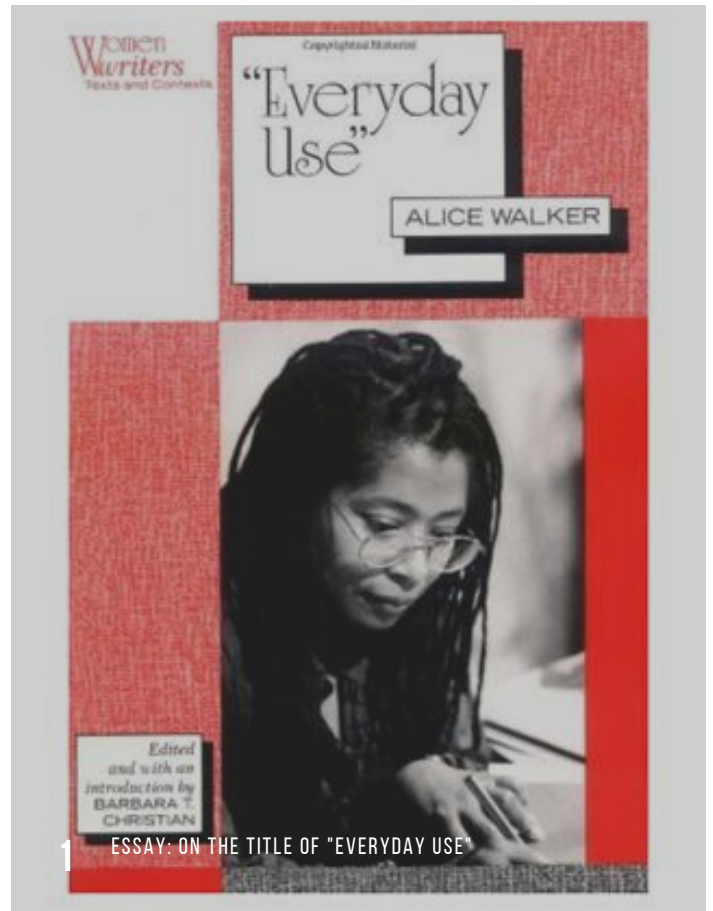
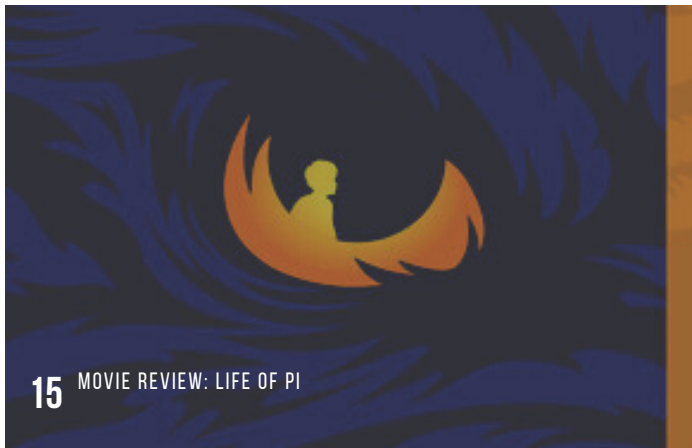


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18 March 2021

Essay: On the Title of "Everyday Use"
A short story by Alice Walker

When I think about how the title of this short story informs the theme, it suggests how the term "everyday use" means different things to different people. One's social and economic status, as well as life experience, molds their point of view. As I read the story with this in mind, I can more clearly see the theme as a thread woven throughout to give deeper meaning to the story. It provokes thoughtful consideration about our own identity, our place in society, and how we view our heritage.

Mama's definition of "everyday use" is about survival, from her flannel nightgowns to the quilt on the bed, which is necessary for warmth in the winter. Dee views these items of everyday use as curiosities that could serve as decoration and conversation pieces. The butter churn to her is an artistic centerpiece for her table, not a tool for making butter, or a connection to her family and its history. The title brings these views of the necessities of life to our attention, emphasizing themes of heritage and identity.

There are many thought-provoking conflicts regarding family, identity, race, and heritage illustrated in the character of Dee. Although she does not acknowledge it, her privileged life is the result of sacrifices Mama made so that she could have an education. Dee then used her education to escape from a life of poverty and ignorance, but it also gave her power, and she wields it like a weapon to forge a path away from her past and gain control over her destiny.

