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1987 Volume II: Epic, Romance and the American Dream

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## **The Oxcart and A Raisin in the Sun: Romanticism, Realism, or Idealism**

Curriculum Unit 87.02.12  
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In our culture, with its variety of religions, value systems, political ideology, and life styles, people are confronted with many confusing choices. What should they commit themselves to? Our professionals are committed to the principle that we all need some type of guidance system.

Where am I going? What should I strive to become? What is the meaning of life? Especially our own individual lives. Too many people are concerned with lifestyles rather than substance. The human predisposition is to accept things as one finds them. New suggestions are not always accepted. Hopefully, this unit will help young people to develop a life statement of their own.

Through group and individual exercises students will be given an opportunity to see what values are important to them. This unit will cover a six to eight week period. It will be geared toward average, below average, and remedial students in grades six through eight. The objectives for the students are:

1. To understand the structure of plays
2. To determine the importance of values
3. To set guidelines for moral values
4. To understand symbols
5. To distinguish between fact and opinion
6. To differentiate between romanticism, idealism, and realism
7. To develop an individual philosophy of life and express it

## ACTIVITIES

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Read The Oxcart in its entirety  
Read at least one scene from A Raisin in the Sun  
Critique the video of A Raisin in the Sun  
Participate in oral discussions  
Complete vocabulary studies  
Complete Self Ranking evaluation  
Compare Rankings with others  
Given a list of argumentative statements, the students will identify strengths and weaknesses  
Construct individual guidelines  
Distinguish between statements that are provable and those that are not (Fact and Opinion)  
Creative Writing

## DEVELOPMENT OF MORALS AND VALUES

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Morals and values are developed. Children acquire ideas about right and wrong at different ages. Kohlberg (1963) has investigated such development, describing three levels of moral thought. The levels and stages are described in the table provided in this unit. These stages have been identified from verbal responses of children and adults to moral dilemmas presented to them. One such dilemma is: Should a civil defense worker leave his post to help his family, which may have been injured in a disaster, or should he stay where he is and help others? Responses to such a dilemma could be based on beliefs that:

Stage 1. The worker should stay, or he'll be punished by the authorities.

Stage 2. He should go to his family because he'll worry himself to death if he doesn't find out what happened to them.

Stage 3. He should go because good husbands care about their families.

Stage 4. He should stay because the rules say he should not leave his post.

Stage 5. He probably should stay since he agreed to man such a position in an emergency, but if some special circumstances came up, he might justify his leaving.

Stage 6. He should stay because if he left he would be putting the safety of a few over the many, and that's not right; the people near him who are in trouble are someone's family also, and he is ethically bound to take care of them. If he didn't, he would probably feel miserable the rest of his life. <sup>1</sup>

Children of various ages show various levels of moral thought. The rate of development through the stages can be increased through experiences. The stage at which the child is functioning sets limits on what he can comprehend. Studies have demonstrated that the sequence of moral development cannot be altered. Children never revert to a stage through which they have passed. <sup>2</sup>

Moral development is a process of growth based upon interaction with the environment, Educators and behavioral scientists are working on the problems of improving moral development in a technologically mature and rapidly changing society. Teachers will do well to remember that when moral concerns are an issue, a student can profit from exposure to belief at one stage above his own. Presenting moral beliefs at high levels of abstraction and complexity will probably be ineffective with young children.

Table 19-3. Kohlberg's Definition of Stages of Moral Development (Source: Adapted from Tuiel (1973, pp. 733-734)).

*(figure available in print form)*

## **SYMBOLS**

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Slowly children learn to react to symbols, By age seven a child can symbolically transform the contents of his mind. This happened through experience with the world.

Children ages 11-14 are usually capable of logical thinking with abstractions. Thinking of the hypothetical-deductive type is possible. He can draw conclusions, offer interpretations, and develop hypotheses.

Many times writers do not say exactly what they mean. Rather, they approach a subject in an indirect manner by using symbols and/or parables to stimulate readers to draw their own conclusions. To reflect on a character in an abstract manner can prompt a child to see the significance of that character.

## ABOUT PLAYS

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A play usually has one major plot. This is sometimes complicated by several minor plots. The plot is often recognized early or it may slowly untold.

