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Honors Literature

Academic 4

Character Analysis: Beneatha

In an era where the average African- American family was notshowcased a pioneering play, *A Raisin in the Sun,* by Lorraine Hansberry, paved the way to show an authentic story of the struggles faced by the African-American society. The play is set in 1959 in Chicago. Early in the story we learn that the family is about to receive a substantial amount of money because of the death of their father/husband. Each family member has his or her own ideas on what should be done with the money. They all dream of the possibilities but live the struggle of fulfilling them. When rubber meets the road and hits unexpected bumps the true motives and character of the family comes out. Beneatha’s character is extremely important for understanding the conflicts both externally and internally in the family. Beneatha is very opinionated, has lots of sass, and can be short tempered, but also has a strong sense of culture. The fiery passion displayed in her gives us a perspective contrary to the others, one that’s honest and bold.

Beneatha is the type of girl who has confidence among even the toughest of times, but isn’t quite she of what she wants. Nevertheless she is very opinionated. She stays on edge for almost the entire play and is quick to dish out her two sense, whatever the topic may be. She questions those who defy her and uses her tongue as a double edge sword. Often she doesn’t realize the power behind her words and impact they have until after she spews them out. “I mean it! I’m just tired of hearing about God all the time. What does He got to do with anything? Does He pay tuition? (50).” Here Beneatha not only upsets her mother but also offends her. This type of opinionated forcefulness from her is seen many times. “Independence and then what? What about the crooks and thieves and just plain idiots who will come into power and steal and plunder the same as before- only now they will be black and do it the name in Independence- WHAT ABOUT THEM?! (133).” Again Beneatha gives a passionate but harsh response to a question from a man who cares about her. Her opinions always seem to spill out. “Oh Mama- The Murchisons are honest-to-God-real-*live*-rich colored people, and the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people are rich colored people. I thought everybody knew that. I’ve met Mrs. Murchison. She’s a scene! (49). “ Beneatha displays a lot of ‘sass’ and never holds back. She speaks her mind more than she bites her tongue.

Beneatha has loads of individuality. She prides herself in her cultural roots and is the most culturally centered of the family. She doesn’t care much about what other people think as long as she can state what she’s thinking. Her cultural roots are extremely important to her, so much so that she lets it start to tear apart a relationship. After taking a bold step by cutting her hair she makes a judgmental statement to George, a man who is about to take her out. “That’s up to George. If he’s ashamed of his heritage. (80).” Beneatha knows how to use her words to spike up a reaction. After being introduced more personally to African culture and dress, by another character Asagai, Beneatha has an outburst of cultural behavior. “You are looking at a what a well dressed Nigerian woman wears- Isn’t it beautiful. Enough of this assimilationist junk! OCOMOGOSIAY! (76).” This way of expressing herself is a way she can escape reality. Her opinionated personality and cultural niche mix heavily when politics are bought up. After declaring how much she hates assimilationist Negros she elaborates so the rest of the family understands. “It means someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case *oppressive* culture! (81).” She shows that she cares more about her past than the present in this scene but rings true for more than just her character.

Beneatha not only creates a lot of conflict, but also is conflicted herself, bringing out her short temper. Between her family, romance, and school she isn’t sure of what direction she is headed or how to get there. The inconsistency of her life brings out the temper and moodiness of her strong personality. Beneatha uses dry humor and sarcasm frequently. “This friends is the welcoming committee. (118).” Her comment is aimed as a low blow to a man trying to peacefully make arrangements with the family. Her mood changes often and is very unpredictable. “What do you what from me brother- that I quit school or just drop dead, which! (37).” Beneatha is demanding and went straight from a peaceful disagreement to a blown out feud with her brother. There are other times where she demands quite the opposite. “Too many things have happened today. I must sit down and think. I don’t know what I feel about anything right this minute. (137).” She is like a bomb waiting to explode, with no timer or pattern.

Beneatha is rich with opinion. She can spit words fast but isn’t considerate of those who hear her. Her culturally centered mind pushes her to not let other people’s words define her and to be her own person. She is confident but lost in the struggles of life. Her statements while brutal ring true in the conflict the family has. Beneatha’s short temperedness is hard to predict and her moody responses are frequent throughout the play. She knows how to pick a fight and doesn’t like to be overpowered. In the midst of her blunt opinions, Beneatha is a character that voices the turmoil she is in, even when her words are used as a disguise. She learns to accept the things she can’t control but stays true to herself. Beneatha’s voice is powerful and her words are sharp, cutting deep with meaning and passion.