

everyday use alice walker sparknotes

everyday use alice walker sparknotes provides an insightful and concise summary of Alice Walker's renowned short story "Everyday Use." This story, rich in cultural and familial themes, explores the complexities of identity, heritage, and the differing perceptions of African American culture within a family. Understanding the characters, plot, and symbolism through a detailed analysis is crucial for grasping the profound messages Walker conveys. This article delves into a comprehensive overview of the story's plot, character analysis, thematic elements, and symbolism. It also highlights the cultural significance and historical context that enrich the narrative. By utilizing everyday use alice walker sparknotes and related study materials, readers and students can better appreciate the nuances of Walker's work and its enduring relevance in literature and cultural studies.

- Plot Summary of Everyday Use
- Character Analysis
- Themes and Motifs
- Symbolism in Everyday Use
- Cultural and Historical Context

Plot Summary of Everyday Use

The plot summary in everyday use alice walker sparknotes outlines the central events of the story, which revolves around a family reunion at the home of Mama, the narrator. The story opens with Mama reflecting on her life and her two daughters, Dee and Maggie. Dee returns home after some

time away, bringing with her a new sense of identity and appreciation for African heritage. However, her views clash with Mama's and Maggie's more practical and traditional understanding of their culture. The story's tension culminates in a confrontation over family heirlooms, particularly quilts made by ancestors, which Dee wishes to claim as artifacts rather than everyday objects.

This conflict serves as the narrative's core, highlighting the differing approaches to heritage within the family. Mama ultimately decides to give the quilts to Maggie, who will use them as intended, symbolizing a deeper connection to heritage. The story ends with Mama feeling a sense of empowerment and clarity about her family's values.

Character Analysis

Everyday use alice walker sparknotes provides detailed insights into the main characters, whose personalities and motivations drive the story's themes.

Mama

Mama, the story's narrator, is a strong, hardworking African American woman who embodies practicality and a grounded understanding of heritage. She is physically robust and emotionally resilient, valuing the everyday use of cultural objects over aesthetic or superficial appreciation. Mama's perspective highlights a lived experience of heritage that contrasts with Dee's more abstract notions.

Dee (Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo)

Dee represents a modern, educated African American who embraces a reclaimed African identity. She has changed her name to reflect this new identity and seeks to preserve cultural artifacts as symbols rather than for practical use. Dee's character is often interpreted as embodying cultural appropriation or a disconnect from authentic tradition, as she prioritizes style and symbolism over function.

Maggie

Maggie is Mama's younger, shy, and scarred daughter. She represents continuity and tradition, embodying a humble and genuine connection to her heritage. Maggie understands the significance of the family quilts and other heirlooms not as mere artifacts but as living parts of her culture, meant to be used and cherished in everyday life.

Themes and Motifs

Everyday use alicé walker sparknotes emphasizes several key themes and motifs that are essential to interpreting the story's meaning.

Heritage and Identity

The central theme revolves around the contrasting interpretations of heritage. Dee's approach views heritage as something to be displayed and admired, while Mama and Maggie see it as a living tradition to be preserved through daily use and memory. This dynamic explores the complexity of African American identity and the struggle between modernity and tradition.

Family and Generational Conflict

The story also explores familial relationships and generational differences. The tensions between Mama, Dee, and Maggie reveal how cultural values and personal identities can diverge within a family, reflecting broader societal changes.

Practicality vs. Aestheticism

A recurring motif is the contrast between practical use and aesthetic appreciation. This is most evident in the dispute over the quilts, symbolizing the different ways culture can be valued.

Symbolism in Everyday Use

Symbolism is a vital component of everyday use in Alice Walker's *Everyday Use*, as many objects and characters carry deeper meanings.

The Quilts

The quilts are the most prominent symbols, representing heritage, family history, and continuity. Made from scraps of clothing worn by ancestors, they embody the lived experiences of generations. Mama's decision to give the quilts to Maggie reflects the value of keeping heritage alive through everyday use rather than mere preservation.

Names and Identity

Dee's name change to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo symbolizes her attempt to reclaim African roots and redefine her identity. However, this act also highlights the tension between external identity and internal cultural understanding.