The personal character traits are usually brought out early. This helps to keep each character distinct especially the main character. If a man flies into a temper when a servant makes a slight error, or keeps interrupting the conversation of other people, or is offensively boastly your audience will realize at once the sort of person he is.

Dialogue must be unusually clear and precise, It should correspond to the character; children don't talk like adults or a policeman like a school teacher.

I have chosen two plays, *THE OXCART* by Rene Marques and *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* by Lorraine Hansberry. I chose plays above epic novels because it is much easier to individualize characters in plays, especially for students who are slow or remedial learners. The elementary student as well as the junior high student enjoy dramatizations. To grasp the indepth understanding of a character becomes real. These two plays will not only give students a stimulating reading experience but an opportunity to draw their own conclusions and make decisions.

The families in these plays, although of two different cultures, feel that the ability to alleviate some of the difficulties they are experiencing was dependent on change, change they themselves could make. Just how realistic was this dream? To find reasonable happiness is what every human being wants. Does the romantic who functions on imagination and emotions have a chance to succeed? Or does the realist have the advantage, the one who has the disposition to see situations or difficulties in the light of facts and deal with them practically? Is the representation in literature and art as they are in life? This may or may not be. The idealist has the ability to see things as they should be rather than as they are.

Could this brighten our hope for the future? To believe that the family will one day come together as a loving unit and everyone doing their part will inevitably happen, is hope.

The knowledge and feeling that there is a way out of difficulty, that things can work out, that one can somehow handle and manage internal and eternal reality is hope, ones sense of the possible. "Hope always transcends the present moment. Hope looks to the next step, whatever form the step may take." <sup>3</sup> Hope is then energized by belief in the possibility of getting somewhere or reaching goals. Steadier and more mature hope that is less subject to rise and fall develops as life moves on. Now it becomes possible to act on hope in an emergency and there is one last deep resource. This is a special gift.

## THE OXCART

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The family in *THE OXCART* encounter many problems but a glimmer of hope is always evident. The love they have for each other is seen in the high hopes they have for each other.

The eldest son, Luis, decides to move the family to San Juan after hurricanes destroy most of their farm and all but three acres is taken over by the government. In San Juan he hopes to work in a factory and support the

family. Unfortunately things do not work out and they ended up in a small shack with no land.

Now Luis experiences a great deal of guilt and inadequacy. He feels responsible for the unhappiness of the family and decides that a move to America will solve their problems totally. Luis has not lost hope and believes that a new life in a new place with new opportunities is the next step they need to take.

Luis is the dominant figure. In this culture the eldest male usually is. Although the grandfather, Dr. Chago, is a symbol of strength and traditional values, does not leave the home land. He loves his family but Puerto Rico is a part of him. It is Luis who makes all final decisions.

Da Gabriela loves her children very much. Luis has her support as most men in this culture would be supported by the women. She never lets him know how unhappy she is but reminds him that he is doing the best he can for the family.

Hope for a better future lies ahead in the children. There is hope that Luis does not lose his zealous spirit. The family has hopes of Chaquito, the youngest son, becoming educated. It is hoped that Juanita will find a good husband, which is an accomplishment in that culture.

The play comes to a fatal end for Luis. He has been working long hours in a factory to maintain the needs of the family, and is killed in an accident while working. Because of this Juanita decides to return to Puerto Rico with Da. Gabriela and begin again in their own land with Chaquito.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Why is the head of the family so important?
2. Why do you think Da. Gabriela raised a child as her own son when he was the son of her husband's mistress?
3. What type of son was Luis to Da. Gabriela? How did he feel about her?
4. How did the family feel about the land (Puerto Rico)?
5. What made the family so close?
6. Why did the family move from Puerto Rico to San Juan and then to New York?
7. Why did Juanita become a prostitute?
8. What dream did Da. Gabriela have for Juanita?
9. Do you feel sorry for Juanita? Why?
10. After so much tragedy, how did Da. Gabriela change?

## ***A RAISIN IN THE SUN (On video)***

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Walter Lee struggles desperately to become head of the family in *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*. At the age of 35 he cannot see any accomplishments in his life. Life for him is just a constant battle. He has been married to Ruth for eleven years. They have a ten year old son, Travis, whom they love very much. The poverty he has tried to overcome is now looking his son in the face. Walter finally has a ray of hope again. He plans to make an investment in a liquor store with two friends.

