

Raisin In The Sun Study Questions 6. What Does Mama Mean When She Says "We Aint No Business People, Ruth."

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In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, the characters grapple with dreams, identity, and societal expectations. One pivotal moment occurs when Mama, also known as Lena Younger, states to Ruth, "We ain't no business people, Ruth." This statement encapsulates her perspective on their family's financial situation, priorities, and their understanding of success within their community and personal values. Understanding what Mama truly means by this remark offers insight into her character, the themes of the play, and the broader socio-economic commentary Hansberry weaves into her narrative. In this article, we will explore the context of this statement, interpret its significance, and analyze its impact on the characters and the story's themes.

Context of Mama's Statement in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Background of the Characters and Situation

- Mama Lena Younger is the matriarch of the Younger family, striving to provide a better life for her family.
- Ruth Younger, her daughter-in-law, is also concerned about their financial stability and future.
- The family has recently received an insurance check following the death of Ruth's father, which sparks discussions about how to use the money.

The Moment of the Statement

- Mama makes her comment during a conversation about the family's plans for the insurance money.
- She expresses her feelings about their financial ambitions and the kind of life she envisions for her family.

Interpreting Mama's Statement: "We Ain't No Business People, Ruth"

Literal Meaning

- Mama is asserting that their family is not engaged in commerce or entrepreneurship.
- They are not businessmen or investors; they are ordinary working-class people.

Deeper Symbolic Meanings

- The statement reflects her belief that their primary focus should be on stability, family, and morality, not on money-making ventures.
- It signifies her skepticism about risking their small inheritance on risky investments or entrepreneurial pursuits.
- It emphasizes her values: contentment with modest means, hard work, and maintaining dignity.

What Mama's Words Reveal About Her Values and Beliefs

Valuing Stability Over Risk

- Mama prefers a cautious approach to finances.
- She believes that stability and security come from steady work and honest living rather than speculative business ventures.

Disdain for Materialism

- Her words imply a critique of greed or excessive ambition.
- She wants her family to prioritize moral integrity over monetary success.

Understanding of Social Class and Success

- Mama's perspective is shaped by her experiences as a Black woman in a segregated society.
- She associates success with respectability, community standing, and moral fiber, not just wealth.

Implications of Mama's Statement for the Play's Themes

Class and Socioeconomic Status

- The play explores the struggles of African American families striving for upward mobility.
- Mama's view highlights the tension between dreams of prosperity and the realities of their economic situation.

The American Dream

- Mama's cautious stance contrasts with Walter Lee's desire to invest and get rich quickly.
- It raises questions about the true meaning of success and fulfillment.

Family and Morality

- The statement underscores the importance of family unity and moral integrity over financial pursuits.
- Mama's perspective suggests that true wealth lies in love, respect, and dignity.

Analyzing the Impact of Mama's Words on Other Characters

On Ruth

- Ruth is often torn between her own ambitions and Mama's traditional values.
- Mama's words reinforce Ruth's internal conflicts about their financial decisions and lifestyle.

On Walter Lee

- Walter dreams of business success as a way to prove his worth.
- Mama's statement challenges his aspirations, emphasizing the need for caution and morality.

On Beneatha

- Beneatha's pursuit of education and identity is somewhat independent of Mama's views on money.
- However, Mama's emphasis on morality influences Beneatha's own values.

Conclusion: The Significance of Mama's Statement in The Play

Mama's declaration that "We ain't no business people, Ruth" is not merely a statement about financial activity; it encapsulates her worldview, values, and hopes for her family. It reflects her desire for stability, her skepticism of materialism, and her understanding of what constitutes true success. These beliefs shape her interactions with other characters and influence the family's decisions regarding their future.

By analyzing this statement, readers gain deeper insight into Mama's character and the play's central themes—particularly the tension between dreams and reality, morality and materialism, and individual aspirations within societal constraints. It reminds us that success is not solely measured by wealth but by integrity, love, and dignity—values that Mama holds dear and seeks for her family.

