Rural Life Of An African American Family In Everyday Use

'Everyday Use,' a short story that depicts the rural life of an African American family written by Alice Walker in 1973, was written to address the life of a young girl attempting to be something that she is not. In 'Everyday Use,' Dee, an older educated sister, wanted to stray away from her family lifestyle to become like the outside society and travel around the world. Maggie, the simple sister, stayed at home and followed the traditional ways of her family. Being the only educated person in the family, Dee treated her family as someone who is beneath her, which allowed Mama her mom to give the quilt to Maggie. Even though it is should be passed down to the oldest sibling in the family. No matter how Dee tried to distance herself from her family and their ways, she couldn't; she even tried to change her name. However, she finally learned that no matter how she wants to be in the same place as the white people in her community, home is where she has accepted the most. The story teaches us we can never walk away from what we are born in.

The characteristics of Dee and Maggie are both vastly different. Right from the start of the story, readers could understand that Dee has many traits that her younger sister doesn't possess. The mother describes Dee as the daughter with more beautiful hair, a fuller figure, and has a lighter complexion than Maggie (Walker 487). Based on the comparison between the two sisters, Maggie is seen as the previously victimized and highly silenced (Whitsitt 442). According to Munir in 'The Defense Mechanism and the Core Issues of Dee in Alice Walker's Everyday Use,' Munir believes that since dee is the only family with a degree, her achievement, her light skin color, and her difference pushes her to dangle between her old and new life' (293). Dee is also pictured as the sister with no hesitation towards anything and a strong ambition. In life, being self-centered could be stemmed from deep issues in our life. Farell stated that 'Dee is seen as self-centered and determined, which urged her mom to made her see the wrongs of her older daughter finally. Denial happens when someone believes that the problem never happened or occurred (Munir 292), which was what mama was doing towards Dee. According to Dee's action, Munir sees it as a way of self-defense mechanism. Because Dee's physical appearance is different from her family with her lighter complexion and her education, she felt she would be abandoned. She fears to be close to people, which is why she built a wall around her (293). That wall occurred as a result of the bond between Maggie and her mom. Because of Maggie's accident, she believes all of what happened wouldn't have happened. She blames everything on her physical appearance 'leads to an important question, and that is if she would have been saved from the fire instead of Maggie, then she would be in the same situation as Maggie.' Readers are able to conclude from Dee's point of view that the deeper connection between Maggie and their mom is because of Maggie's inability to go and explore the outside world.

The effect of black feminism has shown that black women are having the qualities as their male counterparts. In “Alice Walker’s ‘Everyday Use.”Tuten explains “In part, then Mama has come to define herself in terms of her failure to meet the standard of what Lindsey Tucker calls a “basically white middle-class identity”-the white male-dominated system portrayed in the television show” (Tuten 46). Showing that the society created a standard that puts white women as being superior to black. In “Everyday Use”, Maggie exudes her feminism through her affectionate heart for her mother. Dee is still looking for her identity, which pursued her to take the same identity that the society has upon beauty, which cause her to create her own

