Unit 2

Title: Everyday Use[[1]](#footnote-1)

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.5; W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.9; SL.9-10.1; L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2, L.9-10.4, L.9-10.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings:

What we value and the choices we make shape our identity.

Synopsis

In this story, set in the 1960s, a mother tells about a visit from her daughter Dee, to the family’s rural Southern home. Dee has adopted a different, bright, style of dress and Muslim way of greeting her family. She has brought along a male partner who shares her bold style and ways. Narration and dialogue reveal character traits as tension builds among Mama, Dee, and the younger daughter, Maggie, who is physically and emotionally scarred from a long-ago house fire. Dee disdains her family but wants their handmade household items, which she sees as valuable heirlooms. When Dee learns that the quilts she covets are promised to her sister, Dee becomes more determined to have them, arguing that Maggie would only “put them to everyday use.” Maggie acquiesces, but Mama surprises even herself by defying Dee and presenting the quilts to Maggie.

1. Read the entire story a time or two, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire story independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. This story is complex in its ideas but not in its syntax or vocabulary, so letting the students read it out loud to each other would be great practice with fluency.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| In the initial description of the outdoor setting, the narrator compares the yard to an “extended living room”. What can we infer about the setting of the story from the details in the introduction? | Because the yard is referred to as a “living room”, we can assume the family spends a lot of time there. We also learn the family sweeps the dirt in the yard, indicating the location is dry and rural. Finally, with “breezes that never come”, we can infer the story takes place in a hot climate. |
| This sequence is an account of a daydream that does not actually happen in the action of the story. Compare and contrast the way the narrator wishes she was in her dream to the way she is in real life. What is the impact of the usage of this structure? | In her dream, the mother imagines a scenario on television where she is ushered into the Johnny Carson show from a limousine and her daughter embraces her tearfully, pinning an orchid on her dress. This imaginary interaction suggests the mother longs for affection and admiration from her daughter. She feels this is “…the way my daughter would want me to be: one hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake…Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.” Her dream self is a stark contrast to reality as we learn she is “a large, big-boned woman with rough man-working hands” and her large size keeps her “hot in zero weather.” And, she ponders, “Whoever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue?” She also questions herself: “Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye?” The impact of using a compare and contrast structure is effective on the author’s part because readers understand not only who and what Mama is, but also what she is not. This helps develop our understanding of Mama’s character as someone who is poor and works hard – not someone who would ever be highlighted on a late night talk show. |
| What does this daydream tell us about how the mother perceives her relationship with daughter, and how does this manipulation of time and sequence increase tension in the story? Use evidence from the text to support your response. | In this section of text, Mama explains the difference between who her daughter, Dee, would like her to be in contrast to who she really is. This is done in the form of a daydream of herself on the Johnny Carson show versus a description of what she looks like and does in real life. On the Carson show she is “…the way my daughter would want me to be: one hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake…Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.” In her own description of herself, Mama says she is “a large, big-boned woman with rough man-working hands” who’s large size keeps her “hot in zero weather.” These descriptions give readers some insight into the way Mama perceives her relationship with her daughter because we can tell that she feels she does not live up to her daughter’s expectations. These differences suggest she believes her daughter is embarrassed by her appearance and intelligence. The manipulation of time and sequence increases tension surrounding the impending arrival of Dee because readers anticipate an encounter where the mother disappoints Dee. |
| We learn there was a house fire. Re-read the paragraph and describe how Dee reacts to the house fire. What do we learn about her from this passage? | While her sister is being burned in the house fire, Dee is safely removed watching her house and sister being burned. Her cold, and detached reaction alludes to the distance between Dee and her family and suggests she does not care for her mother and sister, nor she does want to help them. Additionally, we learn she has hatred for the house through Mama’s speculation that she wants to “do a dance around the ashes.” |
| The author uses several personifications to depict the way Dee reads to her family. Identify examples of personification and the effect that they have on the meaning and tone of the text. | “…forcing words, lies, other folks’ habits, whole lives upon us too.”  “…trapped and ignorant underneath her voice.”  “…washed us in a river of make believe”  “…burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn’t necessarily need to know.”  “…pressed us to her with the serious ways that she read.”  “…shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.”  The personifying words forcing, trapped, washed, burned, pressed, shove are all aggressive in nature. The tone is one of resentment and the mood is oppressive. This helps the reader understand the relationship among the three women as well as Mama’s and Maggie’s perception of Dee’s educated status. |
| Mama describes Dee and Maggie. Given this information, describe Maggie and contrast her to what we know about Dee. How are they similar? How are they different? How might their differences contribute to the kinds of interactions they have, and how does this affect the story? | Though they are sisters and share the same upbringing, Maggie is simple, unattractive, poor and not very bright. Conversely, Dee is educated, bright, stylish and sophisticated and “always wanted nice things.” We also learn Dee is “lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and fuller figure”. These differences create an atmosphere in which Maggie feels inferior to Dee, thus causing tension between the two sisters and their differing expectations of what life will bring them. |