SEO Keywords and Phrases for Optimization

- Raisin In The Sun study questions
- What does Mama mean in Raisin In The Sun
- Raisin In The Sun Mama quotes
- Themes in Raisin In The Sun
- Mama's values in Raisin In The Sun
- Raisin In The Sun analysis questions
- Lorraine Hansberry Raisin In The Sun
- Family and success in Raisin In The Sun
- African American family struggles
- Socioeconomic themes in Raisin In The Sun

Final Thoughts

Understanding Mama's statement in *A Raisin in the Sun* enriches our comprehension of the play's themes and characters. It highlights her traditional values and her cautious approach to money and success, which contrast with other characters' ambitions. Recognizing the context and deeper meanings of her words allows readers and students to appreciate the nuanced social commentary Hansberry offers on race, class, and the American Dream. Whether for academic study or personal reflection, exploring this moment offers valuable insights into the enduring relevance of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does Mama mean when she says "We ain't no business people, Ruth" in 'A Raisin in the Sun'?

Mama is expressing that they are not naturally business-minded or entrepreneurial; she believes their strengths lie in family and moral values rather than in business pursuits.

How does Mama's statement reflect her view on financial success and priorities?

Mama's comment indicates that she values family integrity and moral principles over material wealth or business ventures, emphasizing that their focus should be on family rather than business ambitions.

What does this quote reveal about Mama's attitude toward business and entrepreneurship?

It shows that Mama feels they lack the skills or temperament for business and that pursuing such avenues might not align with their identity or values.

How does Mama's remark influence Ruth's perspective on their financial situation?

Ruth may interpret Mama's words as a reminder to stay grounded in their current circumstances and to prioritize family stability over risky business ventures.

In what way does this statement highlight the themes of the play regarding identity and societal roles?

It underscores the idea that their worth and identity are rooted in family and moral integrity rather than in societal expectations of success through business or material gain.

Additional Resources

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In Lorraine Hansberry's groundbreaking play *A Raisin in the Sun*, characters grapple with dreams, identity, and the harsh realities of racial and economic oppression. Among the many poignant moments,

one line stands out for its layered meaning and emotional weight: Mama's assertion to Ruth, "We ain't no business people, Ruth." This statement encapsulates a significant theme in the play—the tension between traditional family values and the harsh economic realities faced by African Americans striving for upward mobility. Understanding what Mama intends with this statement offers deeper insight into her character, her worldview, and the broader social commentary Hansberry weaves into her narrative.

Contextual Background: The Play's Setting and Characters

Before dissecting Mama's statement, it's essential to understand the context within which it occurs.

- **The Younger Family:** The play centers on the Younger family, living in a cramped Chicago apartment. Ruth, Mama (Lena Younger), her son Walter Lee, and Beneatha are navigating dreams of a better life amidst economic hardship and racial discrimination.
- **Mama's Dream:** Mama envisions purchasing a house in a better neighborhood, symbolizing stability, dignity, and a future for her family.
- **Walter's Business Aspirations:** Walter dreams of investing in a liquor store to elevate the family's financial status but faces skepticism and internal conflict about economic pursuits.

In this environment, Mama's words take on a layered significance, reflecting her values, her understanding of her place in society, and her perceptions of what constitutes success.

Interpreting Mama's Statement: "We Ain't No Business People, Ruth"

When Mama tells Ruth, "We ain't no business people," she is expressing a conscious acknowledgment of her family's limited experience and comfort with the world of commerce and enterprise. This phrase can be unpacked on several levels:

1. A Humble Reflection of Economic Reality

Mama recognizes that her family's strengths lie not in entrepreneurship but in labor, caregiving, and maintaining their household. She perceives herself and her family as rooted in traditional, domestic roles rather than the cutthroat world of business.

- **Limited Business Acumen:** Mama's comment indicates her awareness that her family lacks the skills, education, or interest in running a business.
- **A Realistic Self-Assessment:** She is not dismissing ambition but acknowledging her family's current position and abilities.

2. A Cultural and Racial Identity Assertion

During the play's time period, systemic racism limited opportunities for Black Americans in business. Mama's statement may also reflect an internalized understanding of racial barriers, emphasizing that her family's identity is rooted in community and family rather than commerce.

- **Racial Barriers:** She might be implying that, given societal constraints, their focus should be on stability and dignity rather than risky economic ventures.
- **Cultural Values:** Emphasizing kinship, morality, and hard work over material success aligns with her views.

