

A Raisin in the Sun: Title History

By Ashlee Torres

The title for *A Raisin in the Sun* comes from a line in Langston Hughes's poem, "Harlem," published in 1951. The poetic words Hughes contributed to the world of the Harlem Renaissance served as inspiration for Hansberry from an early age.

Their work poses a few potential answers to the question: "What happens to a dream deferred?" Hughes first shaped this question in his poem, in which he related the dream to a "raisin in the sun," left out to dry. But to understand either Hughes or Hansberry's applications, we must first understand the meaning of the word "deferred." If we agree that the word means 'to be postponed,' then the purpose of writing for both author and poet is revealed.

What goes on in someone's mind after his or her dream has been denied? Not simply by another person but by a way of life and a society that is imbalanced out of favor? It's difficult to say. But Hansberry and Hughes attempt to tackle these questions through sympathetic eyes.

Hughes contemplates the multitude of possible reactions to the postponing of dreams; each one is unique to the individual. For one, the dream may very well "fester like a sore," without anything being done to salvage it. For another, it may "crust and sugar over," bringing fresh hope to a new dream. But for an entire generation of people who have had their dreams suppressed, the weight is heavy. And any of the next could be the straw that breaks the camel's back - the flame that causes this accumulation of powder to "explode." Hughes's poem compares a dream deferred in a juxtaposed fashion; the different modes forgotten dreams can take are contrasted - a festering "rotten" feeling of regret versus a "sweet" confidence in future action, a slow and despairing, defeated "sag" versus a storming explosion against injustice. The back-and-forth between these perspectives could also be considered a cycle of feelings people may undergo, such as the five stages of grief, as they realize the prevailing discrimination against them.

When Hansberry's characters are met with oppressive circumstances, their prospective dreams are seemingly dashed; however, new methods of achieving those dreams come to light through their own deliberation and determination - determination not to allow the world to tell them what they can or cannot do. For Hansberry, this represents the start of a revolution - a realization that enough is enough and that the dreams of African Americans will no longer be ignored.

Source:

Hughes, Langston. "Harlem by Langston Hughes." *Poetry Foundation*. 2002. Web. 11 Nov. 2020.
<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem>>.