Clybourne Park
By Bruce Norris

Play Guide
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Clybourne Park Play Guide written and compiled by Katherine Monberg, ATC Literary Assistant. Discussion questions and activities provided by April Jackson, Education Manager, Amber Tibbitts and Bryanna Patrick, Education Associates.

Support for ATC’s education and community programming has been provided by:

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Arizona Theatre Company is a professional, not-for-profit theatre company. This means all of our artists, administrators and production staff are paid professionals, and the income we receive from ticket sales and contributions goes right back into our budget to create our work, rather than to any particular person as a profit.

Each season, ATC employs hundreds of actors, directors and designers from all over the country to create the work you see on stage. In addition, ATC currently employs about 100 staff members in our production shops and administrative offices in Tucson and Phoenix during our season. Among these people are carpenters, painters, marketing professionals, fundraisers, stage directors, computer specialists, sound and light board operators, tailors, costume designers, box office agents, stage crew – the list is endless – representing an amazing range of talents and skills.

We are also supported by a Board of Trustees, a group of business and community leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to assist the theatre in financial and legal matters, advise in marketing and fundraising, and help represent the theatre in our community.

Roughly 150,000 people attend our shows every year, and several thousands of those people support us with charitable contributions in addition to purchasing their tickets. Businesses large and small, private foundations and the city and state governments also support our work financially.

All of this is in support of our vision and mission:

Our vision is to touch lives through the power of theatre.

Our mission is to create professional theatre that continually strives to reach new levels of artistic excellence and that resonates locally, in the state of Arizona and throughout the nation. In order to fulfill our mission, the theatre produces a broad repertoire ranging from classics to new works, engages artists of the highest caliber, and is committed to assuring access to the broadest spectrum of citizens.
INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

Home is where the heart – and history – is. Jokes fly and hidden agendas unfold as two vastly different generations of characters tip-toe the delicate dance of social politics. Pitting race against real estate, two seminal events – 50 years apart – are at the crux of the conflict in the same North Chicago house. This rich and lightning quick 2011 Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy is every bit as provocative as it is entertaining as it cleverly spins the events of A Raisin in the Sun into an unforgettable new story about race and real estate in America.

SYNOPSIS  Please note: This synopsis contains spoilers.

ACT I  In 1959, Russ Stoller sits in his house in Clybourne Park, a neighborhood of Chicago. In two days, Russ and his wife, Bev, are moving to Glen Meadow, a suburb outside of the city, where Russ will begin work at his new office. Bev and their African-American housemaid, Francine, pack some final items. Since the death of Russ and Bev’s son, Kenneth, a Korean War veteran, the home (and the neighborhood as a whole) has been a source of pain for the couple. Bev hopes the move will be a fresh start. Jim, their minister, arrives to console Russ, whose anger and hopelessness worry his wife. Russ, however, tells the minister to leave him alone. Before Jim can leave, Albert, Francine’s husband, arrives to collect her. He volunteers to help with a heavy trunk that needs to be carried downstairs. Karl Lindner, a representative of the neighborhood community association, arrives with his wife, Betsy. Jim brings Francine into the conversation, asking her whether her black family would be happy moving into a white neighborhood, but Russ declares the conversation over: the sale of the house is final. Despite Karl’s arguments, Russ refuses to budge. Claiming he has a responsibility to protect the community, Karl threatens to scare the buyers away by telling them why they are getting such a good deal on the property – because Kenneth committed suicide in the house. The situation turns violent, and everyone leaves. Russ tells Bev that he will bury the trunk in the backyard.

