

Summer Reading 2019

9th grade

You are required to read two books for English this summer:

1. **Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (a play)**
2. **Rishi Reddi's *Karma and Other Stories***

We will give you a multiple-choice test on both works during the second English class this coming fall. We will focus the test questions on what you should know (in terms of plot and detail) if you carefully consider the study questions we ask you to think about as you read. So please pay careful attention to the study questions and make good use of them: this study guide will help you enjoy the works and get more out of them. Please bring these books and this study guide with you when you come to Middlesex next fall; you should use the study guide to help you review the works before the test. (You should do most of this review before the night before the test, as you will have homework in a number of classes to do that night.) To help you get a sense of what the test will be like, we offer two sample multiple-choice questions on the last page of this document.

Study Guide for Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

A Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry's first and most famous play, opened on Broadway in 1959 when she was 28 years old. It was the first play by an African American playwright to be produced on Broadway, and it went on to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as the Best Play of the year, making Hansberry the youngest playwright ever so honored. The play has held an iconic position in American theater ever since. Unfortunately Hansberry died a few years later of cancer, at the all-too-young age of 34, while her second play was running on Broadway.

From the beginning what distinguished *Raisin in the Sun* was its combination of previously untold African American experience and universal applicability. With its portrait of family bonds and conflicts, of the tensions between the sexes and the generations, the play was instantly popular because all Americans saw their lives reflected in it. At the same time, no one had ever put the specific experience of African Americans on the stage in this way: the portrait of a black family living in 1950's Southside Chicago was a revelation. The great African American essayist and novelist James Baldwin remarked at the time that *Raisin* "put more of the truth of black people's lives on the stage than any other play in the entire history of theater." The play has a lot to say about the wounds and traumas inflicted by society and family, but in its ultimate vision of family pride and the perseverance of love and hope, its vision is uplifting and inspiring, however difficult its characters' lives.

Reading Questions:

1. What is the layout of the Youngers' apartment? Who sleeps where? Where is the bathroom? What is the significance of the bathroom's placement?
2. Relationships are central to this play; track the development of the following relationships over the play: Ruth and her husband Walter; Travis and his parents Ruth and Walter; Walter and his sister Beneatha; Mama/Lena and her two children Walter and

Beneatha; Beneatha and her two boyfriends, George Murchison and Joseph Asagai. Each relationship has something important to say about the family or society—for example, about the relationship between spouses, between siblings, between parents and children. What crucial cultural and life choices do Beneatha's two boyfriends offer her?

3. Dreams are also important in this play. What is Walter's dream? What is Beneatha's dream? What is Mama's dream? What is Joseph Asagai's dream? Which dreams does the play support and to what extent? Does it prefer Beneatha's dream to Walter's? If so, why? Does it ultimately support Joseph's dream or Beneatha's critique of it?

4. At one point, Walter says, "Because money is life, Mama." Think about the many ways the play supports this statement and critiques it.

5. There are several important symbols in this play. Think about the significance of Mama's plant, the kitchen window, the rat, the new house, and hairstyles. What do you think each of these represents?

6. While Mama is in many ways the play's most heroic character, Walter--his anger, his illusions, and his ultimate redemption—are its most central focus. Why are Walter's anger, illusions, and ultimate redemption so central to this play? What cultural and societal issues does the play explore through Walter Younger?

Study Guide for Rishi Reddi's *Karma and Other Stories*

Published in 2007, Rishi Reddi's *Karma and Other Stories* is a short story cycle that depicts the contemporary lives of Indian-American families from the perspectives of both first- and second-generation immigrants. Largely set in the Boston area—with excursions to Hyderabad, India and Wichita, Kansas—the stories explore the challenges, opportunities, and surprising pleasures of establishing a life away from home.

For the test, we will provide a list of characters with a short description of each character, as we do not expect you to memorize the name of every character. You may omit the story "Bangles," as we will not test you about that story.

A short story cycle is a unique form in which the stories are interconnected; the central character of one story (e.g. Lakshmi in "Lakshmi and the Librarian") will reappear as a minor character in a subsequent story (as Lakshmi does in "The Validity of Love"), and minor characters in early stories will emerge as the protagonists of later stories. Note that the stories don't move in chronological order, so you may learn something about a character in the present and then discover their backstory in a following story. Pay careful attention to how this rotation of characters and stories allows the reader to access a variety of viewpoints and better understand the complex dynamics of family and community.

Just as the stories do not progress in chronological order, the first and second generations seem to exist in different time periods, with parents largely valuing the traditions of the

past and children looking for change in the present and future. *Karma and Other Stories* echoes *A Raisin in the Sun* in this pull between the past and present, roots and new identities, old dreams and unanticipated desires. Although the two communities in each text confront different socioeconomic circumstances, consider their similar experiences not only as minorities but also as mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons.

Reading Questions:

1. At the end of “Devadasi,” Uma feels “a surge of despair about her place at home and in the world.” Consider the ways in which characters feel displaced in both America (Lakshmi, Venkat, Vijaya, Amruta, Justice Murthy) and India (Uma), but also how characters become attached to a sense of place no matter where they find themselves.
2. Many of the stories focus on a conflict between parents and children. The conflicts also shift in nature and power as the children become adults and rise to positions of economic or cultural power. What kinds of conflicts do the generations experience, and why?
3. Indian culture, as represented by the first-generation characters (Lakshmi, Venkat, Vijaya, Amruta, Justice Murthy, Shankar), has different expectations for the roles of men and women than modern American culture. How are men and women expected to act according to traditional Indian standards, and how do these expectations come into conflict with the American values of liberty and equality?
4. Several characters in both the first and second generations struggle to follow the social expectations and traditions of Indian culture. How do the characters try to forge their own individual identities without entirely rejecting their cultural heritage?
5. Success—whether defined as economic success, happiness, or cultural adjustment and ease—comes more easily to some characters than others, and the readers see divisions between characters based on those differences (between siblings, between friends, between generations). What are the effects of these differences in success?

Sample Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Joseph Asagai gives Beneatha
 - A. a spear for Walter and some hair products for herself.
 - B. a beautiful wooden bowl from Nigeria.
 - C. silver bracelets from Canada.
 - D. colorful robes from Nigeria and some records.
 - E. a colorful headscarf from Nigeria.
2. In “The Validity of Love,” Supriya and Luke laugh at an inside joke at the grocery store about
 - A. Supriya’s dog.
 - B. soy milk.
 - C. arranged marriages.
 - D. Supriya’s haircut.
 - E. their breakup.

ANSWERS: 1. D; 2. B.