

Slide 1 (Introduction): *A Raisin in the Sun* is a timeless, thematically relevant work that requires thoughtful planning in terms of historical accuracy, theme communication, design, casting, and pacing in order to run a successful production. Through the eyes of a director, we will examine the ways in which Hansberry's script acts as a canvas for theatre artists to tell the story of familial love, resilience, and courage she intended.

Slide 2: To introduce *A Raisin in the Sun*, I want to talk about the historical context and setting. The play is set in 1950s America when white people were paid twice as much and were two times more likely to be hired than black people. Black people were also restricted and segregated from education and housing which is significant in the context of *A Raisin in the Sun* because of the Younger family's dream to move to a house in an all-white neighborhood and Beneatha's goal to become a doctor.

Slide 3: The Younger family's apartment is located in the South side of Chicago, where living conditions were harsh for a multitude of reasons including discriminatory housing policies and crowding. The American Housing Act that was enacted in 1949 prevented black people from living in some all-white neighborhoods and led to the creation of public housing units in all-black neighborhoods. The neighborhood was called Bronzeville and was the center of culture and business for African American people which may have influenced Walter Younger in his ambition to become involved in business through investing.

Slide 4: It was not uncommon during this time for African American families to share one kitchenette style apartment with one bedroom or landlords would split up larger apartments. It was also very common for residents on the same floor or the entire building to share one or two bathrooms. This is all to say that these families were very crowded and had very little space to live. The living conditions in these apartments were also often poor because of the lack of proper heating and the use of makeshift heating elements would cause fires making these places dangerous to live in.

Slide 5: Money is a central part of the plot and theme of *A Raisin in the Sun* and represents both the family's limitations and their ambitions. The family fights over what to do with the insurance money they are expected to receive because they all have different perspectives on what money could do for their family. Mama sees money as an opportunity to stabilize and better her family. Beneatha sees money as a tool to help her pursue her dream of becoming a doctor. Walter Lee sees money as a way to gain independence and improve his social status. Each member of the family has a different view of the path to achieving the American Dream, but money is an important part of each of their plans.

Slide 6: Money is what allows the family to buy the house in an all-white neighborhood which symbolizes security, freedom, and the possibility to push boundaries and overcome societal

limitations. The house is not just a physical space but represents the larger dreams the Younger family has of reuniting as a family and creating a better life in several different ways in terms of social, financial, and educational opportunities. It also becomes a symbol of the racial tension occurring at this time in America and highlights the many struggles that black people face in America regarding systemic racism.

Slide 7: In attempting to move into a house in an all-white neighborhood, the family struggles with racial discrimination and systemic racism raises many issues in the lives of the family. They face discrimination financially, in housing, education, and in terms of their identity. These issues related to systemic racism prevent them from living the life they want and accomplishing the dreams they have for both themselves and for the family as a whole. In highlighting these aspects of discrimination, Hansberry highlights how racial prejudice impacts the day-to-day lives of black people.

Slide 8: Another prominent aspect of *A Raisin in the Sun* is gender and how the characters either attempt to align with societal gender expectations or aim to challenge them. Beneatha Younger aims to challenge gender expectations by wanting to go to school and become a doctor. In doing this, she not only resists the conventional roles assigned to women, particularly black people, but goes against who the society she lives in is telling her she is and who she wants to be. This defiance is powerful and revolutionary for its time because it brings up a larger conversation about black women's autonomy over their own bodies and identities.

Slide 9: On the other hand, Walter is extremely frustrated with the state of the family's finances and limitations and wants to invest in a liquor store with the hope that it will allow the family's image to be more socially acceptable and will give them more independence. Walter aims to be successful and is more focused on material possessions and wealth than any other character in the play. As a result of his obsession with money he is somewhat blinded to the greater and more meaningful purposes of life and his family's wants and needs.

