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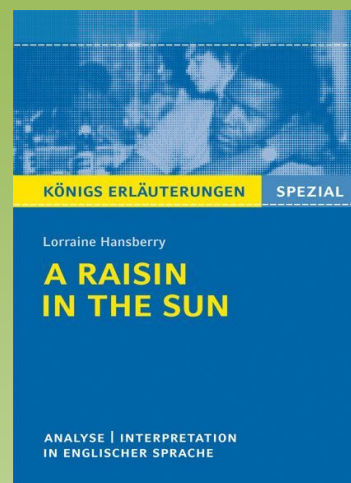
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Auszug aus:

Lorraine Hansberry: A Raisin in the Sun

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1. AT A GLANCE

This study guide to Lorraine Hansberry's drama *A Raisin in the Sun* is designed to provide an easy-to-use overview of the structure, context, themes and characters of the play.

Part 2 takes a brief look at **Lorraine Hansberry and her career**.

- ⇒ p. 9 → Hansberry was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1930. Her parents both worked and were both active in pushing back against racism and discrimination.
- ⇒ p. 26 → *A Raisin in the Sun* was **first performed on stage in 1959**, the first play written by an African-American woman to ever be performed on Broadway, and was an instant success.

Part 3 provides analyses and interpretations of the play.

***A Raisin in the Sun* – Origins and Sources:**

- ⇒ p. 35 Hansberry's play was influenced by her own experiences and her parents' activism, by the Harlem Renaissance and the poet Langston Hughes, and the reality of life for African-Americans living in a big city like Chicago in the 1950s.

Summaries:

- ⇒ p. 44 *A Raisin in the Sun* is about the Younger family – “Mama” Lena, her son Walter, his wife Ruth, and their son Travis, and Lena's other child, her daughter Beneatha. They share an apartment in a poor district in Chicago. The family is about to receive a \$10,000 pay-out from Mama's dead husband's life insurance, and the money causes trouble. Walter wants to invest in a liquor store with a shady friend, Willie Harris: Ruth and Mama want to invest in a nice house in a

better part of town. A representative of the white residents of the area the Younger family wishes to move to tries to buy them off, not wanting black families to move into their neighbourhood. When the cheque arrives, Mama allows Walter to look after the majority of the money to help him fight off depression and a sense of being a failure. But he loses all of the money she gives him when Willie steals it. Luckily, Mama has saved the rest and made a down payment on the house in Clybourne Park. The family gets ready to move, deciding to defy the white residents and fight for their unity and happiness.

Structure:

Raisin is a three-act play. The dramatic structure follows the classic development of build-up, climax and resolution. ⇨ p. 59

Characters:

The play is about the Younger family and a few important characters around them.

- **“Mama” Lena Younger** is a widow. She is a strong, caring, loving figure who holds the family together. ⇨ p. 66
- **Ruth Younger** is a weary, prematurely aged housewife. She works non-stop and is showing signs of breaking under the pressure of her work, her difficult husband, and the fact that she is pregnant. ⇨ p. 69
- **Walter Lee Younger** is a bitter and frustrated young man in his 30s. He is intense and his sister describes him as an “elaborate neurotic”. ⇨ p. 70
- **Beneatha Younger** is Walter’s sister. She is an educated, interesting woman who is determined to explore her potential and express herself. ⇨ p. 72

- ⇒ p. 73 → **Travis Willard Younger** is the 10-year old son of Ruth and Walter. He is a lively, charming boy.
- ⇒ p. 74 → **Joseph Asagai** is a sophisticated Nigerian student who is friends with Beneatha. He has a strong influence on her interest in Africa and her African heritage.
- ⇒ p. 74 → **George Murchison** is a wealthy, middle-class young black man who is courting Beneatha. She finds him shallow.
- ⇒ p. 75 → **Karl Lindner** is the representative of the white residents' association of Clybourne Park. He has been sent to the Younger family to persuade them not to buy the house there: the residents don't want black people living there.

⇒ p. 75 **Other characters** like Bobo, Mrs. Johnson or Willie Harris.

Themes:

- ⇒ p. 80 The major themes we will look at in this study guide are racial identity (including white-black racism and African/African-American issues): family relationships and gender equality; social issues like poverty and ghettos; and the important theme of dreams, faith and hope.

Style and Language:

- ⇒ p. 94 We have to deal with two distinct categories of language: the stage directions and the lines.

Interpretation:

- ⇒ p. 99 We will look at the film in this chapter and at the continuing story of the Younger family by other authors.

2.1 Biography

2. LORRAINE HANSBERRY: LIFE & WORKS

2.1 Biography

YEAR	PLACE	EVENT	AGE
1930	Chicago, Illinois (USA)	On May 19th Lorraine was born. Her parents were Carl (a real estate broker) and Nannie (a local activist). Lorraine was the youngest of four children.	
1938	Chicago	Carl Hansberry bought a house in the Washington Park Subdivisions area on Chicago's South Side. The mostly white neighbours tried to legally force the Hansberry family out of their house. Carl Hansberry took the case all the way to the US Supreme Court, where he won the right to live there with his family (see <i>Hansberry v. Lee</i> , p. 36).	8
1946	Chicago	March 17: Carl Hansberry died in Mexico. He was there looking for a new home for his family. He had wanted to remove them from the pervasive racism in the USA.	15
1948	Chicago/Wisconsin	Lorraine graduated from high school, and went on to study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She worked on the presidential campaign of the Progressive Party candidate Henry A. Wallace.	18
1949	Guadalajara, Mexico	Summer: Lorraine studied painting at the University of Guadalajara.	19
1950–1953	New York	Lorraine moved to New York to become a writer. She moved to Harlem and became politically active: She worked at the <i>Freedom</i> newspaper and met Black Pan-Africanists. ¹	20–21



Lorraine Hansberry
(1930–1965)
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¹ Lorraine's environment, work and acquaintances in New York are discussed more fully in the chapter on Contemporary Background in this study guide, see p.12.

2.1 Biography

YEAR	PLACE	EVENT	AGE
1953	Chicago	June 20: Lorraine marries the Jewish songwriter and activist Robert Nemiroff. Nemiroff was earning good money and Lorraine was able to focus on writing full time. It was around this time that Lorraine began working on <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>.	22
	New York		
1957	New York	Lorraine published two letters to the house magazine of <i>The Daughters of Bilitis</i> , a lesbian activist group. This and other circumstantial evidence has led many students of Hansberry's life to conclude that she was secretly lesbian: whatever the truth may have been, she was a vocal campaigner against homophobia and for civil rights for gays and lesbians. Around this time she also separated from her husband.	27
1959–60	New York	March 11: <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> is performed for the first time on Broadway in the <i>Ethel Barrymore Theater</i>. This first production later moved to the <i>Belasco Theater</i> where it continued to run until June 1960, after 530 performances. <i>New York Drama Critics' Circle</i> named it the best play of 1959.	29–30
1961	USA	The film version of <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> is released. Lorraine also wrote the screenplay. For more about the film, see the chapter on interpretations in this study guide (p. 100).	31
1964	New York	Lorraine divorced from her husband, but they remained close. In this year she was also diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.	34
1965	New York	January 12: Lorraine Hansberry died of cancer. She was buried on January 15 in Croton-on-Harlem, New York.	34



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