

About the play and original performance

- Ethel Barrymore Theatre, Broadway, USA.
- 11 March 1959.
- Proscenium arch stage.
- Realistic set design by Ralph Alswang; clearly follows Hansberry’s description.
- Realistic costumes showing characters through style and colour; everyday clothes from the period.
- Realistic props.
- First play to present a realistic Black experience of life in America, with African American actors playing non-stereotypical characters.
- Hansberry won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Play of the Year.

Context

- Just before the rise of the Civil Rights Movement.
- Set in Chicago South Side.
- Segregation – housing, schools, restaurants, etc.
- Disenfranchisement – African Americans not able to vote; limited prospects.
- Many African Americans were poor and had jobs working for White people.
- The American Dream – inaccessible.
- Legacy of slavery and emancipation.
- Rise of feminism.
- Challenging gender roles and stereotypes.

Style

- Realism.
- Links to kitchen sink drama.
- Three acts spread out over approximately a month.
- Follows unities of time, place and action well.
- Realistic acting style.
- Uses non-standard English forms to amplify aspects of character and context.
- All characters are African American, except Asagai, who is Nigerian, and Karl Lindner.
- Very frequent, detailed stage directions.
- What rehearsal techniques might you use with your actors and why?

Key characters

Lena Younger (Mama): matriarch, proud, dignified, wise, caring, old-fashioned, resilient, hopeful, with inner strength; wants to move into her own house.

Walter Lee Younger: chauffeur, frustrated, motivated by money, bitter, foolish, proud, with traditional masculine views; wants to run a liquor store.

Beneatha Younger: intelligent, conflicted, seeking identity, outspoken, arrogant, interested in her African heritage; wants to be a doctor.

Ruth Younger: loyal, downtrodden, submissive, frustrated, maternal, with a quite traditional outlook; wants to move out of the apartment.

Travis Younger: lively, respectful, honest.

Joseph Asagai: Nigerian, Yoruba speaker, intelligent, idealist, kind, respectful, articulate, level-headed, anti-colonialist, anti-assimilationist.

George Murchison: rich, pretentious, assimilationist, college-educated, conceited, self-centred, with traditional views of women.

Karl Lindner: quiet, polite, non-threatening, nervous, gentle; represents the White segregationist Clybourne Park residents.

Directing

- Will your *A Raisin in the Sun* be a faithful interpretation or a reinterpretation?
- What type of staging and style are you working with?
- How are you interpreting the text? What do you want to say through your production?
- Which themes will your work emphasise?
- How do you imagine the characters and their relationships?
- How will you direct your actors to communicate relationships and motivation?
- How will you use character positioning and proxemics to communicate meaning?
- How can you link to your current, contemporary context to make the play relevant?
- What rehearsal techniques might you use with your actors and why?

Design

Are you creating a faithful interpretation or a reinterpretation? Use live theatre to inspire and influence your ideas. How will actors interact with the design elements? **Decisions must be consistent with your chosen style.**

Set and props – *location, setting, period, themes, atmosphere, symbols*

Stage type; style; layout of space; size of space; entrances and exits; colours; materials; textures; shapes; symbols; levels; projection surfaces; floor, backdrop/cyclorama; furniture and props (style, size, colour, material, condition, location, use) above the stage; suspending from above.

Costume, hair and make-up – *status, age, context, personality, circumstances, location*

Garment: colour; size; condition; texture; material; time period. Hair: style; colour; condition; accessories. Make-up: face; hands; feet; body; special effects; prosthetics.

Lighting – *mood, atmosphere, location, time of day, emphasis, emotion*

Naturalistic or non-naturalistic; colour; intensity; angle; positioning; type of lantern; birdie; special; practical; wash; gel; gobo; moving head; strobe; torches; phones.

Sound – *location, atmosphere, emotion, tension, pace, amplification*

Music; atmospheric; ambient; special effect; diegetic; non-diegetic; volume; fade; layering; soundscape; microphones; reverb; echo; delay; effects and treatment; speaker positioning.

Acting

- Underpinned by research and off-text work to establish status, social class, motivation, objective/intent; super objective, function, relationships, backstory, character arc.
- Use live theatre performances to inspire you and influence acting ideas. Consider: What happened, how, why, what did I like, how could I adapt the idea for my interpretation?
- Experiment and **explore practically**. Focus on ensuring your performance decisions communicate your intentions and chosen style. Make sure you can explain: What am I doing, how am I doing it, why am I doing it?

Vocal skills

- To communicate meaning via tone, volume, tempo, pause, pitch, intonation, musicality, accent.
- Consider vocal sounds: breath, sigh, cry, sing, hum, chant, whisper, hesitation, stutter.
- Consider vocal skills for more stylised approaches.

Physical skills

- To communicate meaning through: posture, gait, body language, facial expression, gesture.
- Consider tempo, rhythm, pace, energy, dynamics, direction, weight, speed, flow.
- Consider physical skills for more stylised approaches, for example physical theatre, heightened naturalism: unison; canon; repetition; motif; slow motion; exaggeration.

Interaction

- To communicate meaning through character positioning, spatial relationships, proxemics, vocal choices, physical choices. Driven by motivation and reaction.
- Needs to effectively communicate the relationship between characters – between two or more characters, also with the audience or even interaction with the space/set.

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