

trinity repertory company



By Bruce Norris

Directed by Brian Mertes

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THEATER AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE AND DISCUSSION

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND GO OVER WITH YOUR CLASSES BEFORE
THE SHOW

TEACHERS:

Speaking to your students about theater etiquette is ESSENTIAL. Students should be aware that this is a live performance and that they should not talk during the show. **If you do nothing else to prepare your students to see the play, please take some time to talk to them about theater etiquette** in an effort to help the students better appreciate their experience. It will enhance their enjoyment of the show and allow other audience members to enjoy the experience. The questions below can help guide the discussions. Thank you for your help and enjoy the show!

ETIQUETTE:

What is the **role of the audience in a live performance**? How is it different from seeing a film? Why can't you chew gum or eat popcorn at a live theater performance? Why can't you talk? What can happen in live theater that cannot happen in cinema?

Reiterate that students may not chew gum, eat, or talk during the performance. Please make sure all cell phones and pagers are turned off. Recording devices and cameras are strictly prohibited. If there is a disturbance, they will be asked to leave and the class will not be invited back to the theater. Students may not leave the building during intermission.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW AT TRINITY REP:

What are the **differences between live theater and cinema**? (Two dimensional vs. three dimensional; larger than life on the screen vs. life-size; recorded vs. live, etc.) Discuss the nature of film as mass-produced, versus the one-time only nature of live performances. Talk about original art works versus posters. Which do they feel is more valuable? Why?

Observation #1 – When you get into the theater, look around. What do you see? Observe the lighting instruments around the room and on the ceiling. Look at the set. Does it look realistic or abstract? Try to guess how the set will be used during the show.

Observation #2 -- Discuss the elements that go into producing a live performance: The lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the “behind the scenes” elements of the theater are working backstage as the play unfolds before the students’ eyes. Tell them to be aware of this as they watch the show. Observe the lighting cues. How do special effects work? How do the actors change costumes so fast?

Actors in a live performance are very attuned to the audience and are interested in the students’ reactions to the play. Ask the students to write letters to the actors about the characters they played and to ask questions of the actors. **Send these letters to:** Trinity Repertory Company, c/o Education, 201 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903 **or email to:** education@trinityrep.com.

USING THIS STUDY GUIDE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

A Letter from Education Director Caroline Azano

Welcome to Trinity Rep and the 44th season of Project Discovery! The Education Staff at Trinity had a lot of fun preparing this study guide, and hope that the activities included will help you incorporate the play into your academic study. It is also structured to help you to introduce performance into your classroom through the following elements:

- **Community Building in Your Classroom**
- **Inspiration and Background on the Artist**
- **Entering and Comprehending Text**
- **Creating Text for Performance**
- **Performing in Your Class**
- **Reflecting on Your Performance**

Further, the Rhode Island Department of Education has recently developed Grade Span Expectations for the fine arts in content, knowledge and skills that will be used to assess all students. (Available at <http://www.ride.ri.gov/instruction/gle.aspx>) Trinity Rep's Project Discovery student matinees help high school students in the following GSE areas:

- Analyzing and evaluating a theatrical performance for its effective use of music, dance, or visual arts (T1-3b)
- Evaluating major and minor themes and characters and their symbolic representation (i.e., cultural references) (T3-2a)
- Evaluating techniques for their effectiveness and craft (e.g., critiquing actor's performance and the playwright's dialog) (T3-2b)
- Evaluating a play or performances based on analysis of what is seen, heard, and known to judge its value and contribution to humanity (T4-1a)
- Evaluating character's objectives and motivations based on what is seen, heard, and known to explain character's behavior (T4-1b)
- Evaluating technical elements of theatrical production (T4-1c)
- Evaluating dramatic elements of a plot for their effectiveness and cohesiveness (T4-1d)

Enjoy the show!



Unit One: Background Information

Bruce Norris, the Playwright



Bruce Norris is a contemporary American playwright who is becoming known for his critically-acclaimed and unflinching satirical new plays, often targeting the hypocrisy of American middle class society. He is an emerging bad boy type of figure in the media, often called a provocateur and noted for his controversial quotes.

Norris was born in Houston Texas on May 16, 1960, but dropped his accent in junior high because he was “ashamed to be from Texas.” He was the middle child of three and was raised in an Episcopalian household, though he himself was an atheist even at the age of twelve. Norris has said that his mother, who passed away in 1987, “encouraged dissent and subversion at every turn”- a lesson that seems to have stuck. His father, on the other hand, disapproved of his son’s interest in theatre, which began to show in high school.

Nevertheless, after high school, Norris attended Boston University to study scenic design. He later transferred to Northwestern University and, after graduating in 1982 with a Theatre Arts degree, he became an actor. He performed professionally both onstage and on television, including several roles on Broadway and even an appearance as a school teacher with a speech impediment in M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Sixth Sense* in 1996. In 1992, Norris wrote his first play, *The Actor Retires* and has continued writing since. He is often associated with The Steppenwolf Theatre Company, a prominent and Tony Award-winning Chicago theatre company, both as an actor and as a playwright.

He wrote *Clybourne Park* in 2009- a **riff** on Lorraine Hansberry’s 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun*. It premiered at the Playwright’s Horizons in New York in February 2010, and later made its UK premiere at the Royal Court Theatre in London during August of the same year. The play was awarded the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an award for “a distinguished play by an American author, preferably original in its source and dealing with American life.” The jury, in choosing *Clybourne Park*, called it “a powerful work whose memorable characters speak in witty and perceptive ways to America’s sometimes toxic struggle with race and class consciousness.”

Bruce Norris currently lives in Brooklyn Heights, New York City.

What is a riff?

A riff is a term often used to describe a piece that is a distinct variation or new take on an existing plot. Riffs take an infinite number of forms, anything from showing different points of view, to changing the setting or time period of the original piece. The original text is used as a jumping off point for the author to run with on his/her own. For example, *10 Things I Hate About You* could be considered a riff on Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*.

A Conversation with Bruce Norris

Trinity Rep's Artistic director Curt Columbus and playwright Bruce Norris worked together often in Chicago. They spoke (and laughed) by phone in June about Norris' career and his craft.



Curt Columbus, Artistic Director

Curt Columbus: You have been -- I won't say you are -- but you *have been* an actor for much of your career.

Bruce Norris: Uh huh. What about that?

CC: (laughter) Well, was that a constructive part of your development as a writer? [...] Does it influence the way you write plays?

BN: Yes. I mean, I approach writing plays from an actor's point of view, rather than from a literary point of view. That has both pluses and minuses. It means that generally I'm not thinking about the elegance with which I can phrase something, or the poetic dimension of my work. I'm basically looking for things that create uncomfortable or dramatic situations, because that's what actors like to do.

CC: I think that's what's extraordinary for audiences experiencing your plays, the additive effect of them, rather than line-by-line... people experience them as comedies and dramas simultaneously. That's not something you can say about a lot of writers, and I would tie that directly to your being an actor. [...] So are your plays comedies or dramas?

BN: I think that same question could be put to a lot of plays. I don't know. I'm not thinking that way when I sit down to write a play, except that I frequently think "What's something that we're not supposed to laugh about, and why do I find that funny?"

CC: [...]Your work is often simultaneously very political and very human. Do you think of yourself as a political writer?

BN: (Sigh.) Well, define your terms! [...] I think I write plays set in a political milieu, or plays that address the ways that people use politics to get what they want.

CC: Of course, your characters are often a lot like the people in the audience.



