
The Problem of Identity in “Sonny’s Blues” and ‘A Raisin in the Sun’

It’s funny how things that might seem to lack importance and worth, when instantaneously taken away, can cause an overwhelming rush through one’s body as if they were being trampled by a thousand-pound cyclops out of nowhere. Erick Erickson, a psychologist, once said, “In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.” A human and their identity is equal to a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It consists of many parts that are held together to make up one's exclusive characteristics. Throughout the world, many live in the fear of unacceptance, resulting in segregation. Evidence is shown through the short literary works “Sonny’s Blues” and ‘A Raisin in the Sun’. It is seen through the African American literary works by various authors that one’s identity is uncovered by accepting one's heritage in the process of overcoming the fear that they will not be accepted by the white community.

Characters in African American literature are required to experience new things when in search to find one's heritage. In “Sonny’s Blues,” the main character, Sonny, attempts to escape the inner chaos in his life, by turning to heroin. Sonny, however, realizes that drugs will not solve his problems, so he searches for an alternative throughout the story. He finds that being a jazz pianist can help him escape the pain and loss in his life. The narrator proudly says, “Sonny’s fingers filled the air with life. But that life contained so many others”. Sonny found that though his heritage was full of brokenness, he can accept it, which inspires him to try new things, including being a jazz pianist.

In A Raisin in the Sun, Beneatha is constantly trying new things as she searches for her identity. Along her search, she picks up multiple boyfriends, clothes, music, and African dances. Beneatha is not proud of her heritage and fails to recognize her identity, but as she begins experiencing new things and hobbies, she realizes her family's worth. In doing this, she stops running away from the unjust problems before her and faces the fear of unacceptance from the white community, resulting in Beneatha finding her identity through new experiences and acknowledging her family’s heritage.

In conclusion, one’s identity is uncovered by accepting one's heritage in the process of overcoming the fear that they will not be accepted by the white community, seen throughout the African American literary works by various authors. Even though colored people are constantly neglected and condemned, it fails to stop them from recognizing their heritage and discovering their identity. Sean Covey, an American business executive, and author, wisely says, “If you

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base your identity on having friends, being accepted, and being popular, you may find yourself compromising your standards or changing them every weekend to accommodate your friends.” These African American works allow readers to contemplate that no matter the obstacle or suffering in one’s life, anyone can find their identity by experiencing new things and exposing the past when in search for one’s identity. Find and stick with a true identity like the peanut butter sticks with the jelly.

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