Dee's desire to ground herself with a meaningful identity is commendable, but she has not yet matured enough to apply knowledge gained with wisdom and compassion. Her desire

may be in earnest, but it is pathetically shallow. She has used her knowledge of the world, especially African culture, to create a persona. She calls this new identity Wagero Leewanika Kemanjo. Dee seeks to diminish the connection to her heritage in America, which is tainted by slavery and oppression. Instead, she adopts a more romantic post-colonial African heritage. However, she does this with a flamboyant hairstyle, ostentatious jewelry and colorful clothing, as if these accouterments are meaningful expressions of the African culture. She may be unaware that her portrayal of this African heritage is not accurate, or maybe it is irrelevant to her. She is so deeply invested in the narrative she created about herself that it is unlikely the truth would sway her.

It is possible that this portrayal is Walker's commentary on some aspects of the Black Power movement of the 1960-1970's. This movement brought Black history to the forefront, encouraging African Americans to celebrate racial pride and to embrace their African heritage. Groups and individuals making the news and setting the pace were the Nation of Islam, the Black Panther Party, and Malcolm X. Dee and her partner, Hakim-a-barber, appear to have embraced some of the trappings of the movement. They have adopted African names and some elements of Islam, but her embrace of her heritage lacks sincerity. Hakim-a-barber obviously doesn't take the tenets of his adopted religion seriously.

Playing her part as Wagero, Dee also attempts to shed every vestige of her family's roots. She assumes that her birth name is 'white', even though she was named after her Aunt Dicie. She argues that somewhere in the past a white oppressor had given that name to one of her ancestors, purposefully denying the connection to her aunt. She seems to be clueless that the way she is idealizing her African heritage disrespects the mother and family who are literally standing right in front of her. She is ashamed of their poverty despite the sacrifices made to give her the

life she enjoys and does not understand their contentment. Her performance of her new persona dominates, manipulates, and controls her interactions with her family, turning her into an oppressor of her own mother and sister.

The title keeps us focused on the difference in how Mama and Dee view family and heritage, and the everyday trappings of their lives. Dee observes her mother's possessions like an estate assessor, looking for things she can use to display in her home as folk art or antiques that will gain monetary value over time. Mama and Maggie see their family in those objects; the butter churn carved by Uncle Henry, the imprints of hands that used the churn on the handles, and the quilts made of scraps of clothing worn by their loved ones. These are tools of everyday life, and everyday survival. They commemorate the hard work and endurance of their parents and grandparents.

Mama feels the weight of all the tiny rejections throughout the story as she continually contrasts Dee's appearance, mannerisms, speech, and perspective with Maggie's and her own. She wishes Dee could see her, truly see her, as a person. She imagines what it would be like for Dee to express heartfelt gratitude and pride in her mother. However, Mama's grounded practicality prevents her from entertaining this dream for long. The way Dee takes their picture in front of the house does not portray genuine affection, but more like someone documenting an experience. She does not appreciate the effort Mama and Maggie have made to make the yard look nice and welcoming. The way Dee goes shopping, so to speak, for *objets d'art* in her mother's home is insensitive.

The conflict culminates in the brief debate over the quilt. Dee wants the quilts, ostensibly to protect them and preserve their monetary value. But Mama prefers to give the quilts to Maggie, who knows how to quilt and will continue the tradition of repairing the quilt with scraps

of their family's history. The quilts will be used, but with love and appreciation. This is more important to Mama than money and education.

"Everyday Use" gives us characters we immediately understand and care about. This is how stories can be powerful tools to move us toward change on both individual and societal levels. This story softly but firmly illustrates the uneven power dynamics created by education and wealth, and how this can affect identity and culture, even within the same family. While few would disparage a quality education, using knowledge to feel superior is oppressive. The irony displayed in the character of Dee is quite obvious. Access to resources and the accumulation of wealth also skews the way people view their possessions. The conflict over the quilts shows how privileged people can afford to take many of their possessions for granted. The same items for those in poverty are crucial for survival and can be priceless in ways a materialistic society does not understand. Whatever position best describes us, we can use a story like this as a mirror or a magnifying glass, and better understand our purpose and place in the world.