Bruce Norris in *The Sixth Sense* (1999)

BN: And that means liberal, privileged people. That's who goes to the theaters where I work. [...] The people who go to regional theater, or more importantly, to Off Broadway theaters are, by and large, Democratic, left-leaning, wealthy people. That demographic is incredibly articulate about political and social topics. It does no good to try to present to them people who are Stanley Kowalski-like, inarticulate and lower class. That provides them with nothing but class tourism,

and they get to look voyeuristically at the animalistic behavior of what they consider a lower class.

CC: In that way, I think your plays often move an audience to action or at least to contemplation of who they are, more than most contemporary plays.

BN: Contemplation is good. I don't really think theater changes people's behavior. I doubt that anyone goes home and goes through some sort of transcendent reformation from seeing a play. [...] Someone said to me, not long ago, "It seems like all you care about is that people express themselves in a different way." I'd say that's legitimate. If you left *Clybourne Park* and found it harder to talk about your attitudes on race, that would be a good thing.

CC: Race is often a character in your plays... and even when there isn't a nonwhite character, whiteness becomes a character. Why the return to that idea, so often?

BN: Well, I could probably give you a satisfying psychological answer about myself, but I don't want to do that. I'd say that since the majority of people who come to the theaters I work in are white liberal people, so-called progressive people, people who have a utopian fantasy about the effect of their demographic upon the history of mankind, and since I do not share that fantasy, I'd say that I'm trying to do my part to disabuse them of that fantasy. (laughter)

CC: [...] Is there something to the eras of the play, the 1950s and our own?

BN: You mean, is there a reason for setting the two acts fifty years apart? Well, if you set something over a long time period, you're setting up a longitudinal experiment, I guess. I was trying to ask "what has changed and what hasn't changed?" What *has* happened in the intervening 50 years since the end of *A Raisin in the Sun* is that a lot of very admirable laws have been written, and others changed, to take away political barriers that have kept people down for a long time. What has *not* changed, I think, in fifty or two thousand or ten thousand years, is human nature. I think people, by nature, are territorial and self-interested. Conflicts that arise over race, ethnicity, culture, don't arise in the absence of a territorial conflict. In other words, as long as people stay on their side of the fence, there's never a problem, between Hindus and Muslims, Hutus and Tutsis, blacks and whites, and the Jews. (laughter) As long as everyone stays in their area, it's fine. When people start crossing boundaries, you have war.

CC: So just because you remove the legislative barriers, society may not change.

BN: As I said to someone else not long ago, if we're all so good natured, so pure and not racist as individuals, why haven't we voluntarily integrated? We've had plenty of time to move. Why haven't people like me, an educated, left-leaning white person, why haven't I moved up into Spanish Harlem, or Harlem proper? I haven't. I stay here in my white neighborhood. I don't have a justification for that. I don't even have children to use as an excuse, to say "well, I want them to have a better education." I just like the way it feels here. I guess to some extent that makes me a racist. I tend to hang out with people who are like me. Someone asked me the other day how many black friends I have, and I said "basically, none." But then on the other hand, I don't have many friends. (laughter)

TIMELINE: Critical Events in Black History

1863 – Emancipation Proclamation goes into effect.

1896 -- *Plessy v. Ferguson*; the Supreme Court upholds the concept of "separate but equal" public facilities.

1909 – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded.

1918 – Harlem Renaissance begins.

1919 – Race riots across the country, including Chicago.

1940 – Lorraine Hansberry’s father, Carl, wins the legal battle of *Hansberry v. Lee*, in which the Supreme Court prohibits a Chicago group from attempting to prevent African Americans from moving into their neighborhood. Hansberry’s childhood experiences in the “hellishly hostile white neighborhood” will eventually inspire her to write *A Raisin in the Sun*.



1946 – U.S. Supreme Court decision deems bus segregation unconstitutional.

1947 – Jackie Robinson is the first African American to play major league baseball.

1948 – President Harry Truman integrates armed forces by executive order.

1949 – National Housing Act addresses substandard housing for African Americans. Supreme Court declares local enforcement of segregated neighborhoods unconstitutional.

1954 – In *Brown v. Board of Education*, Supreme Court overturns the “separate but equal” doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*

1955 – Rosa Parks arrested in Montgomery, AL, after refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. A bus boycott is organized in response.

1957 – Arkansas governor Orval Faubus refuses to desegregate Little Rock High School, calling in the Arkansas National Guard to keep nine black students from entering the school. President Eisenhower calls in the U.S. Army to protect the “Little Rock Nine,” who are eventually admitted to the school.

1959 – *A Raisin in the Sun* opens on Broadway to critical and popular acclaim. Hansberry wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

1962 – University of Mississippi denies admission to African-American student James Meredith, resulting in contempt charges against Governor Ross Barnett.

1963 – Civil rights march on Washington, D.C.
Medgar Evers assassinated.

1964 – Martin Luther King, Jr. wins Nobel Peace Prize.
Race riots in Harlem.
Hansberry's play *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* opens on Broadway

1965 – Malcolm X assassinated.
Voting Rights Bill passed.
Race riots in Watts, Los Angeles, CA.

1967 – Black Power conference in Newark, NJ.
Race riots in Detroit, Cleveland, and Newark.

1968 – Civil Rights Act of 1968 promises fair treatment in housing.
Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated.

1992 – Riots erupt in Los Angeles and other cities after a jury acquits L.A. police officers in the videotaped beating of Rodney King, an African American.

2008 – Barack Obama becomes the first African American to be elected President of the United States.



TIMELINE ACTIVITY

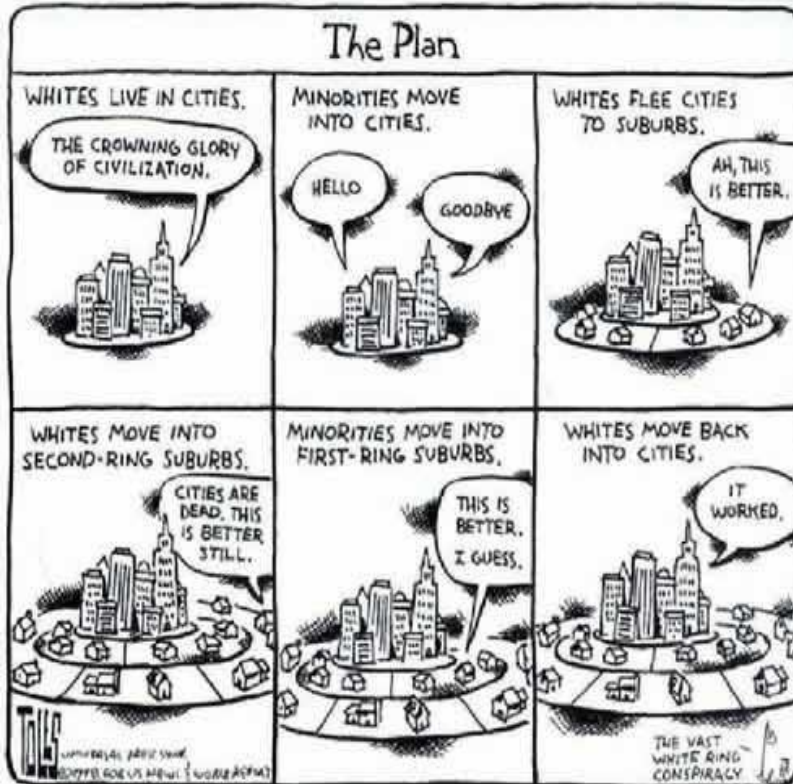
Have your students design a timeline for themselves. What important events have happened during their life time? What do they consider important? Examples can include the invention of the internet and Sept. 11th, 2001. Ask them to explain why they included the events they did. You could post the timelines around the room.