The House and Environment

Mama's home and its surroundings symbolize stability, tradition, and the reality of everyday life. The simple setting contrasts with Dee's more sophisticated and externalized cultural expression.

Cultural and Historical Context

Understanding the cultural and historical context enriches the interpretation of *Everyday Use* in Alice Walker's story. Written during the 1970s, a time of increased interest in African American identity and heritage, the story reflects the broader Black Arts Movement and the quest for cultural pride and authenticity.

Alice Walker's narrative addresses issues of cultural preservation, the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, and the complexities of African American identity during a period of social change. The story critiques superficial embraces of heritage while affirming the value of lived tradition and familial bonds.

- Reflection of African American struggles with identity
- Influence of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements
- Exploration of cultural authenticity versus appropriation
- Post-Civil Rights era social dynamics

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of 'Everyday Use' by Alice Walker according to SparkNotes?

The central theme of 'Everyday Use' is the conflict between different attitudes toward heritage and cultural identity, highlighting the contrast between practical appreciation and romanticized views of African American heritage.

How does SparkNotes describe the character of Dee in 'Everyday Use' by Alice Walker?

SparkNotes describes Dee as confident, assertive, and somewhat superficial, valuing heritage as a symbol of status rather than for its practical or emotional significance.

What role does the quilt play in 'Everyday Use' as explained by SparkNotes?

According to SparkNotes, the quilt symbolizes the family's heritage and the connection between past and present, representing the practical and lived experience of the family's history.

How does Alice Walker use the character of Mama in 'Everyday Use' as noted in SparkNotes?

Mama is portrayed as a grounded, hardworking woman who values her heritage through everyday use, embodying authenticity and a deep emotional connection to her family's traditions.

What is the significance of the story's setting in 'Everyday Use' in SparkNotes analysis?

SparkNotes points out that the rural Southern setting emphasizes themes of tradition, heritage, and the contrast between urban and rural perspectives on cultural identity.

How does the narrative perspective in 'Everyday Use' influence the story according to SparkNotes?

The first-person narrative perspective allows readers to see the story through Mama's eyes, providing insight into her values and the tension between her daughters' differing attitudes toward heritage.

Additional Resources

1. *Everyday Use by Alice Walker - SparkNotes Study Guide*

This guide provides an in-depth analysis of Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use." It explores the themes of heritage, identity, and family conflict, offering summaries, character descriptions, and critical essays. Ideal for students seeking to understand the deeper meanings behind the narrative and its

cultural context.

2. *The Color Purple by Alice Walker*

A powerful novel that addresses issues of racism, sexism, and resilience through the life of Celie, an African American woman in the early 20th century South. Like "Everyday Use," it explores themes of heritage and self-identity, making it a complementary read to Walker's short stories.

3. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose by Alice Walker*

This collection of essays and reflections delves into African American women's history, creativity, and cultural heritage. It provides insight into the womanist perspective that heavily influences Walker's literary works, including "Everyday Use."

4. *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*

This book offers critical essays on African American women authors, including Alice Walker. It examines themes such as cultural heritage and identity, which are central to "Everyday Use," providing broader literary context.

5. *Roots and Culture: African American Heritage in Literature*

Focusing on the representation of African American heritage in literature, this book discusses how authors like Alice Walker depict cultural identity. It helps readers understand the significance of heritage and tradition in stories like "Everyday Use."

6. *Contemporary African American Fiction: New Critical Essays*

A collection of critical analyses on modern African American literature, featuring discussions on Alice Walker's work. The essays explore themes of family, tradition, and cultural conflict prevalent in "Everyday Use."

7. *Women Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*

This work examines how women writers incorporate cultural heritage and identity into their narratives. It provides a useful framework for understanding the cultural tensions in "Everyday Use."

8. *Short Story Criticism: Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"*

A detailed critical overview focused specifically on "Everyday Use," this book includes various scholarly perspectives that analyze the story's themes, characters, and symbolism, enriching the reader's comprehension.

9. *Heritage and Memory in African American Literature*

This book explores how African American authors address heritage and memory in their works. It situates "Everyday Use" within a larger tradition of literature that grapples with the complexities of cultural identity and familial legacy.

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