

Lifelong Institute

Semester: Fall 2026

Course: Harlem Renaissance Literature

Instructor: Dr. Jacqueline Goffe-McNish

Time: Tuesday 11:05 to 12:20

Room: Zoom

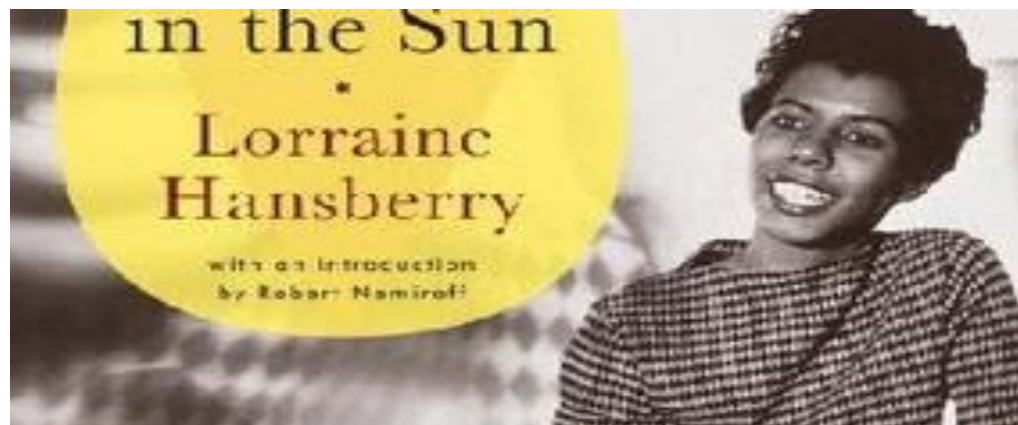
Phone: 845-471-7220

Email: goffemcnish@gmail.com

Texts: **A Raisin in the Sun** by Lorraine Hansberry

Selected Poems of Langston Hughes.

- Guidelines**
1. Please read the sections assigned before the class.
 2. Please focus your discussions on the text being discussed.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

Schedule

September 22	Introduction of Class Members Introduction to Literature Introduction to the play
September 29	Discussion of Act 1 Scene i Cultural Analysis, Religious Allusion
October 6	Discussion Act 1 Scene ii and Act 2 Scene i Character Analysis, Epiphany, Setting Analysis, Analysis of Symbols.
October 13	Discussion of Act 2 Scene ii and iii Magical Realism, Presentation of Death
October 20	Discussion of Act 3 Masking, Veiling, and Double Consciousness
October 27	Discussion of Sections Afro-American Fragments and Shadow of Blues Historical Analysis, Role of African Diaspora, Naming, Intersectionality.
November 3	Discussion of Sections Distance Nowhere and Lament Over Love Presentation of Journeys, Submersion, Deconstruction.
November 10	Discussion of Sections Madam to You and Words of Freedom.

Creolization, Identity, Search for El. Dorado. Sisyphean Experience.

Journal

Introduction

Lorraine Hansberry's history is making chronicles of the difficult period of integration during the 1940s as families move from the agrarian south and settles in the industrial north. The play explores the lives of a family who lives in a predominantly colored section of the city and receives money from an insurance entitlement because of the death of the father of the family. The mother/ grandmother is now in charge of making decisions about the future of the family. This matriarchal society created by this crisis is the catalyst for multiple conflict. The son/ father of the next generation wants to buy a bar to create wealth, but this meets resistance because of the religious implications of providing alcohol which is clearly seen as anti- religion. The conflicts continue when the daughter decides to become a doctor. This is anti the role of women in this society. The wife considers an abortion to be less of a burden, and this creates the third major conflict as it goes against the pro-life belief of this generation. The subplot deals with the role of Africa in the person of an exchange student named Asagai. The play ends with the family adjusting to the new norms and finding renewed love and respect for each other.

Main points in the Play

1. The significance of the names in the text: Walter, water- takes the shape of the vessel in which it finds itself; Beneatha, position in society; Ruth, the loyal daughter in law; Lena, someone to lean on; Travis, travesty; Mr. Linder, a typical Jewish gentlemen; Bobo. The fool; Mrs.---- the nosey neighbor; and Asagai, the African.
2. The role of religion and the place of Christianity
3. The Great Northern Movement
4. The symbolism of the plant
5. Africa and Colonization
6. The role of children in the Black household
7. The position women in the community
8. The Matriarchal Society
9. The integration of Black men
10. The true history of African Americans

Raisin in the Sun Quiz

1. What is assimilation? Give evidence from the text.
2. What is the significance of the discussion about the eggs?
3. What is the role of 'religion' in the history of the African Americans as presented in the text?
4. What does Beneatha mean when she says "if the salt loses its savor"?
5. In what way is Mama the matriarch of the family?
6. How does the plant represent Mama?
7. What are Asagai's views on Colonization?
8. What is the role of the supernatural in the text?
9. What is the significance of Ruth's name?
10. In what way does Mrs. Johnson provide "comic relief" in the text?