3. A Defense Against Disappointment and Societal Expectations

Mama's words can serve as a protective statement, shielding Ruth and others from unrealistic aspirations that may lead to disillusionment.

- **Managing Expectations:** She might be tempering hopes of quick financial gain, advocating instead for patience and steady effort.
- **Protecting Family Unity:** By downplaying the idea of entrepreneurship, she encourages her family to focus on what they can realistically achieve.

Deeper Themes Embodied in Mama's Words

Mama's phrase encapsulates several overarching themes in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Analyzing these themes provides a broader understanding of her character and the play's social commentary.

1. The Value of Dignity and Moral Integrity Over Material Wealth

Mama's identity is rooted in her moral compass and her desire to preserve her family's dignity.

- **Dignity as Success:** For Mama, owning a home and maintaining family unity are more important than accumulating wealth through business ventures.
- **Rejecting Materialism:** Her words suggest a disdain for the materialistic pursuits that can corrupt morals or lead to greed.

2. The Limitations Imposed by Society and Race

Hansberry's play vividly depicts how systemic racism constrains the economic opportunities for Black families.

- **Barriers to Business Ownership:** Mama's acknowledgment hints at the societal obstacles that prevent her family from becoming business entrepreneurs.
- **Racial Identity and Self-Worth:** Her emphasis on being "not business people" also signifies a recognition of

their societal role, emphasizing community and family rather than economic dominance.

3. The Tension Between Traditional Values and Aspirations for Economic Advancement

Mama's statement underscores a conflict: her focus on family stability versus Walter's desire for wealth and status.

- Traditional vs. Modern: Her words reinforce traditional values, while other characters' aspirations reflect a modern pursuit of material success.
- Balancing Dreams with Reality: Mama's realism acts as a grounding point amidst the family's varied ambitions.

The Significance of Mama's Statement in the Play's Narrative

Mama's declaration is more than just a reflection of her personal beliefs; it is a pivotal moment that influences the play's trajectory.

1. Establishing Character and Values

Her words reveal her worldview—one rooted in family, faith, and moral integrity, rather than business or wealth.

- Mama's Identity: She sees herself as a caretaker and moral compass for her family.
- Guiding Principles: Her declaration emphasizes humility and the importance of community over material success.

2. Foreshadowing Future Events

This statement also foreshadows the conflicts and resolutions that follow.

- Walter's Business Venture: Despite Mama's skepticism, Walter pursues his dreams, leading to tension.
- The Role of Wealth: The play explores whether material success is compatible with moral integrity, a debate rooted in Mama's initial stance.

3. Highlighting the Play's Central Themes

Mama's words encapsulate the broader themes of racial identity, economic hardship, and the pursuit of the American Dream.

- Resilience and Pride: Despite societal limitations, Mama's dignity and pride remain central.
- Family Unity: Her perspective helps keep the family united amidst differing aspirations.

The Broader Social and Cultural Implications

Understanding Mama's statement also invites reflection on the broader societal context of the 1950s, when *A Raisin in the Sun* was written and first performed.

1. Historical Context

- Post-War America: The play is set during a time of economic growth but also persistent racial discrimination.
- Black Economic Empowerment: The narrative challenges stereotypes and explores the limits of Black economic mobility.

2. Contemporary Relevance

Today, Mama's words resonate in ongoing discussions about economic justice, racial equality, and cultural identity.

- Economic Barriers: Many Black families still face systemic obstacles to entrepreneurship.
- Cultural Pride: The emphasis on community and dignity remains vital.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Mama's Words

Mama's declaration, "We ain't no business people, Ruth," is a microcosm of her worldview—grounded in humility, morality, and a realistic appraisal of societal limitations. It highlights her prioritization of family, dignity, and community over material wealth or entrepreneurial pursuits. Through this statement, Hansberry masterfully captures the complex interplay between individual dreams and societal realities, a tension that continues to resonate today.

By understanding the depth behind Mama's words, readers and viewers gain a richer appreciation of her character and the enduring themes of *A Raisin in the Sun*. It reminds us that success isn't solely measured by economic achievements but also by integrity, resilience, and the strength of family bonds—a message as relevant now as it was in the play's era.

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