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Personal Reading Journal: "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker
11 February 2021

When I use the phrase "everyday use", I'm referring to the most useful items I own. They may be common and ordinary, showing some wear and tear, but that is because they are dependable and have stood the test of time. Objects not used every day are specialized in some way, and likely have limited uses. Some objects are decorative or have sentimental value. I think sometimes it makes sense to save an item for a special future use. My daughter (named after my mother) plans to wear my mother's watch at her wedding as her "something old." But hoarding possessions doesn't seem very practical or enjoyable to me. If an object is precious, I want to be able to see it and reflect on the emotional connection to it.

In the story "Everyday Use", this dichotomy is illustrated by two different attitudes toward humble household objects. Mama and Maggie see the people connected to the tools of everyday life, such as the butter churn and their quilts. They see the imprints of the hands that made and used the butter churn, the clothing scraps that make up the quilts. When Dee, aka Wangero, sees these objects, she sees them as items to display for their antiquity and maybe even their monetary value. Mama and Maggie treasure their heritage as a deep, meaningful connection to their family ancestry, to the people who are precious to them. Dee pretends to embrace her heritage, but for her it is just a persona, an exotic name, a fanciful costume she can wear.

I enjoyed the narrator's blunt and honest assessment of herself and her daughters. Mama is very practical, and her choice to give the quilts to her daughter Maggie shows how well she understands human nature. She longs for Dee to acknowledge the sacrifices made so that she could have a better life. Dee may have received an education, but Mama knows more about life

than Dee. Dee's display of her knowledge is an affectation to show herself superior to her upbringing. She feels entitled, and her visit to her family feels more like a trip to the zoo or the creation of a documentary because of the way she takes pictures and assesses the objects in the house. In this way she actively rejects her heritage, and I think Walker is making the point that the idealization of one's culture and heritage can be a denial of it. To truly respect your heritage, you must accept the unpleasant aspects of it along with the things of which you are proud. History must tell the whole story; the joys and the sorrows, the triumphs and the mistakes, the love and the betrayals. To pretend that bad things didn't happen, that people didn't fail, is to embrace a lie. We must acknowledge and learn from the past, not deny it.

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Personal Reading Journal: "A&P" by John Updike
22 January 2021

The main character Sammy is narrating this story to the reader, breaking the fourth wall. He is a very observant young man, and highly imaginative. He believes he knows what is really going on inside the minds of others. During the course of the story he makes quite a few judgments about the shoppers, his co-workers, his family, his boss, and the girls that capture his interest. Because he is acutely aware of the others in the store, he imagines they are equally aware of him, possibly making the same kind of unflattering appraisals.

This awareness gives Sammy many audiences for whom to play his act of heroism. He has invited the reader inside his head and lays out the reasons for the gesture he makes at the climax of the story. He has told this story to his family, and they think his decision is "the sad part of the story". He didn't want to hurt his family, but he has acted on his convictions and he thinks enough of his family that he wants them to understand his thought process.

One of Sammy's reasons for the act of quitting is to prove a point to his manager Lengel, his co-worker Stokesie, and the customers who have stopped to watch Lengel reprimand the girls for their scanty attire in his store. He feels Lengel handled the situation badly and embarrassed the girls unnecessarily. Once he has spoken the words "I quit" out loud, he feels committed to the stand he has taken on behalf of the girls, as well as against the establishment for which he feels so much disdain. But most of all, Sammy wants to make this grand gesture so the girls will see him as noble and heroic. He has defended their honor, so to speak, and hopes that they take notice.

It is ironic that the audience that means the most to Sammy was never aware of what he tried to do for them. Now he is left trying to convince his family, the reader, and himself that he did the right thing, in spite of what it cost him.

Sammy reminds me of other characters, such as Jonathan in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Jonathan is very much inside his own head, but also imagines that he knows what is going on inside of others. He often acts on these beliefs, and is shocked to discover that most people aren't thinking about him the way he thinks about them. His grand gestures get him into trouble and never give him the recognition he craves.

Sammy treads the same path, but there is hope for him if he can mature enough to turn his imagination into empathy instead of empty grand gestures.