His mother Lena loves him very much. It is against her better judgment and moral values to invest in a liquor store. She has received ten thousand dollars from her late husband's insurance. This money represents the years of labor her beloved husband had done. An investment of this type is too much of a risk. She plans to put a down payment on a small house with a yard so her family can move out of the two bedroom, rundown, insect infested apartment they now call home. She also dreams of sending her youngest daughter, Beneatha to medical school.

This conflict has affected the entire family. Walter now drinks excessively as his frustrations grow. His dignity and sense of commitment are at stake. Beneatha dates an African trying to find her identity through him. Ruth discovers she is pregnant and struggles with a decision to bring another life into this already unbearable situation. She sees an abortion as a solution but Mama sees it as a rejection of life. She verbalizes her feeling clearly.

Suddenly Walter Lee feels betrayed by his mother. She has put a down payment on a house in an all-white neighborhood. Walter's dreams are butchered. Lena realizes she has not given Walter the opportunity to be the man and head of the family he struggles desperately to become. She is broken by his despair and gives him the remaining \$6500 with instructions to put \$3500 in an account for Beneatha's education and \$3000 to use the way he feels is best for the family. The down payment on a house seems to be the best decision when the family learns that Walter invested the entire \$6500 in his liquor store and is taken by his friend who disappears with the money.

Mama is the only one who finds the strength to forgive him. This love is the saving force that gives Walter Lee strength to make another decision which he hopes will reverse this dilemma. He calls a representative from the white neighborhood who has offered to buy them out. His mother understands his desperation as well as the frustrations of the family to lose the only thing they have left, the house. She puts the future of the family again in his hands. She lets him make the final decision but not without drawing his attention to the ultimate focal point of both Walter and herself. This is Travis, the joy of their life, their hope for a future, and the most precious possession of the family.

It is at this point Walter Lee finds an inner strength. He tells the representative that his family is moving after all. The full leadership role deep within him is born. Walter Lee through careful nurturing and support is the true head of the family.

The Younger family have very little materially which made them feel powerless. They soon realize their strength was in their commitment and love for one another.

This compassionate and touching play gets its title from a poem by Langston Hughes which begins:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up?

Like a raisin in the sun?

Each principal character has a “dream deferred”. Lorraine Hansberry has created a play that is dramatic, moving and so realistic. This is what transform *A Raisin in the Sun* from just another social document to a human drama.

Travel, including just moving to the suburbs, has long been a form of escape as well as adventure for many people. Columbus followed a dream to discover, the Israelites fled Egypt to escape bondage, slaves in America looked for freedom right here in this country, the Spanish searched for greater opportunities and people are still using travel as an escape from something and/or passage to something better. Whether they should, is as individual as one’s tastes buds. To know if escape is good may be impossible until it is done. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist, has said, “There is no exit from the human dilemma. Everyone has a mind and the ability to reason, so the final and decisive step is up to the individual.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What is the importance of Mama’s role in the family?
2. Who should decide what to do with the money?
3. What is the importance of Walter Lee’s responsibility to the family?
4. What affection do the family member have for one another?
5. How do they feel about education?
6. Why is Beneatha interested in Africa?
7. Would Beneatha be happy in Africa with Asagai?
8. Why did Mama give Walter Lee \$6500?
9. When did Walter Lee prove that he is a responsible man and ready to be the head of the family?

## DRAMATIZATION

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It could be very difficult to choose one scene from these highly emotional, action-filled play. The students can be grouped in groups of five or six and assigned a scene to perform in the classroom. This would allow more students to actively participate.

Some scenes to consider from *A Raisin in the Sun* would be the scene in which Walter Lee expresses his dream to be a business man and own a liquor store the scene in which the family discovers Walter Lee has lost the money; the scene in which the representative from Clybourne Park offers to bury their house; or the scene that Beneatha explains Africa to Mama.

Some scenes to consider from the *The Oxcart* would be when Luis decides to move the family to San Juan and work in the factory; when Juanita begs Luis to move them away from San Juan; or when Juanita points out how unhappy Da. Gabriela has become.