White Flight & Gentrification

. Excerpts from: Matthew Jerzyk's "Gentrification's Third Way: An Analysis of Housing Policy & Gentrification in Providence"

WHITE FLIGHT

The American housing market mirrors the myriad economic, social, and racial problems plaguing the nation. From the eighteenth through the midtwentieth century, government-



sanctioned segregation policies in both the public and private sectors created neighborhoods defined by skin color. The growth of the automobile and the birth of American highways furthered physical divisions and lines of segregation, compounding the advantages of white Americans who had access to capital, land, and credit. In essence, developments in transportation facilitated white flight from the “inner city” to the sprawling expanse of the suburbs. [...]

The abandonment of cities had a disastrous effect on those left behind. With increasing housing demand created by a huge surge of African Americans coming to the North, landlords were able to charge high rents for dilapidated housing units sold after the white

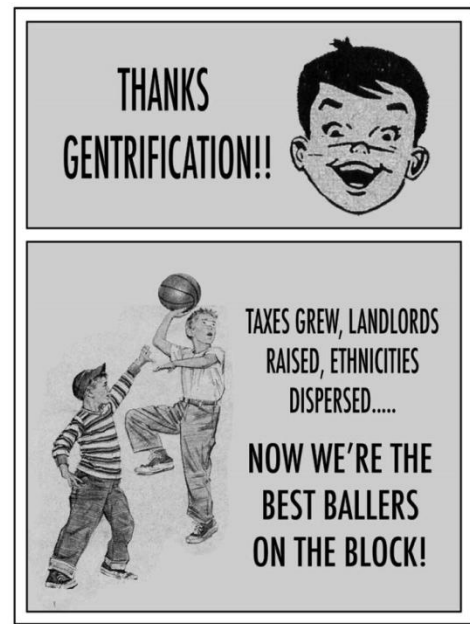
flight to the suburbs. [...] In addition, a lack of urban political strength ensured that new public housing projects were built in poor areas, thus further consolidating impoverished citizens into the centers of American cities. The disappearance of wealth from the cities also impacted the quality of public education, as local school funding is intricately intertwined with property taxes and local housing values. Further, local businesses—already crippled by anti-urban discrimination from banks and insurance companies—fled city neighborhoods and followed consumer wealth to the suburbs, rendering both jobs and products inaccessible to city residents. A bleak cycle developed: local conditions created an environment in which education and good jobs were largely unavailable, and a wall of social and economic isolation prevented residents from improving their living conditions.

GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification—the flip-side of this deterioration—produces an upward trend in property values in previously neglected neighborhoods. Gentrification is a connotation-laden term, “conjur[ing] up images of yuppies stealing urban housing from rightful inhabitants.” It describes the economic, social, and political changes that accompany reinvestment in low-income, urban communities. The process begins when a few “risk-oblivious pioneers”—often political radicals,

artists, and students—move into a neighborhood. While these “pioneers” can usually afford to live in higher-income neighborhoods, they choose not to for various reasons including a desire to seek the bohemian lifestyle of artists and other creative workers. As these residents settle in, the once-neglected neighborhoods become hip, new destinations for young professionals known in the dialogue of gentrification as the “risk-aware” or the “fixer-uppers.” The “fixer-uppers” put sweat equity into their homes and use political connections to make zoning adjustments and win better terms on bank loans. The “risk-aware” develop relationships with the local police quickly and are likely to start or join local neighborhood associations.

Once this group grows to a critical mass, the local media begins talking about the “neighborhood transformation” that is taking place. At this point, businesses tend to move in to serve the “risk averse.” These are residents who wait for social institutions like coffee shops, restaurants, and neighborhood groups to be established and to solidify a cultural safety net before moving in to the “transformed” neighborhood.



WHO GAINS? WHO LOSES?

Supporters of gentrification assert that the process serves to break down the concentrations of poverty that are most responsible for urban problems. They espouse a “trickle-down” theory based in the assumption that a rising tide lifts all boats. “Gentrification rebalances a concentration of poverty by providing the tax base, rub-off work ethic, and political effectiveness of a middle class,” one defender writes, “and in the process improves the quality of life for all of a community’s residents.”

Additionally, supporters of gentrification point out that increasing property values benefit all homeowners in the neighborhood and create political capital and an increased tax base, both of which lead to more effective and accountable city services and city government.

Critics assert that gentrification harms neighborhood residents directly through displacement and indirectly by pricing them out of the market. Because many low-income residents are renters, they find few opportunities to build an equity stake in their housing. A rising demand for housing means higher rents; as low-income residents become unable to pay these higher rents, landlords will increasingly evict them. Additionally, critics identify gentrification not only as a market force, but also as a divisive social force—often along racial and ethnic lines. While the earliest gentrifiers may embrace community diversity, later waves frequently pursue policies that marginalize low-income residents and drive out established communities of color. In other words, the white residents who once fled America’s cities now return to gentrify them, bringing harmful effects.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are Lindsey and Steve “risk-oblivious”, “risk-aware” or “risk averse”?
2. What are the benefits of gentrification? What are the adverse effects? Is there any way for an area to be gentrified without displacing current residents?
3. Are there neighborhoods you know about in your city that have undergone white flight and/or gentrification?

Clybourne Park: The Characters

ACT I – 1959

Russ: White, late 40's. Bev's husband. Throughout the play, Russ is moody with a tendency to lose his temper, and a particular impatience and frustration with social interaction and propriety. He has been deeply affected by his son's suicide two and a half years before the action of the first act. He has become detached and distant towards his friends and neighbors, and even his wife, who expresses concern and frustration about his strange behavior.

Bev: Married to Russ, white, 40's. Bev could be called a typical suburban housewife of the period. Though she seems to have the best intentions, she is naïve, uninformed, and in denial about her son Kenneth's war crimes, as well as the true nature of her own relationship with Francine. She advocates for the Youngers and refers to Francine as her friend, yet she ends up having Albert and Francine stay late to bring down the trunk from upstairs, despite Francine's insistence that she needs to be elsewhere. She also misremembers how many children Francine and Albert have.

Francine: Black, 30's. Married to Albert. Francine is Bev and Russ' maid. She has been with the family for a long time (she was the person who found their son, Kenneth, after he had committed suicide.) While she is polite and competent, she doesn't seem to have the same illusions as Bev about their friendship.

Jim: White, late 20's. Jim is a young minister, and a friend of Bev and Russ. His attempts to help Russ through a personal tragedy miss the mark and are ineffectual, as are his attempts to mediate the discussion between Russ and Karl.

Albert: Married to Francine, black, 30's. Albert is a well-intentioned man who, despite his wife's objections, wants to stay and help Bev by taking the trunk down the stairs and later tries to help and mediate the conflict between Russ and Jim and Karl- an unwelcome intervention.

Karl: White, 30's. Married to Betsy, Karl Lindner is the only character who also appears in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, when he visits the Youngers in an attempt to buy them out and prevent them from moving to Clybourne Park. He is a part of the Community Association and has taken it upon himself to try to solve the "problem" of the Youngers moving into Clybourne Park. He speaks as a man who believes without a doubt that he is right, and never wavers while attempting to reason with everyone else about what he wants.

Betsy: Married to Karl, late 20's. Betsy is eight months pregnant and deaf. She struggles to keep up with the conversation, especially as things become confrontational towards the end of Act I.

ACT II – 2009

Tom: (Played by the actor playing Jim) Lena and Kevin’s lawyer.