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Personal Reading Journal: A scene from "Childhood in Old Jerusalem" by Ya'akob Yehoshua
23 March 2021

The focus of this scene is family, especially motherhood, and is of a time when Jews and Arabs lived in harmony. It sounds idyllic, with close knit neighbors caring for each blurring the lines of neighbor and family. The scene with the two men meeting as adults and acknowledging each other as brothers is especially poignant. It also offers hope, because if there was such a time of peace in the past, then there could be again.

When the state of Israel was created in 1948, it ignited a conflict that has raged ever since, costing thousands of lives. Troops have been mobilized, missiles launched, and walls built. This is a far cry from the bonds of friendship and family illustrated in this small slice of life.

It is sad to think of how much has been lost, from the potential for lasting relationships that could have been treasured over time, to the lives of men, women, and children. It is as unnecessary as it is tragic. I feel for the people caught in the middle, who would love to just live in peace, but have to fear for their lives every day.

Peace in the Middle East would be wonderful, but it is naive to think it could happen quickly or easily. There are problems with how Palestinian territories are zoned, inequalities in income between Israeli and Palestinian jobs, barriers to free travel--and therefore serious hindrances to trade and economic expansion. Many issues would need to be resolved before this conflict could be resolved, but all things are possible. Hopefully there will come a day when the realization of the high cost of war will overcome the obstacles to sustainable peace.

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Personal Reading Journal: "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid
16 February 2021

The story of the girl in question puts you in the mind of a woman who has felt the incredible weight of a parent's bitterness and fearful expectations. The staccato rhythm is an onslaught, and although brief, it is a relief when the story is over.

The choice to format this story as a list of do's and don'ts is interesting because even without a plot, it tells the story of a struggling family. They appear to live in a rural setting, and mentions of "benna" and "dasheen" place them in the Caribbean. There are chores to do, clothes to wash and mend, a garden to tend, fish to catch, and meals to prepare. The mother is concerned about how her daughter is perceived by society, and her advice shows that she fears her daughter will bring her shame by being sexually promiscuous and becoming pregnant. She also fears that her daughter will end up like her. She seems to think that if her daughter is preoccupied with household chores and providing for the family, she won't have time to get into trouble, and she'll learn the skills necessary to be "respectable."

Although the story is composed of the mother's lectures (with two tiny interruptions by the daughter), we are in the point of view of the daughter. She is remembering the advice she heard from her mother; mixed with affection, twisted with anxiety. It is obvious that her mother's advice deeply affected her. I think every child has at some point felt that their parents did little else but barrage them with warnings, advice, and sometimes shame, so it is easy to relate to this girl.

As we grow up and become parents ourselves, we can begin to understand the underlying reasons for how our parents chose to relate to us. While the mother may not seem likable because of her caustic tone and tendency to insult instead of encourage, it is also clear that she cares about her daughter, and wants her to live a good life. She thinks she is helping with her household hints and handy tips, and warnings about men and sexuality. It leads me to believe that the mother wants her daughter to do better than she did. It is unfortunate that her love is masked by bitterness.

I can relate a little to both characters, but more to the setting. I grew up in rural West Virginia. My parents bought a run-down farmhouse that we renovated ourselves, so there were several years with no running water. My brother and I were responsible for many household chores and gardening tasks that had to be done by hand. My mother was demanding, but most of the time she was kind. She had a tendency to downplay any compliments aimed at me by saying things like, "Pretty is as pretty does", which always made me wonder what I was doing wrong.

Now that I'm a parent with grown children, I've experienced the transition from child to adult to parent, and understand better that my mom did her best with what she knew. My adult children now look at me in much the same way, understanding that parents are not infallible. Parents often act from a place of love, but at times their actions spring from a place of pain and disappointment. Whatever one's cultural background, I think this is probably true for many parent-child relationships.

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ENG 1150 Experiencing Literature
Personal Reading Journal: "Greasy Lake" by T. Coraghessan Boyle
31 January 2021

"Greasy Lake" is a timely choice for this course as it is an immersion into toxic masculinity, which is a theme related to current issues in our culture about gender and identity. The boys in this story have fallen for a twisted version of the stereotypical Alpha Male and have been running that playbook page by page, from the abuse of alcohol to the destruction of property. Because of the way this story is told, it's likely that the protagonist—now the adult narrator—has not fully rejected all aspects of this perversion of masculinity.