## THE BLACK WOMAN

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In recent years the names of Black women have leaped from the front pages of our daily newspapers. Rosa Parks, Daisy Bates, Autherine Lucy, Vivian Malone and Gloria Richardson are but a few, who have at various times, become the focus of heated controversy. In most instances, their claim to front-page coverage followed their defiance of some aspect of institutionalized discrimination or segregation.

In taking a stand, Black women, from earliest days on American soil have troubled the waters. These women possess qualities of courage, determination and leadership which they exhibited before they were seized in Africa and freighted into bondage in the new world, These qualities have endured.

Not even the darkest days of slavery were able to break the spirit of the Black woman. Instead they emerged as the mainstay of the Black race. She is homemaker, teacher, physician, artist, missionary, bread winner (if need be), and social reformer. She has been the inspiration of Black families for many generations.

Black women have often been critized and accused of being domineering to such an extent as to erode the masculinity of Black men. This dominance represents a response to a need. If a woman's husband falls victim to the mob, she must keep the children together, wipe their tears and plan for their healthy growth in a world they may feel nothing but hate for.

## The PUERTO RICAN WOMAN

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Traditionally, obedience and respect for authority especially the head of the family, are part of the Latin American's upbringing. The men work outside of the home while the women care for the home and the children.

Piety, gallantry, respect for parents, and courtesy are carefully cultivated. Courtesy and gallantry are



emphasized in courting a girl in

Latin America. In many places the boy still needs the girl's permission to visit her at her window or the door of her house. If this is granted, he must also secure permission of her parents. When asking for her hand in marriage, his parents or godparents must visit and ask her parents on his behalf. Several visits are required, the last often accompanied by gifts of food and wine.

The girl does not lose her own family name when she marries. If Cecilia Lopez marries Juan Diaz, she becomes Cecilia Lopez de (of) Diaz. Her family name also lives on in her children. Her son Pablo, for example, would be known as Pablo Diaz Lopez.

The status of the woman is improving throughout Latin America. Improvement varies from country to country and class to class. But more women are now engaged in careers in government, science, diplomacy, and business than ever before.

## **COMPARATIVE QUESTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PLAYS**

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1. How are the two families victimized by society?
2. How does poverty affect them?
3. In what ways are the mothers alike in these families?
4. What is the significance of owning a house or a piece of land?
5. What elements keep these families together?
6. What elements seem to pull them apart?
7. How does each individual obtain respect from the family?
8. How does each family feel about education?
9. What does it mean to have a job?
10. How does history affect these two families?

## WRITING

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Pretend you could live anywhere in the world you wanted. Write a composition about this place. It could be a foreign country, a desert island, a large city, a small town, a new neighborhood, or any other place you want. Describe what you would expect it to be like and explain why you would want to live there.

## VOCABULARY MATCH-UP

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- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. dilemma         | A. A deep sense of insecurity and dissatisfaction                                   |
| ___ 2. moral           | B. To consider or rate highly; hold in esteem                                       |
| ___ 3. value           | C. Being worthy, honored, or esteemed   |
| ___ 4. plot            | D. A typical example of a group or class: one that represents another               |
| ___ 5. scene           | E. A concept of right behavior  |
| ___ 6. act             | F. A situation involving choice between equally unsatisfactory alternatives         |
| ___ 7. character       | G. The plan or main story of a literary work  |
| ___ 8. culture         | H. Behavior typical of a group or class   |
| ___ 9. poverty         | I. A division of a play presenting continuous action one ___ place                  |
| ___ 10. investment     | J. Lack of money or material possessions  |
| ___ 11. representative | K. The state of being obligated   |
| ___ 12. decision       | L. One of the subdivisions of a play as a division of an act.                       |
| ___ 13. frustration    | M. The act or process of deciding   |
| ___ 14. commitment     | N. One of the persons of a drama: The personality or part which an actor re-creates |
| ___ 15. dignity        | O. The outlay of money for income or profit   |
| ___ 16. props          |   |

## Name Search

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Fill in the blanks with the correct name of the character and then circle the name in the puzzle.