Lindsey: (Played by the actor playing Betsy) Married to Steve and pregnant. She is very concerned with being politically correct. She and Steve are buying the house in Clybourne Park. They intend to tear it down and start from scratch, rebuilding the home bigger than it was before.

Kathy: (Played by the actor playing Bev) Steve and Lindsey’s lawyer. Betsy and Karl’s daughter.

Steve: (Played by the actor playing Karl) Married to Lindsey. He is less concerned with being politically correct and is the one to bring all the tension to the surface.

Lena: (Played by the actor playing Francine) Married to Kevin. Her great aunt was one of the Younger’s- one of the first black families to move into Clybourne Park- who lived in the house. She has memories of playing in the house and on the tree in the backyard as a child. She is a strong presence who is not afraid to speak her mind.

Kevin: (Played by the actor playing Albert) Married to Lena. A friendly, easy-going man, though he loses his temper when he hears Steve insulting Lena.

Dan: (Played by the actor playing Russ) A friendly and talkative construction worker on the house. He finds the trunk in the backyard.

Kenneth: (Played by the actor playing Jim, or new actor) Bev and Russ’ son, who we only hear about in the first act. He fought in the Korean War and, when he returned, he was accused of war crimes. He committed suicide in the upstairs of the house in Clybourne Park.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the double casting in *Clybourne Park*? Is there any relationship between the two characters an actor plays in each time period? For example, between Francine and Lena.
2. What are some other through lines between the two acts? Is there other mirroring that occurs? (For example: the line “But you can’t live in a principle,” is spoken in both acts.) What is the significance or meaning of these occurrences?



Russ/Dan



Karl/Steve



Bev/Kathy



Albert/Kevin



Betsy/Lindsey



Francine/Lena



Jim/Tom

Clybourne Park: The Synopsis

The first act of *Clybourne Park* begins on a Saturday afternoon in 1959. Bev and Russ, a white married couple, are preparing to move out of their home in the white middle class neighborhood of Clybourne Park with the help of their maid, Francine. The play opens on Russ eating a tub of ice cream as he and his wife contemplate the names of cities and the people who live in them. They are interrupted by a telephone call from Karl Lindner, a member of the Community Association, and a visit from Jim, the local minister. As Bev is in the kitchen getting iced tea, it is revealed that Jim's visit is partially due to a run in with Bev, when she expressed concern over Russ' erratic behavior. Jim attempts to talk to and comfort Russ about his son's suicide, which happened two and a half years ago, but Russ becomes defensive and insults Jim. When Bev re-enters and realizes what happened, she becomes upset and frustrated with Russ' lack of civility. Albert, Francine's husband, interrupts the heated moment when he arrives to pick up Francine. Bev mentions a trunk that she needs taken down the stairs and, despite Francine's protests, Albert offers to help.

Karl shows up with his wife Betsy, who is deaf and very pregnant. They have just come from Hamilton Park, where Karl was visiting the Youngers- a black family that has bought Bev and Russ' house. Arguments arise about the problems of integrating the neighborhood and fears about the property values falling if a black family were to move in. At one point, the trunk that Francine and Albert are trying to move falls down the stairs, creating a commotion. Before they leave, Francine and Albert, the only black couple in the house, are awkwardly called upon for their insight into the issue. Karl wants Russ to stop the sale to the Youngers and instead sell the house to the Community Association, but Russ refuses. When Karl says he will tell the Youngers why the house is being sold at such a low price (because Karl's son committed suicide on the upper floor of the house a few years prior), Russ loses his temper, declaring that he no longer cares about the community after the way they treated his son when he was accused of war crimes after returning from the Korean War. He begins to read his son's suicide letter, upsetting Bev, and kicks everyone out of the house.

Act Two begins in the same house half a century later, in 2009. Two couples are meeting, along with each of their lawyers. Steve and Lindsey are a white couple who have bought the house in Clybourne Park (which has become a predominantly black neighborhood) and plan to knock it down to build a bigger house and Kathy is their lawyer. Lena and Kevin are a black couple representing the neighborhood organization with their lawyer, Tom. It begins as a discussion of housing regulations and codes for the neighborhood, focusing mainly on the size of the home Steve and Lindsey plan on building. The conversation is generally unproductive and slow moving due to interruptions by ringing cell phones and Dan, a construction worker working in the yard. During these interruptions, the characters make small talk and discuss vacations.

Finally, Lena delivers a small speech about what the neighborhood means to her and its historical value for her community. She reveals that the house used to belong to her Aunt and she spent time there as a child. She also mentions the suicide that took place in the house, which upsets Lindsey. Dan enters with the trunk from Act One, which he found buried in the yard. The discussion between the two couples and their lawyers degenerates into an uncomfortable and heated discussion of racial issues, with resentment from both sides- culminating in a series of offensive racist jokes and ending in blatant insults. The play ends with a flashback between Kenneth (Bev and Russ' son) and Bev, as Dan reads a letter he found in the trunk from the yard.

***Clybourne Park*: Important Themes**

Truth and Justice

In *Clybourne Park*, characters struggle to express themselves truthfully and accurately. They seem to have difficulty finding the balance between sugar-coated diplomacy and brutal (even ugly) honesty. The play asks: What happens when you really tell the truth? How much are you willing to tell the truth to yourself and someone else? There are no villains in this play.

Everyone is trying their best to act correctly and do the right thing, but they don't succeed. We can all recognize that moment of seeing our best intentions go astray.

Discussion Questions

1. Do the characters in this play tell the truth? Always? Sometimes? Never?
2. Does anyone come off well in the play? That is, are there any characters who seem admirable?
3. Does the concept of "justice" apply to the complicated situations we see in *Clybourne Park*? Do you see a way that the characters could act justly, or are there too many shades of gray?

Race and Racism

Act One of *Clybourne Park* depicts a scene from 1959, in which we see the racial prejudices and misunderstandings of that era. You may watch this scene and feel that our society no longer operates this way. However, in Act Two, we see a modern-day scene taking place in 2009 with racial prejudice and misunderstanding still alive, even among people who would not think of themselves as racist. *Clybourne Park* presents audiences with the uncomfortable assertion that we haven't made as much progress in the past 50 years as we'd like to think.

Discussion Questions

1. Would you consider the characters in *Clybourne Park* racist?
2. Did the play make you think about racism in your own life?
3. Do you think *Clybourne Park*'s depiction of race relations is realistic?
4. In addition to racial differences, are there other ways in which characters in *Clybourne Park* are forced to confront people who are unfamiliar or "other"?
5. Is there such a thing as "harmless racism"? Consider the off-color jokes that are told in the second act. Does humor have a place in dealing with racism? Can it be healing, or does it solely perpetuate racism?

Home, History, and Memory

Over the course of the play, from 1959 to 2009, the house on Clybourne Street is home to several different families. We see that the house means different things to each of them at different times. In Act One, part of the reason that Bev and Russ are moving is that the neighborhood no longer feels like home. Yet as Bev and Russ are preparing to move, others in the community have a vested interest in maintaining the neighborhood as a white community. In Act Two, the characters argue over who has the right to claim ownership over the identity of the house and the neighborhood. Changing architecture can change the identity of a place, by erasing memory of the past. For some characters, the neighborhood's identity is a valuable thing to be preserved, for others it has different, less positive associations.

Discussion Questions

1. What does "home" mean to you?
2. Who has the right to claim ownership over a place—a house, a neighborhood, a community?
3. How does gentrification impact the cultural memory of a neighborhood?