ACT II  In 2009, Steve and his pregnant wife, Lindsey, meet with their lawyer, Kathy (the daughter of Betsy and Karl), in the same Clybourne Park house where Russ and Bev once lived. They are joined by Kevin and his wife, Lena (the great-niece of Lena “Mama” Younger from Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun), and Tom from the neighborhood Property Owners Association, to discuss a petition that protests Steve and Lindsey’s proposed renovation of the house. Steve and Lindsey are moving into Clybourne Park from Glen Meadow and plan to build a larger house on the property. The Property Owners Association, contacted by a concerned Lena and Kevin, wants to ensure that the new home is consistent with the “historically significant” neighborhood’s aesthetic. While the group attempts to wade through the legalese, they are
interrupted both by cell phone calls and Dan, a handyman who is working on digging up a dead crepe myrtle tree in the backyard. Lena finally loses her patience, feeling that she is the only one taking the matter at hand seriously. She takes great pride in Clybourne Park’s history of African-American struggle. This house in particular has personal resonance for her, as her great-aunt lived here and was the first person of color to move into the neighborhood. A heated argument about racism, reverse racism, gentrification, sexism, and marginalization ensues, during which Dan enters dragging a trunk he has unearthed beneath the tree. The squabble succeeds in offending everyone, and they all depart. Dan manages to get the trunk open. He finds a letter written by Kenneth to his parents. As Dan reads the letter, 2009 dissolves into the day that Kenneth committed suicide. Kenneth writes a letter to his parents as Francine arrives to start the housework; his mother, who overslept, comes down from bed to reassure her son that the world is going to change for the better.

— Written by Lena Hoffman, reprinted with permission from Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

### MEET THE CREATORS

**BRUCE NORRIS** (Playwright – *Clybourne Park*) is a 1982 graduate of Northwestern University with a degree in theater. Norris began his career as an actor, appearing in productions at Victory Gardens and the Goodman, as well as on Broadway in Neil Simon’s *Biloxi Blues*. He also appeared in film, playing the stuttering teacher in 1999’s *The Sixth Sense*. In the late 1990s, Norris committed himself to playwriting full time, moving from Chicago to New York. In addition to *Clybourne Park*, Norris has written *The Infidel* (2000), *Purple Heart* (2002), *We All Went Down to Amsterdam* (2003), *The Pain and the Itch* (2004), and *The Unmentionables* (2006), all of which had their premieres at Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre. His newest play, *A Parallelogram*, premiered there in July 2011. His work has also been seen at Playwrights Horizons (New York), Lookingglass Theatre (Chicago), Philadelphia Theatre Company, Woolly Mammoth Theatre (Washington, D.C.), Staatstheater Mainz (Germany), and The Galway Festival (Ireland), among others. He is the recipient of the Steinberg Playwright Award (2009), The Whiting Foundation Prize for Drama (2006), as well as two Joseph Jefferson Awards (Chicago) for Best New Work. As an actor he can be seen in the films *A Civil Action*, *The Sixth Sense*, and the recent *All Good Things*.

— Reprinted with permission from Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

**LORRAINE HANSBERRY** (Playwright – *A Raisin in the Sun*) was born on May 19, 1930, the youngest of four children. Her father, Carl, worked as a real estate broker and her mother as a schoolteacher. In 1938, the Hansberry family moved to the Washington Park Subdivision, an all-white neighborhood in Chicago, and was attacked, often violently, by their new neighbors for their refusal to acquiesce to the residential covenant that forbade African-Americans from taking up residence there. The neighborhood’s legal efforts to force the Hansberrys to relocate eventually made its way to the Supreme Court as *Hansberry v. Lee*, which ruled in favor of the Hansberry family. Hansberry attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she originally intended to become a painter. After changing her major to writing, she withdrew from the university in 1950 and moved to New York City to pursue her writing career.

Once in New York, Hansberry began taking writing classes at the New School for Social Research and worked as a writer and editor for Paul Robeson’s progressive black newspaper *Freedom*. In 1953, Hansberry left her job at the paper and married Robert B. Nemiroff, a Jewish songwriter, whom she had met on a picket line protesting discrimination at NYU. She worked as a waitress and cashier while writing in her spare time, and by 1956 had left her jobs to devote her full attention to her writing. During this period, she authored the play *Crystal Stair*, later renamed *A Raisin in the Sun*, from a line in a Langston Hughes poem. The play opened on Broadway in 1959 to huge success, and was followed by a film version starring Sidney Poitier in 1961. Her success was slightly shadowed by bad publicity that forced her family to leave Chicago for Los Angeles, and by marital problems that led her to obtain a quiet divorce in Mexico in 1964.
Hansberry’s second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*, was completed in 1964, and remains her only other drama to be produced onstage during her lifetime. While the play was in production, Hansberry became increasingly ill, spending more and more time in hospitals, and she died of pancreatic cancer on January 12, 1965, at the young age of 34 – passing away on the same night that her second production closed.