Boys have long been taught that they need to be "masculine", but they've not been taught what that means. Instead of learning that adulthood means being responsible, compassionate, hardworking, and honest, they learn too many lessons from popular culture and entertainment. They see violence, fast cars, and sexual promiscuity touted as "male", and bad behavior excused as "boys will be boys." This story illustrates how boys can internalize these popular images of who and what they need to be, and without strong guidance from responsible adults, how self-destructive their actions can become.

The boys begin the story very full of themselves, pretending to be wild and dangerous by committing acts of rebellion such as wearing leather jackets, striking rebellious poses, and snorting glue. Their actions on the night described in the story inevitably become more careless, to the point where they commit acts of brutal violence and attempt to gang rape a woman.

The story doesn't rubber stamp this behavior, as they do experience some of the consequences for their actions. A turning point in the story is when the narrator, escaping from some other males bent on destruction, hides in the lake, only to find a dead body. When he

emerges from the lake in the morning, he realizes that they won't easily explain away to their parents what has happened to them or the car. By the light of day, a better understanding of how they quickly devolved from "bad" to truly evil begins to dawn on them.

The lake itself seems to be a metaphor for the journey these boys are taking from childhood to the kind of adults they are becoming. Greasy Lake started out as a pristine body of water, but over time it was corrupted with trash and muck. Children begin their lives sweet and innocent, but over time the lack of guidance and the influence of society can corrupt their characters.

It is important to note how the tone affects the point of the story. This is an adult recounting a vivid memory from his youth in a rather sardonic tone of voice. It's like a humble brag wrapped in a warning. The narrator makes several comparisons in the story to elements of war, from the battle-scarred banks of the lake to the shell-shocked aspect of the boys at the end of the story. He even thinks the only person in worse shape than himself is the dead man in the lake. "My car was wrecked; he was dead." (Greasy Lake 5) However, these are privileged upper-middle class boys, one of whom has parents paying for his education at an Ivy League school. He reveals his immaturity with these inaccurate and hyperbolic comparisons. It leads me to believe that while he may be ashamed and sorry, he still has not fully learned the lessons this incident was trying to teach him. His wrong-headed ideas of masculinity compel him to mask his emotions in this tongue-in-cheek retelling of the story of Greasy Lake.

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Movie Review: *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (book to movie adaptation)
04 April 2021

Book-to-movie adaptations face the challenge of translating a novel length text to a 90-page screenplay. If readers respect and love the book, the task is even more demanding. The movie *Life of Pi* successfully takes the story about a boy and a tiger surviving on the ocean and turns it into a visually stunning film as touching as it is beautiful.

The movie follows the book fairly closely in its tone and most of its plot points, and uses the conversation between the writer and Pi to frame the story. Pi briefly tells about growing up in India with a problematic name, creating an identity for himself, and learning about animals in his parent's zoo. He also has the curious habit of embracing nearly every religion to which he is introduced, seeing the image of God in Hinduism, Catholicism, and Islam.

Hard times cause his family to sell the zoo and move to Canada to start a new life. On their ocean voyage with some of their zoo animals on board, a storm sinks the boat, with only Pi, a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker, an orangutan, a zebra, and a hyena escaping on a lifeboat. Most of the story takes place on the ocean, with Pi struggling to survive and eventually using the care and training of Richard Parker as motivation to keep his mind occupied. His faith also keeps him believing that there is a reason for this tragedy. He sees signs and miracles in the gorgeous sky, the amazing sea life, and the fierceness of thunderstorms.

The visual impact of the effects helps the audience feel the desperation, awe, and fear that Pi is feeling. The audience hangs on to their seats as Pi clings to life and to his faith. The CGI is used to increase the "wow" factor of Pi's experiences at sea, but it still manages to not call attention to itself.

As expected, there were some changes made to adapt this story to the screen, mostly by condensing the timeline. For example, the book starts with several pages of the writer describing his search for a good story, and how he finds Pi. The movie jumps right into Pi's meeting with the writer, describing his childhood, and quickly advancing to the journey on the boat. In some areas this makes the story seem rushed. For example, it's difficult to feel the length of time Pi spent on the boat. The book is much more graphic than the movie in its descriptions of violence and the gross realities of survival at sea, but a PG movie rating requires most of this to happen off screen and in the imagination.