Language

"I think [Lena]'s using coded language to say, 'Don't build your house. We don't like you here, and we don't want you here.' But she says it with the kind of correct-sounding political rhetoric that is persuasive to those of us on the left while on the right, people go, ' ... you! This is what I'm going to do!'"-Bruce Norris

The way characters express themselves, whether effectively or not, is a big theme in *Clybourne Park*. The words we use and the games we play with language are highlighted in the play. As mentioned in the quote above, Bruce Norris explores instances of coded language- language that says one thing while meaning something else. He contrasts the politically correct language of the second act with the blunt words of the first act, and asks if, despite the new vocabulary, the meaning has changed at all. He also makes use of small talk throughout the play, calling attention to the way the characters use language to avoid or dance around true meaning and communication.

Discussion Questions

1. What is coded language? Have you ever used it yourself?
2. Do you think any of the characters in the play are effective communicators?
3. Is there any effective way to talk about race and racism? How PC is too PC?

Lorraine Hansberry & *A Raisin in the Sun*

Lorraine Hansberry, the granddaughter of a slave, was born on May 19, 1930, the youngest of four children in a prominent Chicago family. Her family was affluent, intellectual and active in support of civil rights. When Lorraine was eight, she and her family moved to a predominantly white neighborhood of Chicago where they experienced bigotry, discrimination and violence, laying the groundwork for some of the themes of *A Raisin in the Sun*.



In 1948 she graduated from Englewood High School, and attended the University of Wisconsin as an art major, becoming the first person in her family to attend college outside the south. Two years later, after she saw a play written by Sean O'Casey, she realized she wanted to be a writer and moved to New York. Once there, Hansberry began taking classes in writing and working for Freedom, a prominent African-American newspaper. She is associated with W. E. B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes, two of the most influential writers of the time; the title *A Raisin in the Sun* is taken from Hughes' poem, "A Dream Deferred."

On March 11, 1959, *A Raisin In The Sun* premiered on Broadway in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. While many producers thought white audiences wouldn't pay to see a play about a black family, the show became a full-blown commercial and critical success. Hansberry, at age twenty-nine, became the youngest person, the first African American, and only the fifth woman to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and the first African-American woman to have a production on Broadway. In 1961, with Hansberry's guidance, *A Raisin In The Sun* became an award-winning film starring Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee and the original Broadway cast. Hansberry's talented young life was cut tragically short when she died from cancer at the age of thirty-four, on January 12, 1965.

Langston Hughes' *A Dream Deferred*

What happens to a dream deferred?

*Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?*

Does it stink like rotten meat?

*Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?*

*Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.*

Or does it explode?

Does this poem have a relationship or relevance to *Clybourne Park*? What would that be?

ACTIVITY: Break the students into groups (four or five) and hand each group a copy of the poem. Ask them to create a tableau of the poem, where each line has to have some kind of movement, some kind of action. Each group should incorporate individual movements, as well as group movements, and they should feel free to get creative. For example, they can include sound effects if they like.

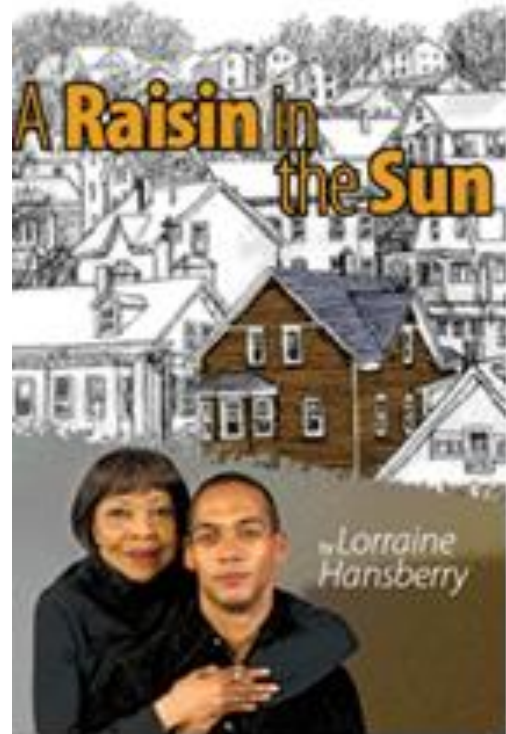
A Raisin in the Sun: Synopsis

A Raisin in the Sun centers on a black family, the Youngers, who live in a cramped, run-down apartment on Chicago's South Side in the 1950's. They are about to receive a \$10,000 check from the life insurance policy of the father of the family, who recently passed away. There is much conflict and difference of opinion over how the new money should be spent.

Mama, the family matriarch, hopes to purchase a new home to improve her family's living situation and realize a lifelong dream. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, agrees with her- she wants a better place to raise her son Travis. However, Mama's son (and Ruth's husband), Walter, would rather use the money to invest in a liquor store with a few of his friends, as part of a get rich quick scheme. In addition, Walter's sister Beneatha, who is studying to become a doctor, hopes to use the money for her medical school tuition and sees her family's desire for wealth and a bigger home as an attempt to assimilate into the world of white people.

Mama places a down payment on a home in the Clybourne Park neighborhood, urged into action by the news that Ruth is pregnant. Soon after, a white man named Karl Lindner visits the Youngers' apartment. He is from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, and explains that he and other Clybourne Park residents are concerned about the Youngers' impending move to their neighborhood. Lindner expresses his community's belief that African Americans are more comfortable living among themselves and makes the family an offer: if they agree not to move into the house, he will give them more money than they paid for it. Outraged at this prejudice-driven attempt to buy them out, the family refuses Lindner's offer.

In the end, it turns out that Walter has invested all the money in his liquor store plan, only to have it all stolen by one of his business partners who turns out to be a con artist. Upon hearing this news, the family despairs. They almost decide to accept Lindner's offer, but, when the time comes, Walter realizes that he will not allow his family to experience such an insult as being paid to stay away from a better neighborhood. He stands up to Lindner, refusing the offer once again and earning the admiration of his family, and the play concludes with the Younger family finally moving into their new home.



Poster from Trinity Rep's 2009 production of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

A Raisin in the Sun: Act II, Scene 3

In Act I of Clybourne Park, when Karl Lindner and his wife Betsy arrive at Russ and Bev's home, they have just come from visiting the Younger's in Hamilton Park. Karl Lindner's appearance in the Younger household appears in A Raisin in the Sun, below:

MAN. Uh- How do you do, Miss? I am looking for a Mrs.- *(He looks at the slip of paper.)* Mrs. Lena Younger-? *(He stops short, struck dumb, as RUTH giggles wildly in WALTERS arms.)*

BENEATHA. *(smoothing her hair with slight embarrassment)* Oh- yes, that's my mother. Excuse me. *(she shuts door.)* Ruth! Brother! *(Enunciating precisely but soundlessly so we can read her lips: "There's a WHITE MAN at the door!")* They stop dancing, RUTH cuts off record, WALTER pinches her butt and she swats at him, laughing. He straightens clothes, BENEATHA opens door.) Uh- come in please.

MAN. *(the look still on his face; recovering)* Thank you.

BENEATHA. My mother isn't here just now. Is it business?

MAN. Yes- well, of a sort.

WALTER. *(freely, the Man of the House; crosses L. above sofa to L.C.)* Have a seat.

(BENEATHA crosses D.L. to front of table.)

MAN. Thank you.

WALTER. I'm Mrs. Younger's son. I look after most of her business matters.

(RUTH and BENEATHA exchange glances.)

MAN. *(sits on broken spring of sofa, shifts uncomfortably)* Well- My name is Karl Lindner-

WALTER *(stretching out his hand)* Walter Younger. *(LINDNER rises to shake, sits.)* This is my wife- *(LINDNER rises politely; RUTH nods, he sits.)* And my sister.