Several of Hansberry’s writings continued to be developed and adapted after her death by her former husband, Robert Neminoﬀ, acting as her literary executor. *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, adapted from many of her writings, was produced Off-Broadway in 1969. *Les Blancs*, a drama set in Africa and originally drafted by Hansberry as early as 1960, was further developed and presented in New York City in 1970, touring nationally for the next two years. Finally, Neminoﬀ and Charlotte Zaltzberg adapted Hansberry’s first play into a musical, *Raisin*, which won the 1973 Tony Award for Best Musical, and was revived in 1981.

Though the years of her life span only a short time, the lasting impact of Lorraine Hansberry’s voice continues to resonate as a part of the base that has formed American drama as we recognize it today. Her work in civil rights activism and anti-discrimination discourse in America continues to impact the scholars and audiences of the present, reaching us even now through the pages of Bruce Norris’s *Clybourne Park*.

### MEET THE CHARACTERS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ACTOR</th>
<th>ACT I</th>
<th>ACT II</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee E. Ernst</td>
<td><strong>Russ</strong>, owner of the house for sale</td>
<td><strong>Dan</strong>, a handyman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenny McKnight</td>
<td><strong>Bev</strong>, married to Russ</td>
<td><strong>Kathy</strong>, Steve and Lindsey’s lawyer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martí Gobel</td>
<td><strong>Francine</strong>, Russ and Bev’s maid</td>
<td><strong>Lena</strong>, married to Kevin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anthony Fleming III</td>
<td><strong>Albert</strong>, married to Francine</td>
<td><strong>Kevin</strong>, married to Lena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Goodman</td>
<td><strong>Jim</strong>, Russ and Bev’s minister</td>
<td><strong>Tom</strong>, neighborhood association representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerard Neugent</td>
<td><strong>Karl</strong>, neighborhood association representative</td>
<td><strong>Steve</strong>, buying the house, married to Lindsey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greta Wohlrabe</td>
<td><strong>Betsy</strong>, married to Karl</td>
<td><strong>Lindsey</strong>, buying the house, married to Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor Rascher</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Kenneth</strong>, the son of Bev and Russ</td>
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Costume rendering of Russ by Costume Designer Rachel Healy.

Costume rendering of Bev by Costume Designer Rachel Healy.

Costume rendering of Kevin by Costume Designer Rachel Healy.
Clybourne Park is a response to one of the most celebrated plays in American drama: *A Raisin in the Sun*. Playwright Bruce Norris directly connects the two plays. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the Younger family buys a house in the Clybourne Park neighborhood; *Clybourne Park* takes place in that house.

When Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway in 1959, it became the first play by an African-American woman to do so. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best New Play, and was nominated for four Tony Awards. On the 25th anniversary of the play, *The New York Times* called *A Raisin in the Sun* the play that “changed American theater forever.”

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, five family members share a small, three-room apartment – Lena (Mama) Younger, her daughter Beneatha, her son Walter Lee, Walter’s wife Ruth, and their son Travis. When Mama receives a life insurance check after her husband’s death, each member of the family argues it should be used to further their own individual dreams. Eventually, Mama decides to use the money as a down payment for a house with enough room for the entire family. With their own house, she sees a bright future for her family.

The house is located in Clybourne Park, an entirely white neighborhood. When the residents of Clybourne Park learn that an African-American family bought the house, they send Karl Lindner, a representative from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, to visit the family. He offers them money in exchange for not moving into the neighborhood. However, Lindner fails to convince the family, and, refusing the money, the optimistic Youngers move to Clybourne Park.

In the original *New York Times* review of the play, Brook Atkinson noted:

“In *A Raisin in the Sun*...Lorraine Hansberry touches on some serious problems. No doubt, her feelings about them are as strong as anyone’s. But she has not tipped her play to prove one thing or another. The play is honest. She has told the inner as well as the outer truth about a Negro family in the South Side of Chicago at the present time...That is Miss Hansberry’s personal contribution to an explosive situation in which simple honesty is the most difficult thing in the world. And also the most illuminating.”

