



A Raisin in the Sun (1959) Possible Claims and Counter-Claims

The debatable issue for this argument-centered project is:

On balance, *A Raisin in the Sun* expresses a more optimistic than pessimistic view of the world.

These are possible argumentative claims and counter-claims, supporting and opposing the two overall positions on this debatable issue. They are aligned with the Selected Passages, though they are by no means exhaustive and students are encouraged to add to this list with their own ideas and formulations.

Position: On balance, *A Raisin in the Sun* expresses a more optimistic than pessimistic view of the world.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, family bonds and affection are depicted as more powerful than the forces at loose in the world outside the home.

Family bonds may be powerful but they cannot overcome the forces of discrimination and disappointment outside the home that undermine the characters' chance at happiness.

In the end, the Youngers are able to own their own home, the play's symbol for fortitude and endurance.

What damages the power of the symbol of home ownership, however, is the ominous presence of racism in Clybourne Park, the neighborhood to which the Youngers are moving.

The narrative arc in the play travels from darkness and negative emotions to lightness and positive emotions.

The play's ending is upbeat, but it's a false note of hope: the sources of the negative emotions earlier in the play have not been removed or solved in the play's third act.

The play is centrally about Walter becoming a man, in the fully ethical and estimable sense of the term.

Walter is a character that can go through ups and downs, and simply because he is experiencing a wave of good feeling at the end of the play does not mean that we are supposed to believe it will be permanent.

The major characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* are able to learn from experience and grow and develop as loving, caring human beings.

The major characters in the play really don't change much; the insurance money is really more responsible for the changes they experience.

A Raisin in the Sun is a play filled with compassion and sympathy for those are suffering, which accounts for its uplifting quality.

While the play does express and endorse compassion, it also acknowledges that compassion is not enough to overcome social forces of oppression.

Position: On balance, *A Raisin in the Sun* expresses a more pessimistic than optimistic view of the world.

Regardless of the family dynamic, the lead characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* are being beaten down by the world around them.

The play certainly acknowledges the existence of racism, but it portrays the power of loving family relationships to ward off its damaging effects.

Walter can never get the support from his wife and family that he needs to be successful and thereby fully a man.

To the contrary, his wife and family do ultimately come to support Walter in the way that he needs.

Walter's dream is crushed in *A Raisin in the Sun*, which means he can never truly be happy or fulfilled.

Walter's dream is transmuted in the play from one with materialistic and self-directed values to one that is more principled and relationship-based.

Women in the novel are seen suffering under an oppressive and inescapable sexism.



Actually, the play is more feminist than sexist, with the lead female characters emerging as morally and emotionally powerful and independent figures.

Racism is shown to be inescapable in America; black people will always suffer from unequal treatment.

Racism may be endemic, but the play shows how African-Americans can successfully struggle to either blunt its effects or overcome it.

The most disturbing view propounded in the play is that the malice in people goes deeper than race or class and, rather, lurks within the human heart.

Of course there will always be evil in the world, but the play is essentially a story of the triumph of love and endurance over hate and despair.