LINDNER. *(rises)* How do you do? *(starts to sit but stops mid-motion, looks behind him to make sure there is no one else to greet, and sits)*

WALTER. *(draws armchair closer, sits with RUTH on the arm beside him, arm about her. Amiably, leaning forward expectantly into the newcomer's face)* What can we do for you, Mr. Lindner!

LINDNER. *(some minor shuffling of the hat and briefcase on his knees)* Well- I am a representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association-

WALTER. (*indicating with remark*) Why don't you sit your things on the couch?

LINDNER. Oh- yes. Thank you. (*He slides brief case and hat onto the couch.*) And as I was saying- I am from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association and we have had it brought to our attention that you people- or at least your mother- has bought a piece of residential property at- (*He digs for the little slip of paper.*) 406 Clybourne Street- (*BENEATHA, eyeing it, drifts behind him.*)



Karl Lindner visits the Youngers in A Raisin in the Sun at Trinity Rep in 2009.

WALTER. That's right. Care for something to drink? Ruth, get Mr. Lindner a beer. (*She rises.*)

LINDNER. (*upset for some reason*) Oh- no, really. I mean thank you very much, but no, thank you.

RUTH. (*innocently*) Some coffee?

LINDNER. Thank you, nothing at all. (*She sits.*) Well, I don't know how much you folks know about our organization. (*He is a gentle man; thoughtful and somewhat labored in his manner.*) It is one of these community organizations set up to look after- oh, you know things like block upkeep and special projects and we also have what we call our New Neighbors Orientation Committee-

BENEATHA. (*skeptically*) Yes- and what do they do?

LINDNER. (*turning a little to her and then returning the main force to WALTER*) Well- it's what you might call a sort of Welcoming Committee I guess. I mean they, we, I'm the chairman- go around and see the new people who move into the neighborhood and sort of give 'em the lowdown on the way we do things out in Clybourne Park.

BENEATHA. (*with false appreciation*) Uh-huh.

LINDNER. And we also have the category of what the Association calls uh- special community problems-

BENEATHA. (*caustically*) Yes- and what are some of those?

WALTER. Girl, let the man talk.

(BENEATHA exhales heavily, crosses L. and above table, picks up an orange from table.)

LINDNER. *(with understated relief)* Thank you. I would sort of like to explain this thing in my own way. I mean I want to explain in a certain way.

(BENEATHA begins tossing the orange up and down)

WALTER. Go ahead.

LINDNER. Yes. Well. I'm going to try to get right to the point. I'm sure we'll all appreciate that in the long run.

BENEATHA. Yes.

WALTER. Be still now!

(BENEATHA crosses R. above sofa, tossing the orange in the air.)

LINDNER. Well-

RUTH. *(innocently still)* Would you like another chair- you don't look comfortable.

LINDNER. *(more frustrated than annoyed)* No, thank you very much. Please. Well- to get right to the point I- *(A great breath and he is off at last.)* I am sure you people must be aware of some of the incidents that have happened when colored people move into certain areas- Well- because we have what I think is going to be a unique type of organization in American community life- not only do we deplore that kind of thing- but we are trying to do something about it. *(WALTER gestures approvingly and BENEATHA halts with the tossing and turns with a new and quizzical interest to LINDNER. She crosses D.R. of sofa to U.L. of WALTER's chair.)* We feel- *(gaining confidence in his mission due to the interest in the faces of the people he is talking to)* We feel that most of the trouble in this world, when you come right down to it- *(He pounds his fist just a little for emphasis on his knee.)* Most of the trouble exists because people just don't sit down and talk to each other.

RUTH. *(nodding as she might in church, pleased with the remark)* You can say that again, Mister.

LINDNER. *(also more encouraged by such affirmation)* That we don't try hard enough to understand the other fellow's problem. The other guy's point of view.

RUTH. Now that's right. *(WALTER gestures that LINDNER is right on target.)*

LINDNER. Yes- and that's why I was elected to come here this afternoon and talk to you people and see if we couldn't find some way to work this thing out. Anybody can see that you are a nice family of folks, hard working and honest, I'm sure. Today everybody knows what it means to be

an outsider. And of course there is always somebody who is out to take advantage of people who don't understand.

WALTER. What do you mean?

LINDNER. Well- you see our community is made up of people who've worked hard as the dickens for years to build up that little community. We're not rich and fancy people; just hard-working honest people who don't really have much but those little homes and a dream of the kind of community we want to raise our children in. Now I don't say we are perfect and there is a lot wrong in some of the things we want. But you've got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better; take more of a common interest in the life of the community when they share a common background. *(As they react, he rushes to reassure them.)* Now I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their *own* communities.

BENEATHA. *(with a grand and bitter gesture)* This, friends, is the Welcoming Committee!

WALTER. *(dumbfounded)* Is this what you came marching all the way over here to tell us?

LINDNER. Well now we've been having a fine conversation I hope you'll hear me all the way through.

WALTER. *(tightly)* Go ahead, man.

LINDNER. You see- in the face of all the things I have said, we are prepared to make your family a very generous offer-

BENEATHA. Thirty pieces and not a coin less!

WALTER. Yeah-?

LINDNER. *(putting on his glasses and drawing out a form from the brief case)* Our association is prepared through the collective effort of our people to buy the house from you at a financial gain to your family.

RUTH. *(rises, crosses L. front of table)* Lord have mercy, ain't this the living gall!

WALTER. All right, you through? *(Rises.)*

LINDNER. Well, I want to give you the exact terms of the arrangement-

WALTER. We don't want to hear no exact terms of no arrangements. I want to know if you got any more to tell 'bout getting together.

LINDNER. (*taking off his glasses*) Well- I don't suppose that you feel-

WALTER. Never mind how I feel- you got any more to say 'bout how people ought to sit down and talk to each other? (*He strides to the door and opens it wide.*) Get out of my house, man.

LINDNER. (*looking around at the hostile faces and reaching and assembling his hat and brief case; crosses L. to U.C.*) I don't understand why you people are reacting this way. What do you think you are going to gain by moving where you- aren't wanted and where some elements- well- people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened-

WALTER. (*Restraining himself: quietly, unable even to look at the man*) Get out.

LINDNER. (*at the door, holding a small card*) Well, I'm sorry it went like this.

WALTER. (*Facing him*) Get out!

LINDNER. (*from the door with deep passion:*) You just can't force people to change their hearts, son. (*He turns and puts his card on the buffet and exits.*)

(*WALTER pushes the door to with stinging hatred, he picks up and looks at the card, puts it down. RUTH sits grimly L. of kitchen table, BENEATHA on arm of chair D.R. They say nothing for several seconds.*)

Stage Directions

D.R. ? L. ? U.C. ? What do these letters mean?

These are blocking notations. They tell an actor where to go onstage. Each production will typically have its own blocking, but they are sometimes provided in a script. On the stage there is Upstage, Downstage, Stage Right, Stage Left, and Center. Downstage is closer to the audience, and upstage is further away. Stage right and left are based on the actor's right and left when they are facing the audience. The notations in the script are sometimes combinations, for example, D.R. means Down Right, L. means Left, U.C. means Up Center, etc.

ACTIVITY: Give the students a scene from *Clybourne Park*, or the scene from *A Raisin in the Sun* with the stage directions crossed out. Have them come up with their own blocking and mark the notations in the script. They can also include notes about the way a character says a line, or the actions they carry out on stage.