S O T W C C N G O C E J U A C

G M Q H M E O O H L U V M U A

E M U I L S T A W B A D N O P

N B D Y U L Q F W A L T E R S

S C P R M U L R C J H A I V O

A T E U I S E B E A E A T H A

I P S T H M H S C T I C X A O

LGOHLAKXVRHSJGX  
CAGJCVLZMDPMETJ  
JITOQRXUAVQTRPA  
QKPVCKAGIIMELOG  
LMIRSOSVKSPCVIQ  
OKVMHIRCCIAOMVT  
HDONCHAGOLPSQPL

1. Da. Gabriella is not my real mother. My name is \_\_\_\_ .
2. \_\_\_\_ resorts to prostitution to make extra money.
3. \_\_\_\_ receives ten thousand dollars from her late husband's insurance.
4. The youngest person in the Younger family is \_\_\_\_ .
5. \_\_\_\_ is not wise with the money his mother gave.
6. \_\_\_\_ cannot leave the land of Puerto Rico.
7. \_\_\_\_ wants to become a doctor.
8. Washing and ironing all day is what \_\_\_\_ does to help support the family.
9. \_\_\_\_ resorts to stealing and is arrested in San Juan.
10. \_\_\_\_ never lets on how unhappy she is.

## **RANKING EVALUATION**

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1. The class should break into groups of four to six students.
2. Working individually, within each group, each student should rank the values listed, assigning the number (1) to the value considered most important, the number (2) to the second most important value, and so on, until all the values have been ranked.

3. Each student will compare his ranking with others in the group, giving the reason for his ranking.

## **VALUES TO BE RANKED**

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Material comfort

Inner peace

Commitment to a cause

An adventurous lifestyle

Friendship

Self respect

Courage

Popularity or fame

Freedom

Service to others

Love

## **CHARACTERS AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT**

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1. Who symbolizes the greatest hope in each play?
2. What specific values can you identify and associate with each character?
3. Which person do you identify most closely with?
4. Which do you identify least closely with?
5. What character(s) represent strength?

A large part of an individual's life philosophy is determined for him by the values he is taught to believe and practice by parents and teachers.

Divide the class into four groups. Have each group examine one argument. Then decide the strengths and weaknesses of each and make lists of each. The groups will share these lists with the class.

\*More advanced students may be able to construct their own set of guidelines to express their approach to a value structure.

***Argument #1 Children are not old enough or experienced enough or wise enough to choose values for themselves. We are responsible for starting them off on the right track. We have to drill values into children now; later they will learn to value for themselves.***

***Argument #2 It takes too much time to help children figure out their own values. It's faster and simpler to merely show them the best way.***

***Argument # Think of the problems that will develop from wrong choices! Time wasted, unnecessary hurt and pain, and perhaps even irreparable human damage. Besides, how can adults contain themselves when they see children going astray? What, after all, are adults for if they do not point the way to wisdom and righteousness?***

***Argument #4 Look, what can I do? Everyone else tries to give values to children. My children will think I'm crazy if I do otherwise, and certainly other adults will look at me and wonder at my laxness.***

These four arguments are taken from the source: Louis E. Raths, Merrill Harmin and Sidney B. Simon, *Values and Teaching : Working with Values in the Classroom* . (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill books, 1966) pp. 41-42

## **DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN STATEMENTS THAT ARE PROVABLE AND THOSE THAT ARE NOT**

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From various sources of information we are constantly confronted with statements and generalizations about social and moral problems. In order to think clearly about these problems, it is useful if one can make a basic distinction between statements for which evidence can be found and statements which cannot be verified..

In each of the following statements indicate whether you believe it is provable, too controversial to prove to everyone's satisfaction, or unprovable because of the lack of evidence.

Compare and discuss your results with your classmates.

P = Provable C = Controversial U = Unprovable

1. Love of the land affected the family.
2. It is evident that the male is the dominant figure.
3. Dr Gabriella has a great sense of responsibility.
4. The eldest man should always be head of the family.

5. People of the same ethnic background should live in the same neighborhood.
6. Prejudice is learned.

## Notes

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1. N. L. Gage, D.C. Berlier. *Educational Psychology* , (Rand McNally College Publishing Co.) 1975 p. 393.
2. Ibid. pp. 393-394.
- 3 William F. Lynch. *Images of Hope*, (Univ. of Notre Dame Press) p. 33.

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English translation by Charles Pilditch. Contains photographs of an actual production by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 1967.

## Film (video)

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Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin In The Sun*

McCuen, Gary E. *American Justice: Is America A Just Society ?* Minnesota: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1975.

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