Lorraine Hansberry believed in finding the universal through the specific, saying, “one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that, in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific.” In a 1961 interview on *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry elaborated:

“I don’t think there is anything more universal in the world than man’s oppression of man. This is what most great dramas have been about, no matter what the device of telling it is. We tend to think, because it is so immediate with us in the United States, that this is a unique human question where white people do not like black people...but the fact of the matter is wherever there are men, there are oppressed people and...to the extent that my work is a successful piece of drama it makes the reality of this oppression true.”

Since its premiere in 1959, the play has been translated into thirty languages. The play became a film in 1961, starring Sidney Poitier and most of the original Broadway cast. Since then, the play has also been made into two made-for-TV movies, once in 1989 starring Danny Glover, and again in 2008, starring Sean Combs.

— Written by Lena Hoffmann, reprinted with permission from Milwaukee Repertory Theater.
Hansberry’s play drew inspiration from her own childhood growing up on Chicago’s South Side and moving into an entirely white neighborhood at a young age. Many neighborhoods had racially restrictive covenants, agreements written into the property deeds binding the owners to not sell or rent their property to specific minority groups.

In 1937, Lorraine’s father, Carl, a realtor active in the NAACP, bought a house in Washington Park, a “restricted” all-white neighborhood of Woodlawn. Like most of Chicago, the neighborhood had estate covenants prohibiting sales to African-Americans. The specific covenant in Washington Park stated, “no part of said premises shall in no manner be used or occupied by a negro or negroes.” The covenant did specify that African-Americans could be chauffeurs or house servants, as long as they did not own the house. Anyone who signed the covenant covering the same land in the neighborhood could enforce these covenants. The Kenwood Improvement Association filed a mandatory injunction for the family to vacate their home. With support of the NAACP, Carl Hansberry challenged the injunction and took the case all the way to the Supreme Court in a case bearing the Hansberry family name. Hansberry’s lawyers won the case when the court rejected the specific covenant impacting the Hansberry family, but did not achieve a ruling on the constitutionality of restrictive residential covenants. The Supreme Court eventually ruled racially restrictive covenants a violation of the fourteenth amendment eight years later in *Shelley vs. Kraemer* when an African-American couple purchased a home in a restricted neighborhood in St. Louis.

— Written by Lena Hoffmann, reprinted with permission from Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

“My father was typical of a generation of Negroes who believed that the “American way” could successfully be made to work to democratize the United States. Thus, twenty-five years ago, he spent a small personal fortune, his considerable talents, and many years of his life fighting, in association with NAACP attorneys, Chicago’s “restrictive covenants” in one of this nation’s ugliest ghettos.

The fight also required our family to occupy disputed property in a hellishly hostile “white neighborhood” in which, literally, howling mobs surrounded our house. One of their missiles almost took the life of the then eight-year-old signer of this letter. My memories of this “correct” way of fighting white supremacy in America include being spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school. And I also remember my desperate and courageous mother, patrolling our house all night with a loaded German Luger, doggedly guarding her four children, while my father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington court.”

— Lorraine Hansberry, letter to the editor, New York Times, April 23, 1964
I saw *A Raisin in the Sun* as a film in probably seventh grade. Interestingly our Social Studies teacher was showing it to a class of all white students who lived in an independent school district, the boundaries of which had been formed specifically to prevent our being integrated into the Houston school district and being bused to other schools with black students.

So I don’t know whether our teacher was just obtuse, or crafty and subversive, but she was showing us a movie that basically in the end – because Karl doesn’t come in until the second act – is really pointing a finger at us and saying we are those people. So I watch it at twelve years old and I could realize even then that I’m Karl Lindner. To see that when you’re a kid and to realize that you’re the villain has an impact.

For years I thought I wanted to play Karl Lindner but then as time went on I thought it’s really an interesting story to think about the conversation that was going on in the white community about the Younger family moving into Clybourne Park. It percolated for many years and that’s how I ended up writing this play.