Unit Two: Entering the Text

“Othering”

Racism and the idea of the “other” are central themes in *Clybourne Park*. The playwright himself tells New York Magazine, “There is no way to escape the fact that I’m a racist.” Have your students discuss racism, what it means in the context of this quote, in the context of the play, and in the context of the world they know. Broaden the discussion to include non-racial othering, which happens all the time but does not get as much attention.

The purpose of the activity below is to make students more aware of othering in general, and to promote discussion on whether this is learned behavior or part of human nature. Norris goes on to say, “I’d like to imagine I was an android who had only pure thoughts, but I’m a human, and I’m an animal. And I think that’s true for everyone.” Is he just being cynical, or is he onto something?

1. Have each student think of a group that they consider themselves to be a part of. The students may choose any sort of group except for race. The more unique the choice, the better – they may consider themselves to be jocks, or vegetarians, or introverts, or believers in the flying spaghetti monster – anything they want.
2. Have them prepare a presentation (either a short oral presentation, a written piece to be read to the class, or even a short scene with another one of the students) that answers the following:
 - a. What are some of the characteristics that define your group? Why do you consider yourself to be a part of it?
 - b. What is a group that you would consider to be “opposite” yours?
 - c. How would you feel if members of this opposite group were to be assigned to work on a project with you? Sit at your lunch table? Move into your house?
 - d. What have your real-life interactions been like with this other group? Have you ever felt you were the target of discrimination by them or by some other group because of the group with which you associate yourself? (*If the presentation is taking the form of a scene, it might be easier to answer this question in the post-scene discussion.*)

Then & Now

Split the class into two groups. One group is 1959, and one is 2011.

Break them up into groups within the larger halves. Hand out the following pictures, half of which depict scenes from Chicago in the 1950's, and half of which are contemporary. Ask students to create a tableau of the picture. Ask them to come up with one movement and one sentence per student and decide an order in which to say them, as well as one word to start and end the piece that they all say together. (For example, "1959!")

Encourage the students to think about the differences between the way people speak, move, and think between the two times- as well as the ways these things may not have changed. Ask them to think about the idea of progress and change, or the lack thereof. Have them try to incorporate these elements and ideas into their pieces.

Construct a short in-class performance by having two groups from each year perform as one piece, one after the other (they can choose which year they'd like to show first). If there's time, allow the two groups to come up with a transition between their pieces. They can decide whether they'd like to both be onstage the whole time (one frozen while the other performs), or if they'd like for one group to be onstage at a time.



Allen with Irving Rosenthal and Peter Orlovsky, January 1959.



Chicago, 1950-51, by Yasuhiro Ishimoto



Photo – Chicago – Eckersall Stadium – Police Three-Wheelers On Duty For A Game – 1959



Religious pamphlets are passed out near a burlesque theater Chicago 1959



Chicago police officers are a presence along Michigan Ave. in Chicago, May 18, 2011



Taste of Chicago 2011



Protesters cross LaSalle Avenue during an Occupy Chicago protest Monday, Oct. 3, 2011, in Chicago

My Neighborhood

1. Ask the students to interview a parent, guardian, relative, or neighbor about what their neighborhood was like when they were growing up. If the student has moved, they can ask about the differences between their old and their new neighborhoods. Ask them to compose a short monologue from the answers they receive. To take it a step further, they can create a second monologue using their own perceptions of the neighborhood and juxtapose them. If time allows, present them to the class.
2. Have students create a collage with their neighborhood as the theme. They can include pictures, colors, words, text, and even music.
3. To bring it all together, hang the collages and use them as a backdrop for the performance of the monologues they created during the first part of the activity.

I'm Not Bad, I'm Just Drawn That Way

One of the most important jobs for an actor is to figure out why their character does what they do. Even if an actor is playing a villain, it is important that the actor not judge or criticize their character's actions—instead, they must play them truthfully.

1. Assign each student (or depending on the class, a group of students) one character from the play. They must take an in-depth look at that character.
2. Have them come up with things that the character say about themselves and lies that other characters say to describe them.
3. Each student or group of students must then make a presentation as to why their character is not so bad after all. Whether or not they actually believe it, encourage students to think about their character's motivations for their actions in the play.
4. Discuss with your students how actors, writers and directors must always ask why people behave the way they do.

Letters in Character- A Writing Activity

The first part of the following activity gives students the opportunity to interact with the characters and plot points of the story. The second half of this activity allows students to get inside the character's head and understand the story from his or her perspective.

1. Have your students choose a character from the play and, using any of the following prompts, write a letter to that character: *What advice would you give the character at this point in the story? What is something important that you want this character to know right now? Tell this character about an event in the story that hasn't happened yet.*
2. Once everyone has finished, collect the letters and redistribute them to other students in the class.
3. Now, each student must imagine that they are the character that the letter is addressed to, and respond to it from his or her perspective.
4. Optional performance opportunity: your students could also write their responses in the form of a monologue and perform them for the class.
5. Afterwards, take a moment to debrief with your students: which part of the activity did they like the best?

Write Your Own Riff!

1. Assign students a well-known plot or story, for example, a fairytale, recent movie, the Harry Potter books, etc. You can also have them pick their own. In groups, ask the students to write a short scene or one-act play that riffs off of their chosen existing plot. Some examples of a way in could be to:
 - a. Pick a character other than the protagonist and write a scene focusing around them. (This character could be a villain or peripheral character in the original story- but it doesn't necessarily have to even appear in it. For example, the bug on the side of the road when Cinderella passes on the way to the ball, Draco Malfoy's pen pal or distant cousin, etc...)
 - b. Write a scene that occurs before, after, or in between the action of the plot- show us what is unseen in the original story.
 - c. Write an alternate ending.
 - d. Change the time period or setting in which the action takes place.

These are just a few examples, allow students to be creative and come up with their own way to riff if they'd like.

If time allows, share the scenes with the rest of the cast.

2. If you'd like to keep the exercise focused on Clybourne Park, ask the students to write a short scene in groups that shows what happens when Francine and Albert get home after Act I. Again, if there's time, share them with the rest of the class. This could be a good opportunity for many great discussions, such as, but certainly not limited to:
 - a. How might Francine and Albert's home look different from that of Bev and Russ?
 - b. What was the previous engagement that Francine insisted she would be late for? Did it exist? If not, why did she make it up?
 - c. What might Francine's attitude towards Bev and Russ be? What about Albert's?
 - d. Why might Albert and Francine have refused Bev's offer of money and the chafing dish?

What is a *chafing dish*?

A chafing dish is a metal dish with a lamp or heating appliance beneath it. It is used for cooking food or for keeping it hot at the table.



Scenes from the Play

ACT I: Russ & Bev

BEV: I said don't forget the change of address for the magazine and you promised me that you would, you promised me *specifically*- (cont'd.)

RUSS: (overlapping) I did it last week.

BEV: (continuous) – that you would see to it so I- Oh.

RUSS: Pulling your leg.

BEV: I see.

RUSS: (*a gentle imitation*) Oh *Russ*!!

BEV: Maybe people don't *like* having their leg pulled.

RUSS: I was just- I was- Okay. (Pause.)

BEV: And are you going to bring that trunk down from upstairs?

RUSS: Yup.

BEV: Thought you said after lunch.

RUSS: Sort a two-person job.

BEV: And you really want to wear those clothes all day?

RUSS: Hadn't really thought about it. (A silence passes between them. RUSS scratches his elbow).

BEV: But you know, you *are* a funny person. I was telling Francine- I ran into Barbara Buckley at Lewis and Coker's and Barbara said that Newland told her a funny joke that you told at Rotary last year.