A major change that was not necessary to the plot is giving Pi a brief teenage romance. Not every movie needs its protagonist to have a love interest as motivation, or to make a departure more poignant.

Another story line that caught my attention is how Pi interacted with Richard Parker on the boat. Pi grew up in a zoo and learned about animals and their behavior from his father and from personal experience. In the movie Pi seems a bit naïve about animals. The serendipity of a survival guide on a lifeboat that includes animal training instructions is more improbable than a carnivorous island.

The different ways the book and movie end are the changes the most significantly impact the overall story. In the book, investigators express disbelief about Pi's story of surviving with Richard Parker. He gives in to his annoyance and tells them a story that they would be more likely to believe—some humans survived on the lifeboat, and the way they turned on each other was horrific. The movie doesn't show these events and this makes for an abrupt plot twist, with the writer connecting the dots and then describing them for the audience. It's the weakest aspect of the movie. Instead of deciding for yourself which story was true, it indicates that the story

with Richard Parker is Pi's way of dealing with the trauma of the shipwreck, the death of his family, and surviving alone at sea.

This movie is one of the few adaptations that respects its source material and stays faithful to the tone and themes of the book. And in spite of the hardship of surviving on a lifeboat in the ocean, I would have been happy to spend more screen time there with Pi.

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Personal Reading Journal: "Our Secret" by Isabel Allende
21 March 2021

This story begins with the couple meeting by chance, and connecting with each other. This progresses to a sexual encounter, but neither are looking for intimacy; they simply want to feel *something*, and they think having sex will give them some relief for their loneliness and inner turmoil. However, the man is overcome by grief and traumatic memories. His melancholy seems to infect them both, and although the woman tries to excuse their sudden lack of desire with claims of weariness, they give up on lovemaking. They start talking instead, sharing some of the details of their past. Because they are naked and the man does not want to her close the window against the light, the woman can see the man's scars. She sees him slipping into visible anguish and understands that he has suffered tremendously. But as time passes and he continues to struggle against his memories of being tortured and seeing someone he loved tortured as well, he suffers an intense flashback and begins to weep. He asks the woman to hold him, so she does, cradling him like a child. She lays him back on the mat and stretches her body over his. She tells him that fear is all-consuming, and he realizes she has experienced the same kind of trauma. They both know a particular brand of pain, shame, and horror.

Because the characters are nameless, the reader does not make an immediate connection or association with the name. It allows the reader to enter into the feelings of the characters, and makes it easier to picture oneself in their place. It adds an air of mystery as well. But the most important thing this story choice does is show us two people suffering a crisis of identity. They don't yet know who they are, they don't know what they want. Their chance encounter is just another desperate grasp for normal, but in finding each other, they are finding themselves.

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ENG 1150 Experiencing Literature
Personal Reading Journal: "Radio Golf", a play by August Wilson
24 February 2021

The title of the play "Radio Golf" is unusual because it sounds like an oxymoron. You can listen to someone talk about golf on the radio, but you can't experience golf that way. And that is what Roosevelt wants—to share his experiences playing golf with kids because he hopes it will help them tap into the same feeling of freedom he felt. However, talking about freedom and literally experiencing freedom are not the same, just as Harmond's desire to "bring back" his community is an idea that doesn't do enough to affect reality. Even though he plans to accomplish change by demolishing, redesigning, and reconstructing the neighborhood, changing attitudes requires more work that is not easily seen or understood.

The theme of culture and identity is played out in the battle over Aunt Esther's house, and in the revelation that wealthy real estate developer Harmond Wilks and poverty-stricken "Old Joe" Barlow are related. At first, Harmond wants to demolish the house as part of his redevelopment project, but once he discovers that he has a personal relationship to the people who owned it, he changes his mind. Every character in this play has an agenda, and they all want to change the system in different ways for different reasons. The means by which they go about it reflect their roots and deeply held beliefs.

This play is timeless in that it is a character-driven tale that explores heritage and history, and how these ideals are always in danger of being destroyed by commercialism and greed. Progress that wipes out history is dangerous to individuals and their communities. It's natural to look to the future and desire to shape it, but not to the point of rendering heritage and history

unrecognizable. These are issues that face us today, especially as we consider the tension between progress and change and the preservation of culture and diversity.

