the obstacles they face
   B. the theme of ambition
   C. the mood of hope
   D. Ruth’s optimism

5. Ruth is most likely scared about having another child because—
   A. her husband will be angry at her
   B. there is no money or room for a child
   C. she continues to be sick
   D. her son Travis is already too much work

6. At the end of the play, the author changes the mood from one of tension to one of determination by—
   A. having Beneatha talk about Asagai’s proposal
   B. showing Ruth stamped in a chair
   C. saying Travis runs in from the street
   D. having Mama say “good-bye” to Mr. Lindner

7. Which of these best summarizes the play?
   A. The Youngers are a poor African American family living in Chicago. Mama receives $10,000. After buying a house in a white neighborhood, Mama gives the rest of the money to Walter for a liquor store. Walter’s friend runs off with the money. The white neighborhood association offers to buy the house to keep the Youngers out of their neighborhood, but Walter decides his pride is more important than money.
   B. The Youngers are a poor African American family. The family receives $10,000. Beneatha does not care about money. She becomes interested in Asagai, an African exchange student. When Walter loses the family’s money, Beneatha has no money to go to school. Asagai asks her to move to Africa with him.
   C. The Youngers are a poor African American family. Mama receives a check for $10,000 and wants to buy a house. They are hesitant to live in a white neighborhood because homes have been burned. The neighborhood tries to prevent them from moving in.
   D. The Youngers are a poor African American family living in Chicago. Mama is the head of the family. Her daughter, Beneatha, wants to become a doctor. Her son Walter is a chauffeur. His wife and son also live in the apartment. The family receives a check for $10,000. Walter loses the money, but the family moves to a big house, anyway.

8. Bobo’s visit is important because—
   A. The Youngers learn that the money is gone
   B. Walter is happy to see Bobo
   C. The Youngers share their news about buying a house
   D. Ruth does not like Bobo and tells him so

9. In this play, what is money connected to the idea of belonging to a group?
   A. Mama can now afford to keep the Youngers in their neighborhood, but Walter decides his pride is more important than money.
   B. The Youngers are a poor African American family. The family receives $10,000. Beneatha does not care about money. She becomes interested in Asagai, an African exchange student. When Walter loses the family’s money, Beneatha has no money to go to school. Asagai asks her to move to Africa with him.
   C. The Youngers are a poor African American family. Mama receives a check for $10,000 and wants to buy a house. They are hesitant to live in a white neighborhood because homes have been burned. The neighborhood tries to prevent them from moving in.
   D. The Youngers are a poor African American family living in Chicago. Mama is the head of the family. Her daughter, Beneatha, wants to become a doctor. Her son Walter is a chauffeur. His wife and son also live in the apartment. The family receives a check for $10,000. Walter loses the money, but the family moves to a big house, anyway.

10. From what Mama says about her husband, Big Walter, the reader can conclude that—
    A. Mama loves Big Walter
    B. Big Walter was lazy
    C. Walter and Beneatha miss their father
    D. Big Walter spent all his money on alcohol

Guidelines for Short Essay

Have students write a short essay in response to one of the writing prompts below. Use the Scoring Guide to assist in your evaluation of their essays.

A. The Youngers have dreams of a better life. Discuss how the Youngers’ environment influences their family life.

Responses should include that living in a tiny, crowded apartment causes conflict in the family. Ruth’s attitude toward her work as a nurse and depression affect all the time. Travis runs in from the street.

B. Mr. Lindner, George Murchison, and Billy Harris each represent a different community to the Youngers. What community does each represent and how do they help or divide the Youngers?

Responses should include that Mr. Lindner represents the white community that will divide the Youngers if Walter takes the money. George Murchison represents rich African Americans who have assimilated to white culture. He threatens to divide Beneatha from her heritage. Billy Harris is the poor black community that Walter wants to escape.