Identify the speaker of each quote, the circumstances in which the speech was said, and the significance of the speech.

11. "Damn all the eggs that ever was"
12. "Always wanted them to have something-be something"
13. "Yes...we've all got acute ghetto-itus"

14. "It's just that every American girl I have known has said that to me"
15. "In my mother's house there is still God"

Essay Topics

1. Discuss the major conflict of 'man against society' detailing how this is represented in the lives of all the characters in the play.
2. Compare and contrast the concepts of assimilation and creolization as represented in the play.
3. Critics have suggested that this play is primarily about a family's search for self. Do you agree? Fully discuss your opinion.
4. Discuss the ways in which the events in this play remain current even though the play was set in the late 1940s.
5. Discuss the ways in which Asagai could be considered a foil of George.
6. Discuss the symbolism of the plant in the play Raisin....
7. Discuss how the introduction of the check changes the lives of the characters in this play.
8. Discuss the stereotypical presentation of Black men in this play created by Hansberry.
9. Discuss the role of the family in validating or manipulating one's sense of self. Use three characters from the play Raisin...
10. Walter should not be blamed for his behavior. He is simply a product of his society. Discuss.
11. Compare and contrast the epiphanic experiences of Beneatha and Walter.

Introduction to Langston Hughes

A seminal figure of the Harlem Renaissance, a period during the 1920s of unprecedented artistic and intellectual achievement among black Americans, Hughes devoted his versatile and prolific career to portraying the urban experience of working-class blacks. Called "the Poet Laureate of Harlem" by Carl Van Vechten, Hughes integrated the rhythm and mood of jazz and blues music into his work and used colloquial language to reflect black American culture. Hughes's gentle humor and wry irony often belie the magnitude of his themes. Having been a victim of poverty and discrimination, Hughes wrote about being seduced by the American Dream of freedom and equality only to be denied its realization. He composed the poem "Dream Deferred" to express his frustration: "What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun? / Or fester like a sore-- / And then run? / Does it stink like rotten meat? / Or crust and sugar over-- / like a syrupy sweet? / Maybe it just sags / like a heavy load. / Or does it explode?" Speaking of Hughes's wide range of works, Theodore R. Hudson stated: "Dipping his pen in ink, not acid, [Hughes's] method was to expose rather than excoriate, to reveal rather than revile."

Biographical Information

Hughes was born February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. While he was an infant his parents split and he moved to Lawrence, Kansas where he was cared for by his grandmother. His mother worked in Kansas City as an actress and his father practiced law in Mexico. When Hughes's grandmother died he moved briefly to Illinois before settling in Cleveland, Ohio where he attended Central High School. There he ran on the track team and was the class poet, publishing poems in the school newspaper. After he graduated he lived for a year with his father in Mexico and then attended Columbia University for one year. Hughes took various jobs and traveled the world. In 1926 he published his first book of poems *The Weary Blues*. He attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, earning a B.A. in 1929. In 1930 his first novel *Not Without Laughter* won the Harmon gold medal for literature and Hughes decided to pursue a career in

writing. He lectured across the country and lived in New York City, writing prolifically. Throughout the 1930s Hughes became involved with the political Left and in 1953 he was investigated by the Senate subcommittee chaired by Joseph McCarthy for his alleged involvement in selling books to libraries abroad. Hughes died in New York City May 22, 1967.

Major Works

Hughes published works in many genres but was primarily known as a poet. He published his first collection of poems *The Weary Blues* in 1926, containing one of his most famous poems "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Other important volumes of poetry are *Fine Clothes for the Jews* (1927), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1959), and *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961). In his poetry Hughes renders the voices, experiences, emotions, and spirit of African Americans. In his attempt to capture the lives of everyday African Americans he deals with subjects like prostitution, racism, lynchings, and teenage pregnancy. Hughes is well known for the influence of jazz and bebop music in his poetry, both as a subject matter and as a structure. Critics have noted his skill in imitating the sound, cadence, and rhythms of the blues style as well as capturing the humor, despair, and loneliness depicted in the music. Hughes's most famous fiction involved a character named Jesse

B. Semple, often called Simple. These short stories provided Hughes with another opportunity to showcase the problems facing African Americans. In Hughes's many plays he captures the vernacular of African Americans and is able to employ such innovative techniques as theatre-in-the-round and audience participation.