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ENG 1150 Experiencing Literature
Personal Reading Journal: "She Has No Place In Paradise" by Nawal El Saadawi
7 February 2021

The story begins with Zeinab laying on the ground, feeling grass instead of dirt, shade from trees instead of relentless sun, and seeing a stream of water. Her life up to now has been arduous and joyless, and she reflects on how easy death was compared to her life and all the ways she had already died. She has endured abuse from every person in her life except her neighbor's son, Hassanain. She's been taught that the purpose of her life is to please her father, brother, and husband, with the promise that she would one day gain Paradise. This lesson has been internalized so thoroughly that the only words she speaks are "yes" and "okay." She is blindly, numbly obedient, but this does not earn appreciation from her family—only more abuse. The promise of Paradise is the only bright spot in her mind, and she imagines that in Paradise her husband will not beat her or abuse her sexually, that because of her nearly flawless obedience to the tenets of their faith, he will instead be kind to her, and hold her hand.

However, as she explores Paradise and is encouraged to see some of the things she imagined it would hold, she encounters her husband, who died some years before. He is not waiting for her; he is on a bed with two fair-skinned virgins—the reward men are promised in the Koran. She realizes that for all her obedience, she will not be rewarded—not even in Paradise. She shuts the door and returns to earth instead of submitting to her fate as a black woman in Paradise. This rejection of her afterlife is heartbreaking because those who embrace a faith that promises an afterlife believe it to be a place of rest, happiness, and being with those you loved, and being loved in return. For Zeinab, her Paradise is as joyless and pointless as her life. If Hell is despair, then that is where she is now.

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Personal Reading Journal: "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin
9 February 2021

The title of this short story by James Baldwin has a double meaning. The blues is a particularly emotional form of jazz, a genre of music that Sonny loves and longs to play. But "the blues" is also a term people use to describe sadness and depression, feelings Sonny can't seem to escape.

Sonny has more than one addiction. When he moves into Isabela's home while his brother is serving in the military, he plays their piano obsessively and listens to music with similar fervor. But after being introduced to heroin, he experiences the same high as the music gave him, and he quickly becomes addicted. The physical effects of heroin obviously make it much harder to quit, so he spends years imprisoned in both body and soul by this addiction. When he finally gains some measure of relief from heroin, he is able to go back to his music and give himself up to it in a way that frees him instead of trapping him.

In the final paragraph, the older brother buys Sonny a drink. As it sits on the top of the piano, the narrator describes it as a "cup of trembling." Since themes of redemption, grace, and sacrifice run through this story, the cup is likely a Biblical reference. In the Bible there are cups of suffering and cups of wrath. Sonny has spent many years full of rage and frustration, but after years of suffering, Sonny has accepted his "cup of trembling" and through playing music he has begun to find grace and peace.

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Personal Reading Journal: “The Flowers” by Alice Walker
13 January 2021

“The Flowers” is a coming-of-age story that illustrates this transition briefly and elegantly. “Coming of age” stories look closely at the time in a child’s life when they begin to pass from childhood to adulthood, and often focus on an incident, usually tragic, when their eyes are opened to the realities of life. A young black girl named Myop, living in the post-Civil War south, begins the story in the carefree, oblivious state of being reserved for children. She doesn’t notice the humbleness of her home, or the fact that pigs are rooting near the source of her family’s drinking water. She goes for a ramble, straying ever farther from home. Then Myop steps on a dead man’s face, an abrupt and gruesome event she takes in with a calm that could be shock or ambivalence. She sees every detail of the man’s decapitated and decomposed corpse, as well as the rotted rope that indicates he was hanged. Has she become inured to violence already, even though she is only ten years old? Perhaps, considering she is a black child living in exceedingly tumultuous times. I think, however, that there is an emphasis on how alone and far from home she is—this time she is facing injustice, cruelty, and horror by herself. As she lays down the flowers she gathered during her journey, I felt that in decorating the murdered man’s grave, she was for the first time seeing her world clearly and letting go of her earlier idealism. As the summer ends, so does her blissful child-like ignorance of the ugliness that exists alongside the beauty of the world.