Scoring Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of the response:</th>
<th>Interpretation is accurate and thoughtful</th>
<th>Interpretation is literal or limited</th>
<th>Interpretation is adequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>A. Interprets the text accurately</td>
<td>A. Interprets the text accurately</td>
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<td>B. Interprets the text accurately</td>
<td>B. Interpretation is weak</td>
<td>B. Interpretation is weak</td>
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<td>C. Interpretation is weak</td>
<td>C. Interpretation is weak</td>
<td>C. Interpretation is weak</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Interprets the text accurately</td>
<td>D. Interpretation is adequate</td>
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Assessment Part II

A Raisin in the Sun

Scoring Guide,

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Assessment Part I

Circle the best answer.

1. The Clybourne Park residents do not want the Youngers to move in because of their race. This attitude is an example of ______.
   A identity
   B prejudice
   C persistence
   D poverty

2. Beneatha explores an African identity by changing her clothing. In this sentence, what does identity mean?
   A religious practice
   B academic degree
   C view of herself
   D unfulfilled dreams

3. Which sentence supports the idea that Walter is not satisfied with his life?
   A “Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?”
   B “Gone, what you mean Willy is gone?”
   C “You trust me like that, Mama?”
   D “I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy . . .”

4. The entire play takes place in a small, crowded apartment. This setting adds to—
   A the conflict between the characters’ dreams and the obstacles they face
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   A her husband will be angry at her
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6. At the end of the play, the author changes the mood from one of tension to one of determination by—
   A having Beneatha tell about Asagai’s proposal
   B showing Ruth slumped in a chair
   C showing Travis run in from the street
   D having Mama say good-bye to Mr. Lindner
Assessment Part I, continued

Circle the best answer.

7. Which of these best summarizes the play?
   A. The Youngers are a poor African American family living in Chicago. Mama receives $10,000. After buying a house in a white neighborhood, Mama gives the rest of the money to Walter for a liquor store. Walter’s friend runs off with the money. The white neighborhood association offers to buy the house to keep the Youngers out of their neighborhood, but Walter decides his pride is more important than money.
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8. Bobo’s visit is important because—
   A. the Youngers learn that the money is gone
   B. Walter is happy to see Bobo
   C. the Youngers share their news about buying a house
   D. Ruth does not like Bobo and tells him so

9. In this play, in what way is money connected to the idea of belonging to a group?
   A. Mama can now forget about Big Walter.
   B. Travis can now go to a private school.
   C. Money provides a way for the Youngers to move to a new neighborhood.
   D. Money allows Beneatha to join Asagai in Africa.

10. From what Mama says about her husband, Big Walter, the reader can conclude that—
    A. Mama loved Big Walter
    B. Big Walter was lazy
    C. Walter and Beneatha miss their father
    D. Big Walter spent all his money on alcohol
Assessment Part II

Choose one question to answer. Write 3–4 paragraphs. Use 3 examples from the text to support your answer. Continue your essay on a separate sheet of paper if necessary.

A. The Youngers have dreams of a better life. Discuss how the Youngers’ environment influences their family life.

B. Mr. Lindner, George Murchison, and Willy Harrison each represent a different community to the Youngers. What community does each represent and how do they unite or divide the Youngers?
Guidelines for Short Essay

Have students write a short essay in response to one of the writing prompts below. Use the Scoring Guide to assist in your evaluation of their essays.

A. The Youngers have dreams of a better life. Discuss how the Youngers’ environment influences their family life.

Responses should include that living in a tiny, crowded apartment causes conflict in the family. Ruth wants an abortion because there isn’t room for a baby. Walter is angry and depressed all the time. Travis sleeps on the sofa. Mama dreams of owning a home.

B. Mr. Lindner, George Murchison, and Willy Harrison each represent a different community to the Youngers. What community does each represent and how do they unite or divide the Youngers?

Responses should include that Mr. Lindner represents the white community that will divide the Youngers if Walter takes the money. George Murchison represents rich African Americans who have assimilated to white culture. He threatens to divide Beneatha from her heritage. Willy Harrison is the poor black community that Walter wants to escape.

Scoring Guide

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