feminism. In “Patches :Quilts and community in Alice Walker’s ‘Everyday Use” Baker qoutes “Assured by the makers of American fashion that black is currently beautiful, she has conformed her own style to that notion” (Pierc-Baker 48). Dee’s mom is the “big boned woman with rough man-working hands” (Walker 1973). Dee’s mom struggles to find her own sense of feminism, she feels likes Dee shames her appearance. She worries that the type of mom Dee would like should be like what is shown on tv, since she is not thin and not knowledge about the outer world. “Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort” (Walker 1973). This was the period in which individuals fought against segregation and discrimination. Blacks in general wanted to discover their history and would like to not be associated with the American ways with the bitterness it has created towards them (Whitsitt 2000). Dee’s mom turning point came at a dire time in “Everyday use”. Being oppressed by her own though allows her older daughter to do what she’s fit. Mama final courageous acts to stand up for heself ties her closely to Dee (Farell 184). Farell stated that Mama behaving like Dee, with her refusal to back down with Dee denunciation of her name. By rejecting Wangero, Mama accepts Maggie, throughout the story Mama see Maggie as a disappointment by her description of her. Mama is aware of Maggie condition that it’s cause of the fire in which she has no control over, which causes her not recognize the strength her younger daughter has had this whole time. Farell shows the turning point in mama as a sign from God “Just like when I’m in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and hout”(58). That was when Mamr “snatched the quilts out of miss wangero’s hands and dumped them into Maggies’s lap. (Farell 184). Walker shows that Mama’s moment of triumph happened when she is able to balance the different types of heritage that represents her two daughters.. At the end mama combines Maggies’s respect for culture with Dee’s pride and ability to never back down, which walker deems necessary if social change is to occur.

The main conflict in “Everyday use” came from their struggle of their heritage. African American culture are truly valued above all else, it’s what keeps them close to their ancestors. This was when African Americans were attempting to characterize their own personalities in social terms. Walker focuses her main interest into Africanism as a concept. An example in “Everyday Use” is when Dee came out of a car dressed in traditional African dress, where she went to go announce to her mom that she’s changing her name to Wanger(Cowart, 172). As a reader, it should be clear that Dee changing her name is an attempt to leave her cultural heritage being. “I couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me” (Walker 488). Maggie and her mom were more connected to their roots unlike Dee (Wangero). She chooses to show her appreciation to her heritage by acknowledging her the past but not her ancestors who paved the way for herself and her family. Dee allows her action to cloud her judgment of what family is and causes her the loss of the quilt. The quilt in the story is the most important object that can reunite the family together, which is essential for the reader to understand the reason behind, and it is meaning. In 'Walker's 'Everyday Use': Destroying to Save: Idealism and Pragmatism in Alice Walker's,' Joe Sarnowski describes the quilt as a generation property that's passed down from their ancestors. Moreover, it represents the struggles their ancestors from the slavery and civil war period up until their present times 'The quilt 'represents' herstory, history, and tradition, binding women, and men, to the past and the past to the present' (283). According to Sarnowski, Mama was significantly invested in the quilt is in their family and being passed down unto the right person. Mama knew that passing the quilt unto Dee will not have the effect she would like, which made her gave the quilt to Maggie. Dee's obsession with the outside world causes herself to be isolated from her family, which causes her the loss of the quilt. Dee's detachment from her life causes her to see what life has to offer. This is not a bad thing because it is in human nature to continue evolving. Sarnowski explains that even though

Dee's view makes her mom and her sister sees that she does not care about where she is from and why their ancestor's ways are vital to them. She did some things that urges African Americans to try to step foot outside into the world and try to make sure the world knows how much they value their ways (Sarnowski 278). She is a person that would like the world to know how proud their heritage is to them, but her family would like to keep that secret. David Cowart points out in his article, 'Heritage and Deracination in Walker's 'Everyday Use' that 'African Americans who risk deracination in their quest for personal authenticity' (183). Readers can understand the reasons behind Dee's actions. The story will leave the readers a better understanding of Mama's decision and the reason why Dee is facing isolation from her own family and race.

The short story Alice Walker wrote moved faster before it’s time. Based on the characters it would have been easy for the readers to ignore their heritage and the lies they hold dear. Alice Walker illustrated the ignorance of not understanding one’s heritage by using the Dee, her mom and Maggie as an example. Alice Walker is clear in guiding the reader in through the understanding of using names, heirlooms for better connection to someone’s heritage and feminism. The struggle with misunderstanding one’s root and loving oneself are all struggles of the black female in the past and present. Society played a significant role in misconstructing the identity of black females in the past. The incident of slavery, maids, and names for the lower classes played a role in calling them worthless, and they could only be worthy by being the same as the white women in the society.

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