Slide 10: Walter also struggles with the opposite problem as Beneatha in that he aims to align with societal gender expectations. Walter becomes more and more frustrated throughout the play because he feels like he should be in control as the family's provider and decision maker which is related to his need to fulfill expectations placed on men to be the 'head of the household'. Walter also feels extremely powerless as a result of systemic issues that prevent him from becoming this provider figure for his family and feels like there is a lack of opportunity for him to succeed.

Slide 11: The casting and rehearsal processes should be approached with very clear intentions for the outward portrayals of each character's distinct personality and purpose to the story. An actor portraying Walter should remain headstrong, stubborn, and in command of the stage with each

choice. The actor should also know that Walter's character is at times meant to represent Booker T. Washington incarnate, and should be educated on Washington's beliefs in Black economic pursuits ahead of social equality.

Slide 12: In contrast to Walter's demeanor, Beneatha should be portrayed in a progressive, passionate, vibrant light that often contrasts with the desperation and tiredness of other characters. Beneatha delivers multiple important, passionate scenes such as her explaining the reasons she wishes to become a doctor and embracing Nigerian dance. These moments should be large and emotionally heavy, communicating complex, moving messages about ambition and culture to the audience.

Slide 13: Lena Younger's character is an older, wiser, counterpart to her children's youthful displays of ambition. Regardless of the actor's age, they must portray Mama knowing she has lived a long lifetime full of smaller triumphs and losses that inform her current decisions and hopes for her children. Mama communicates tender and highly symbolic moments, such as the profound final scene in which she carries her plant to the new house, so her actor must remain aware of their high responsibility to convey nonverbal emotion.

Slide 14: Ruth Younger also carries responsibility as a maternal figure in the household, unafraid to speak her mind not only to Travis, but to Walter and Beneatha, as she often sides with Lena and carries a similar wise quality. An actor should play Ruth with a unique perspective considering she has merely married into the Younger family, so she does not share all of what bonds them together, but she functions in operating the family just the same, as she is the first character introduced onstage.

Slide 15: Throughout the script, Hansberry writes very specific stage directions pertaining to the dispositions of characters that give much more information than simple blocking guidelines. For example, Ruth's "life has been little that she expected, and disappointment has already begun to hang in her face". To ensure that Hansberry's visions for her characters are properly honored, actors should be instructed to think deeply about these directions and follow them as they would blocking.

Slide 16: The exposition of the play drops the audience into a bird's eye view of the Younger family's day-to-day life, and allows them to feel almost included in their personal routines, bonds, and dynamics. In terms of pacing, this section of the show should be performed gradually and with a relaxed tone in order to ease viewers into forming attachments with characters they will later feel for and choose to defend or oppose.

Slide 17: As the script builds into the rising action, introducing central conflicts like the looming presence of Mr. Lindner and his threat against moving into Clybourne Park, pacing should begin

to increase as tension builds between characters. It should be clear to the audience that each individual member of the family is beginning to face inner conflict between achievement and comfort.

Slide 18: As the central crisis of Walter's misuse of the family's money begins to unfold, there are several moments of intense catharsis that should be treated as such by actors. Walter's decision and realization cause polarizing reactions in each of the characters and actors should mindfully convey these individual manifestations of anger, disappointment, fear, and remorse with impactful delivery and physicality.

Slide 19: In the play's falling action and ultimate resolution, actors should return to the slow, delicate pacing seen in the exposition to communicate that the Youngers have made decisions that resolve the stresses built through conflict, and they can recreate the familial harmony seen when we are initially introduced to them. These final moments should still carry intentional emotional weight and should visibly show the family members reflecting on how much the choice to move means to each of them and all they have sacrificed to achieve it.

Slide 20 (Conclusion): In conclusion, *A Raisin in the Sun* is a deeply nuanced play that requires understanding of not only the plot but many aspects such as historical context. Each character requires an emotional depth in order to connect with the audience and, as a director, the goal is not just to tell the story of the Younger family but to create an experience that invites the audience to reflect on the dreams they hold, the obstacles they face, and the power of collective determination in the fight for a better future. The story and issues *A Raisin in the Sun* discusses remain extremely relevant today and it is a play that is worth sharing with more audiences.