— Bruce Norris in an interview with Rebecca Rugg, Artistic Producer at Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

It was very important to me to depict the people in 1959 as people with good intentions. They’re not racists in the KKK way – they’re people who think that they’re doing the right thing to protect their neighborhood and their children and their real estate values. But that’s a form of self-interest that has as its unfortunate byproduct a really racist outcome.

— Bruce Norris in an interview with Kurt Andersen at Studio 360.

Audiences have this sort of childlike need to identify who their hero is in a story and to root for them and get behind them, and one of my favorite things to do as a writer is to confound that impulse.

— Bruce Norris in an interview with Kurt Andersen at Studio 360.

Pretty much every big city has some version of this. Even where I grew up in Houston, it’s a similar thing. There is no actual Clybourne Park in Chicago. Or, to be strictly accurate, there is a playground called Clybourn [sic] Park on Clybourn Avenue, but there is no neighborhood called Clybourne [or Clybourn] Park. That is something Lorraine Hansberry made up. If you want to have an example of the kind of neighborhood we’re talking about, it would be Wicker Park or Ukrainian Village in Chicago. More Wicker Park. Wicker Park is a neighborhood that was mostly Latino for about 25 years, and it’s very close to where Cabrini-Green used to be. Cabrini-Green was a big, dangerous housing project, which is about three or four blocks from where Steppenwolf Theatre is now.

— Bruce Norris speaking with Beatrice Basso of American Conservatory Theater.
COMMUNITY

*Clybourne Park* asks the question, what makes a community? How do people join together with a common purpose of living together and supporting each other? Is that even possible? In Act I, the character of Karl Lindner says “fitting into a community is really what it all comes down to.”

GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification is defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.”

The second act of *Clybourne Park* tackles the polarizing debate surrounding gentrification. For some, gentrification means the revitalization of inner city neighborhoods and the creation of new buildings in place of vacant lots, new business selling an increased variety of goods, and improvements to public works like sidewalks. However, to others, gentrification means the displacement of neighborhood residents due to rising costs of living and property values. Does a neighborhood lose its historical identity when it becomes a more affluent area?

RACIAL COMEDY

Is America ready for racial comedy? Bruce Norris asks this question in *Clybourne Park*, sparing almost no group the punch line. Juxtaposing the comedy of 1959 with 2009, Norris emphasizes America’s complicated history with racial jokes.

The 1960s marked a significant shift in racial comedy — a transition from blatantly racist humor in the tradition of blackface minstrel shows, to racial humor in which exposing people’s prejudice is the punch line.

What is it that racial jokes do in contemporary society? Perhaps, as Emily Hoffman comments in American Conservatory Theater’s *Words on Plays*, “laughter is a release valve, and in the context of tense race relations it can provide just the sort of breathing room needed to wrestle with issues that would otherwise be too difficult or too uncomfortable to touch.”
POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Much of the comedy in *Clybourne Park* comes from the need to be politically correct and what happens when characters cross that line. With comic moments about race, gender, disability, sexuality, etc., Bruce Norris reveals a world in which political correctness stifles conversation and yet protects people. Is political correctness necessary or does it inhibit people’s ability to talk to one another?

In an interview with American Conservatory Theater, Bruce Norris commented, “theoretically [political correctness] is a step. So, now that we’ve all been very careful, you think that after some time goes by things will be normalized. We white people (because we are the oppressors) sit around going, “Is it time now? Has enough time elapsed?”…But of course that never happens, so white people feel resentful because we realize the past is going to hang around our necks like millstones forever. There is no end. Even if we gave reparation payments, still it wouldn’t be enough.”

— Written by Lena Hoffmann, reprinted with permission from Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

**EVENTS OF THE 1950s**

**1950**
- First modern credit card created.
- First organ transplant.
- First “Peanuts” cartoon strip by Charles Schulz.
- Senator Joseph McCarthy begins hunt for Communists.
- Korean War begins.
- The Rotary Club is founded.

**1951**
- Hydrogen bomb constructed.
- South African citizens carry mandatory ID cards declaring their race.
- Color television marketed in the U.S.
- Winston Churchill wins election to become Prime Minister of UK.
- President Truman signs peace treaty with Japan, officially ending WWII.