RUSS: That *I* told?

BEV: About a man with a talking dog?

RUSS: Don's the one with the jokes.

BEV: And Barbara said does Russ not go to Rotary anymore? Apparently they all keep saying where's Russ? (a beat, then) Not that I care one way or the other but you used to enjoy going and I don't see why that, of all things, should have to change- (RUSS shifts in his chair, BEV continues, quickly)- and please don't say *what's the point*, Russ. I hate it when you say that. Because for that matter- (cont'd.)

RUSS: (overlapping) I wasn't going to say-

BEV: (continuous)- Why not just sit in a chair all day and wait for the end of the world but *I* don't intend to live the remainder of my life like that and I think you could take notice of the fact that talking that way *frightens* me.

ACT I: Jim & Russ

RUSS: ...did Bev *ask* you to come over?

JIM: Nope.

RUSS: I mean, good to see you. Great to see you.

JIM: I mean, we *ran into* each other coupla days ago. Got to talking.

RUSS: Uh-huh.

JIM: Little about you. Since she cares about you. Everybody cares about you, Russ.

RUSS: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yup. Well. Tell ya what I think. And I'm not a psychiatrist or anything but I do think a lotta people today have this tendency, tendency to *brood* about stuff, which, if you ask me, is, is, is- well, short answer, it's not *productive*. And what *I'd* say to these people, *were* I to have a degree in psychiatry, I think my advice would be maybe, get up offa your rear end and *do* something.

JIM: Huh.

RUSS: Be my solution.

JIM: Uh-huh.

RUSS: Of course, what do I know?

JIM: I think you know plenty.

RUSS: (Beat. RUSS looks toward the kitchen. Calling.) Hey, Bev?

JIM: Like, I think you know your son was a good man, no matter what. Hero to his country. Nothing changes that.

RUSS: Yup yup yup.

JIM: And I also think you know that sometimes talking about things that happen, painful things, maybe-

RUSS: Uh, you don't happen to have a degree in psychiatry *either*, do you, Jim? (JIM stares.) No? Just checking.

JIM: We all suffer, you know. Not like you and Bev, maybe, but-

RUSS: But, see, since what *I'm* doing here is, see, since I'm just minding *my own* business- (cont'd)

JIM: (overlapping) But it doesn't hurt-

RUSS: (continuous) – sorta seems to *me* you might save yourself the effort worrying about things you don't need to *concern* yourself with and furthermore-

JIM: (overlapping) He's in a better place, Russ.

ACT II: Lena & Lindsey

LENA: Well, maybe the *friendly* thing to do would be for us to respect each other's time, would that be all right?

LINDSEY: *Yes*. totally.

LENA: Thank you. Anyway. All right. (taking her time) Well... I have no way of knowing what sort of connection you have to the neighborhood where *you* grew up?

(Horn sounds.)

LINDSEY: *Just shut the door. Just shut the-* Sorry. The neighborhood where-?

LENA: And some of our concerns have to do with a particular period in history and the things that people experienced here in this community *during* that period- both good and bad, and on a personal level? I just have a lot of *respect* for the people who went through those experiences and still managed to carve out a life for themselves and create a community despite a whole lot of obstacles?

LINDSEY: As well you should.

LENA: Some of which still exist. That's just a part of my *history* and my *parents'* history- and honoring the *connection* to that history- and, *no one*, myself included, likes having to dictate what you can or can't do with your own home, but there's just a lot of *pride*, and a lot of *memories* in these houses, and for some of us, that connection still has *value*, if that makes any sense?

LINDSEY: Total sense.

LENA: For those of us who have remained.

LINDSEY: Absolutely.

LENA: And *respecting* that memory; that has value, too. At least, that's what *I* believe. And that's what I've been wanting to say.

LINDSEY: Look, I for one- I am really grateful for what you said, but this is why we sometimes feel defensive, you know? Because we *love* this neighborhood. We completely do, and we would never want to to to to carelessly- over anyone's- And I totally admit, I'm the one who was resistant, especially with the schools and everything, but once I stopped seeing the neighborhood the way it *used* to be, and could see what it is *now*, and its *potential*.

LENA: Used to be what?

LINDSEY: What do you mean?

LENA: What it "used to be"?

LINDSEY: *Historically*. The changing, you know, demographic-?

ACT II: Steve, Lindsey, Lena & Kevin

STEVE: Okay. Okay. If you really want to- It's (tries to laugh, then, sotto)... it's *race*. Isn't it? You're trying to tell me that that... (to LENA) that implicit in what you *said*- That this entire conversation... isn't at least *partially* informed- *am I right?* (laughs nervously, to LENA) By the issue of... (sotto) of *racism?*

LINDSEY: (to STEVE) *Are you out of your-?* (to LENA) I have no idea where this is coming from.

LENA: Well, the *original* issue was the inappropriately large *house* that- (cont'd)

STEVE: (to LENA, overlapping) Oh, come *on*.

LENA: (continuous)- you're planning to build. Only, *now* I'm fairly certain that I've been called a *racist*.

STEVE: But I didn't say that, did I?

LENA: *Sounded* like you did.

STEVE: (to KEVIN) Did I say that?

KEVIN: Yeah, you kinda did.

STEVE: In what way did I say that?

KEVIN: Uh, *somebody* said racism.

STEVE: *-Cism! -Cism!* Not- *cist!*

KEVIN: Which must originate from *somewhere*.

STEVE: And which we all find totally reprehensi-

KEVIN: So- are *you* the racist?

STEVE: Can I just-?

KEVIN: Is it your wife?

STEVE: Look:

KEVIN: Cause by process of elimination-

STEVE: Here's what I'm saying:

LINDSEY: What *are* you saying?

STEVE: I'm saying: Was race *not* a factor-

LINDSEY: (re: STEVE, exonerating herself) I don't know this person.

Hungry for More?

Opportunities for further reading:

Plays by Bruce Norris

The Infidel, 2000

Purple Heart, 2002

We All Went Down to Amsterdam, 2003

The Pain and the Itch, 2004

The Unmentionables, 2006

A Parallelogram, 2010

Works by Lorraine Hansberry

A Raisin in the Sun, 1959 (play)

A Raisin in the Sun, 1961 (screenplay)

The Drinking Gourd, 1960 (unaired television show)

The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality, 1964 (book)

The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window, 1964 (play)

To be Young, Gifted, and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in her Own Words, 1969 (book)



Clybourne Park at Trinity Rep: Photo by Mark Turek

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Allen with Irving Rosenthal and Peter Orlovksy, January 1959.
<http://www.allenginsberg.org/index.php?page=chicago-1959-with-irving-rosenthal>

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Chicago, 1950-51, by Yasuhiro Ishimoto. <http://ruguru.livejournal.com/656628.html>
Religious pamphlets are passed out near a burlesque theater Chicago 1959. <http://old-time-religion.blogspot.com/2011/04/bible-thumpers-pass-out-flyers-in-front.html>

Chicago police officers are a presence along Michigan Ave. in Chicago, May 18, 2011.
<http://abcnews.go.com/US/flash-mob-crimes-good-police-tracking-culprits/story?id=14381079>

Protesters cross LaSalle Avenue during an Occupy Chicago protest Monday, Oct. 3, 2011, in Chicago.
<http://www.toledoblade.com/Economy/2011/10/03/Protests-against-Wall-Street-and-joblessness-spread-nationwide-fueled-by-arrests-in-New-York.html>

Taste of Chicago 2011.
<http://leisureblogs.chicagotribune.com/.a/6a00d8341c58f853ef01543249594e970c-popup>

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