



Formal Assessment One

Please choose **one** of the follow four prompts.

1. It's been said that human reason is troubled by questions it cannot dismiss, but also cannot answer. So, in a sense, anxiety is just the dizziness of free will. Kant (an eighteenth century Russian-born philosopher) argued that, because we cannot fully know what the consequences of any action will be, the result might be unexpectedly harmful. Therefore, we ought to act to avoid the *known wrong* rather than to avoid a *potential wrong*. However, we know life's much more complex and dirty than that (because of power structures, biases, etc.). Decision-making in life really, then, boils down to a few moments where we declare, "Yes. I will do this" or "No. I will not do this."

Sylvia Plath also addresses this concept in *The Bell Jar*. She writes, "I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was...and another fig was...and another fig was...and another fig was, and another fig was...and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet." She illuminates issues with which we're all faced. Ambivalence—and most importantly—the consequences of inaction.

I'd like you to explore the notion of "decision making" in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Construct an argumentative thesis statement that addresses some of the life-altering decisions made by a character (or characters) in the play. Directly reference the text exactly eight times throughout to evidence your claim. If you'd like to employ external sources to further support your argument, do so minimally.

2. There are plenty of incredibly annoying misconceptions of the term “feminism.” It’s stereotypically (and inaccurately) equated with hating the male gender and hostilely rejecting convention. However, by definition, the word feminism refers to the fundamental belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. Is Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* a feminist text? Construct a thesis statement as it pertains to this question, and vigorously defend. Directly reference the text exactly eight times throughout to evidence your claim. If you’d like to employ external sources to further support your argument, do so minimally. Remember—the text doesn’t come right out and scream overt feministic messages; it’s our job to extract the hidden messages between the lines.
3. It’s hard to dispute the fact that Walter Lee Younger is the play’s protagonist. Even Lorraine Hansberry herself had stated this multiple times. However, she’s dead. The literature, on the other hand, is still very much living and breathing. We’re allowed to play with interpretations, even for the sake of exercise. I want you to feel empowered by this notion. I once had a student argue that Walter Lee Younger’s economic struggles mirrored the struggles of a gay man coming out of the closet, and it was absolutely fantastic. In other words, it’s good to stretch. “X” equals whatever the hell we want it to equal, as long as we back it up with logic, level-headedness, and textual evidence.

This is, of course, the first paper, so let’s stick with the notion of “protagonist” for now. Develop a thesis statement that essentially argues that *another* character (Mama, Ruth, Beneatha, Travis, George, Asagai, Karl Lindner, etc.) is *actually* the play’s main character. Directly reference the text exactly eight times throughout to evidence your claims. And—not dissimilar to the first two options—feel free to employ external courses to further support your argument, but please do so minimally.

4. Construct a completely original thesis statement and exhaustively defend. Directly reference the text exactly eight times throughout to evidence your claim. If you’d like to employ external sources to further support your argument, do so minimally. If you choose this option, I only ask that you get “thesis statement approval” from me before starting. Toss me an email if you’d like to keep the conversation private. I encourage you, though, to use the Questions/Comments/Concerns forum because our conversation may assist another person in class.

Here’s a tip. And this little nugget applies to every paper we write.

Regarding effective literary analysis, the *crumbs* are more important than the *cake* when it comes to *assessment*, *contribution*, and *analysis*. In other words, look closely. The analysis of a single word or a single sentence (or line of dialogue) will ultimately be more effective than the analysis of a paragraph, page, or paraphrased interaction. Specificity is our goal.



*The text,
which we
aim to fully
understand.*

*Our assessment,
contribution, and
analysis, which we
confidently proclaim
to understand.*