**1952**
- Seat belts introduced in cars.
- England’s King George VI dies.
- Jacques Cousteau discovers a ship from ancient Greece.
- The Great Smog of 1952.
- Polio vaccine invented.
- Chicago declared the second largest city in U.S.

**1953**
- Soviet leader Joseph Stalin dies.
- DNA is discovered.
- Mt. Everest climbed by Hillary and Norgay.
- Julius and Ethel Rosenberg executed for espionage.
- Queen Elizabeth II coronated (UK).
1954
- Cigarettes first declared to cause cancer.
- Launch of first atomic submarine.
- Racial segregation declared unconstitutional in U.S.

1955
- Emmett Till murdered in Mississippi, providing one spark for the Civil Rights Movement.
- Disneyland opens in California.
- James Dean is killed in a car accident.
- McDonald’s is founded.
- Rosa Parks refuses to give up her bus seat.
- Warsaw Pact is signed.

1956
- Grace Kelly weds Prince Rainier III of Monaco.
- Hungarian Revolution takes place.
- Khrushchev denounces Stalin.
- Suez Crisis.
- Velcro is invented.
- TV remote control is invented.

1957
- Publication of The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss.
- European Economic Community formed.
- Soviet Union launches the satellite Sputnik.

1958
- Boris Pasternak refuses Nobel Prize for Literature for Doctor Zhivago, under pressure to do so from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Union of Soviet Writers.
- Chinese leader Mao Zedong launches the “Great Leap Forward.”
- The Hope Diamond is donated to the Smithsonian Institute.
- NASA is founded.
- LEGO's are created.

1959
- Fidel Castro becomes dictator of Cuba.
- International treaty makes Antarctica a scientific preserve.
- Nixon and Khrushchev engage in Kitchen Debate.
- The Sound of Music opens on Broadway.
- The Barbie Doll is created.
- A Raisin in the Sun opens on Broadway and in London.

EVENTS OF THE 2000s

2000
- Global stock market crash due to dotcom bubble.
- Millennium bug proves to be a myth.

2001
- Terrorists fly hijacked passenger planes into the WTC and Pentagon.
- President George W. Bush announces War on Terror.
- Enron scandal breaks.

2003
- US and UK lead forces in Afghanistan against the Taliban.

2004
- Chicago's Millennium Park Opens.
- A Raisin in the Sun revived on Broadway.
2005
– Suicide bombers attack London transport.
– Kyoto protocol on climate change unsigned by U.S.
– White Sox sweep the World Series.
– Hurricane Katrina.

2007
– Chicago wins right to represent U.S. in bid for 2016 Olympics.

2008
– Barack Obama elected President of the United States.
– World Banking Crisis affects major banks and mortgage lending.

2009
– Barack Obama wins Nobel Peace Prize.
– Earthquake in Haiti.

CRITICAL EVENTS TOWARD CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE U.S.

1863
– Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation frees the slaves in the United States.

1896
– The Supreme Court upholds segregation with the “separate but equal” verdict of Plessy v. Ferguson.

1909
– NAACP is founded (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

1918
– The beginning of the Harlem Renaissance.

1919
– Race riots erupt throughout the U.S.

1940
– Lorraine Hansberry’s father, Carl, wins Supreme Court verdict in Hansberry v. Lee, which prohibits a Chicago neighborhood from barring African-American tenants and homeowners.

1946
– Supreme Court eliminates segregation on public transportation.

1947
– Jackie Robinson becomes the first African-American Major League Baseball player.

1948
– U.S. Armed Forces integrated by an executive order from President Truman.

1949
– Supreme Court declares segregated neighborhoods unconstitutional.
1954
– Supreme Court overturns “separate but equal” doctrine in Brown v. Board of Education.

1955
– Rosa Parks arrested in Montgomery, AL, for refusal to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, resulting in a bus boycott.

1957
– President Eisenhower sends the U.S. Army to protect the “Little Rock Nine” after the governor of Arkansas refuses to desegregate Little Rock High School.

