A RAISIN IN THE SUN

VIEWING GUIDE AND CRITIQUE (1961 film, Columbia Pictures)

ACT I, SCENE 1 (0:00:00 – 0:30:25)

1. What do you think of the set design? Are the details effective?

2. Why do you think the filmmakers added scenes of Walter Lee at his chauffeuring job?

3. What do you think of the camera shots and angles? Does it feel like a play or a movie?

4. Identify one strength or weakness of this part of the film.

ACT I, SCENE 2 (0:30:25 – 0:54:55)

1. The filmmakers made many changes to this part of Hansberry’s original script. Which of these changes has the greatest impact on the telling? Explain your choice.
   - Travis does not relate the episode of killing the rat.
   - The implication that Joseph has dated white women is absent (Hansberry 64).
   - New scenes are set in the Kitty Cat Club.

2. Is the addition of background or ambient music effective in establishing mood? Explain.

3. Identify one strength or weakness of this part of the film.
ACT II, SCENE 1 (0:54:55 – 1:14:48)

1. The director makes use of extreme close-ups (e.g., when Walter Lee becomes Flaming Spear). What is the director’s purpose in using extreme close-ups?

2. A major omission (when something is left out) in the film version is that Beneatha does not change her hair. What are your thoughts on this omission?

3. Walter Lee’s dramatic reaction to Mama’s news has been reduced to the breaking of a glass in his hands. Does this change improve or diminish the moment? Explain.

4. Identify one strength or weakness of this part of the film.

ACT II, SCENE 2 (1:14:48 – 1:22.01)

1. Which of these omissions makes the greatest impact on the play? Explain your choice.
   - Beneatha grows frustrated with George and tells him to leave.
   - Mrs. Johnson tells the family what she thinks about their move.
   - Walter wakes Travis to tell him about their prosperous future.

2. Why do you think the filmmakers decided to add Mama’s visit to the bar?
**ACT II, SCENE 3** (1:22:01 - 1:43:19)

1. How effective is the sequence showing the family’s visit to Clybourne Park?

2. How successful was the movie in using Mama’s plant as a symbol?

3. How did the director use camera-work and sound to emphasize Walter Lee’s crazed reaction to Bobo’s news?

**ACT III** (1:43:19 – 2:07:48)

1. Why do you think that the movie spends less time talking about colonialism in Africa, violent revolution, and change?

2. Did you notice that the film version dropped the N-word from Walter Lee’s preparation to meet with Lindner? Do you think this was the right choice?

3. How does the pacing change when Walter makes his speech to Mr. Lindner?

4. What is mama doing with her hand at the end of the final scene? (This gesture is not in the original stage directions.) Is this addition effective?
OVERALL CONCLUSIONS:
1. The beginning and the end of the film are very faithful to the play. Why might the director want to start and end by being true to the original?

2. Which of the actors delivered the best performances? Assign a grade to each (A+ to F-).

   - Sidney Poitier (Walter Lee) ____
   - Claudia McNeil (Lena Younger) ____
   - Ruby Dee (Ruth Younger) ____
   - Diana Sands (Beneatha Younger) ____
   - Ivan Dixon (Joseph Asagai) ____
   - John Fiedler (Mr. Lindner) ____
   - Louis Gossett Jr. (George Murchison) ____
   - Steven Perry (Travis Younger) ____

3. Did the film succeed in developing major themes? Explain.

4. Do you note any missed opportunities? Are there things that the filmmakers should have done differently?

A RAISIN IN THE SUN FILM REVIEW:

RL7 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Compare Interpretations
W1A Writing Argument: Organizing Information

Write a review of the 1961 film adaptation based on your expert knowledge of A Raisin in the Sun. What grade (A+ to F-) would you give this movie? What did the filmmakers get right? What are the film’s shortcomings?

Make sure to…

- Organize an effective argument: ESSAY ORGANIZER TEMPLATE.
- Compare the original text and the film adaptation.
- Support your conclusions with details from film and the original play.
- Use appropriate key terms (theme, staging, symbol, acting, camera-work...).