1959
– A Raisin in the Sun opens on Broadway.

1962
– James Meredith denied admission to the University of Mississippi, based on race.

1963
– Civil rights March on Washington, D.C.

1964
– Martin Luther King, Jr. wins Nobel Peace Prize.
– Race riots in Harlem.

1965
– Malcolm X assassinated.
– Voting Rights Bill passed.
– Watts race riots in Los Angeles.

1967
– Black Power conference in Newark, NJ.
– Race riots in Detroit, Cleveland, and Newark.

1968
– Civil Rights Act of 1968 criminalizes racial discrimination in housing.
– Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated.

1969
– First Afro-American and Black Studies programs instituted at American universities.

1972
– Shirley Chisholm becomes the first major-party black candidate for President of the United States, and the first woman to run for the Democratic presidential nomination.

1983
– President Reagan signs legislation declaring Martin Luther King, Jr. Day the third Monday in January.
– Alice Walker’s The Color Purple wins the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

1992
– Riots in Los Angeles after a jury acquits an L.A. police officer after the videotaped beating of Rodney King.

2008
– Barack Obama becomes the first African-American to be elected as President of the United States.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would the playwright choose to double-cast this play? What effect does it have to see the actors from Act I playing different characters 50 years later in Act II?

2. In addition to seeing the same actors in each act, there are also several repeating themes and mirrored sections of dialogue between Act I and Act II, such as the examples listed below. What comment do you think the playwright is making by repeating these conversation topics?

   **Geography**

   Act I: “Ulan Bator!...capitol of Mongolia.”

   Act II: “What’s the capitol of Morocco?”

   What significance do these seemingly irrelevant conversations about the world at large have, considering the play’s themes of place, history, and identity?

   **Children**

   In both acts, characters often use their children’s future as an argument in their favor. But are their decisions and actions really serving to aid their children’s futures?

   “You can’t live in a principle.”

   This line is repeated by two different characters 50 years apart. What is the importance of this line? Do you agree with the sentiment? Has the relevance of that sentiment changed over time?

3. In Act II, the character of Steve says, “The history of America is the history of private property.” What do you think he means? Do you agree or disagree? How do the ideas of ownership and personal identity overlap in our current society?

4. “There is power in making people uncomfortable. There is power in provoking.” Do characters in this play wield that power effectively? Does the playwright? How does humor help us examine difficult and controversial issues? Does humor diminish the impact of important conversations?

5. At the end of Act II, Bev says, “...I really believe things are about to change for the better.” She says this in a flashback and so the last lines of the play actually precede the play’s action. Do you think things did change for the better, or is this the playwright commenting on the irony of change?

6. The set transitions from 1959 to 2009 in front of the audience during intermission. Would the effect have been the same if that transition occurred out of sight of the audience? What comment, if any, does this make about the passage of time?
1. Bruce Norris’s *Clybourne Park* takes the characters and events from Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and creates the next part of their story: Act I takes place in 1959 – contemporaneous with the events in Hansberry’s play – and Act II in 2009. Imagine the neighborhood of Clybourne Park in the year 2059. How would the area have changed? How would American society have changed? Would conversations and opinions about race and ethnicity still be what they are today? Write an outline for a hypothetical Act III of *Clybourne Park*. Include a description of the new characters and how they are related (or not) to the characters we’ve met already.

2. Characters in *Clybourne Park* “talk around” many sensitive subjects. Group your students into teams and see if they can get their teammates to guess words from the list below (a la games like *Taboo* or *$10,000 Pyramid*) without using any part or form of the word itself:

- husband, wife, family, house
- home, suburb, neighborhood, race
- segregation, ghetto, history, culture
- happiness, time, American Dream, respect
- love, racism, ignorance, Negro
- prejudice, stereotype, poverty, wealth

3. Ask students to brainstorm a list of groups they feel a part of (racially, ethnically, geographically, socially, etc.). Then ask them to brainstorm a list of groups they don’t personally identify with; is there any overlap? Have them create a visual representation of their lists, paying attention to any overlap they might have discovered. These visuals could be diagrams or charts or illustrations and can be as abstract or concrete as students wish.