| What do you notice about the way Dee and her companion are dressed and the way they greet Mama and Maggie? What conclusions can you draw about them from these details? | Dee is wearing a long, flowing, “loud” dress in hot weather. She is also wearing lots of gold jewelry and her hair “stands straight up like the wool on a sheep.” Her appearance is out of place in this small rural setting. Dee’s greeting, “Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!” and her companion’s exclamation, “Asalamalakim!”are also unusual for the setting. We learn from the footnote, that asalamalakim comes from the Muslim culture, which Maggie and Mama seem to know nothing about; This scene suggests that these words, actions, and dress are unusual in this area and for the local community. |
| Dee takes several pictures with her polaroid camera and then puts it away. What is Dee careful to include in every shot? Why do you think Dee does this and what can we infer about how she views her family and home? | Dee is careful to include the dilapidated house in every photo. She seems to do this because she wants to be able to take home evidence of her rural upbringing and poor family history. We can make this inference because the photos do not seem genuine as she snaps them, but rather staged. She immediately puts the camera away, clearly showing no further interest in more pictures of her family. This alludes to the fact that Dee views her family and home as artworks and artifacts rather than in a sentimental manner. |
| When Dee returns home, she has changed her name to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo because she “…couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me.” Mama reminds her that she was named after her aunt Dicie who was called Big Dee. Dee continues to probe her mother about the origin of her name. What conclusions can you draw about the different ways Dee and Mama view heritage from this exchange? What might we infer about the significance of Dee’s decision to change her name? | Dee’s continual probing signifies she is dissatisfied with her mother’s explanation of being named after family members. She believes Dee is a name, which comes from an oppressive culture. In stating, “Dee is dead,” and assuming a new African name, it is apparent that she feels a need to identify solely with her re-discovered cultural roots and changes her name to signify a permanent reinvention of herself. Mama sees value in the passing of Dee’s name through the generations and we can infer she believes heritage is also about family and tradition. |
| Find textual examples that indicate the items mentioned in this section are still used on a regular basis. What significance do these items have for each of the Johnson women? | Dee notices the benches they are sitting on have rump prints.  Dee’s hand closes on the butter dish on the table.  Dee notices the churn that still has soured milk in it.  Mama notes that you can see marks where hands have pushed the dasher up and down.  To Dee, these items are significant because of their value as artifacts and documentation of a way of life. They are evidence of the impoverished past that she has left behind. To Mama and Maggie, these items are significant because they are functional and they are reminiscent of the relatives who have made them and how they’ve been passed down through the generations. |
| Notice the different references to Dee’s name. Explain why the author uses different configurations to refer to this character throughout the remainder of the story. | Dee proclaims her new name is Wangero Leewanika Kemajo and Mama immediately begin referring to her as Wangero. This continues until she is referred to by Mama as “Wangero—Dee”. Other times Mama refers to her as Dee (Wangero). The author varies the character’s name to underscore the confusion Mama is experiencing regarding her daughter’s new identity. When she refers to her as Dee (Wangero) throughout the remainder of the story, the reader senses that Mama will continue to see her as the daughter she knew as Dee. |
| The author chooses the word “rifling” to describe Dee’s exploration of Mama’s trunk. What is the connotation of this word and what does this tell you about Mama’s feelings towards Dee’s action? | The author chooses the word rifling, which means searching thoroughly or in a rough manner. The connotation this has is aggressive and negative, showing the reader that Mama feels Dee is being unkind and careless with the quilts. |
| Compare and contrast Mama’s expectations for the quilts versus Dee’s. How do they each think the quilts should be used and what value do they attach to the quilts? How does this interaction help develop the theme of the text? | Mama intends for the quilts to go to Maggie when she gets married. Maggie knows the family history behind each quilt that Dee and Mama sewed. Mama also hopes that Maggie will put them to use and does not mind that they become worn or tattered because quilting is a tradition and skill she has taught and passed on to Maggie. Dee believes that the quilts are “priceless” and should be hung and preserved as artifacts. She believes “Maggie can’t appreciate these quilts” and “she’d probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use.” This helps the development of the theme that what we value shapes our identity as these two characters have conflicting perspectives on the significance and the purpose of the quilts. |
| What changes for Mama, Maggie, and Dee as a result of Mama taking the quilts back from Dee? What effect does this have on the characters and the story? | After Dee takes the quilts designated for Maggie, Mama compares Maggie to “somebody used to never winning anything or having anything reserved for her.”  Mama reflects about Maggie stating, “She looked at her sister with something like fear, but she wasn’t mad at her. This was Maggie’s portion. This was the way she knew God to work.”  Mama then states, “When I looked at her like that, something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet.” She then compares her action to a spiritual experience and does something she had “never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room” snatching the quilts out of “Miss Wangero’s” hands and dropping them into Maggie’s lap.  Through this evidence, we see that Mama realizes Maggie has a fatalistic view of life and believes things will never change for her.  When Mama has this realization and something “hits her”, this event is her call to action. By taking back the quilts, she defies Dee and attempts to show Maggie that this is not how life needs to be.  Mama has changed because she confronts Dee for the first time and defends Maggie; things change for Dee because for once she does not get her way with her mother; things have changed for Maggie because for once, she gets her share. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | cowering | mercilessly  nature  ream  enveloped  rifling |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | homely  earnest | furtive\*  sidle\*  scalding  recompose  oppress\*  doctrines\*  \*definition given in text |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt
  + *In the story “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker, the author shows us how what we value and the choices we make shape our identity. The two central characters, Mama and her daughter, Dee (Wangero,) undergo transformations throughout the story. Write a one to two-page essay explaining the two characters’ transformations and how these transformations relate back to the central theme of the text. Use evidence from the text to support, including direct quotes and page numbers.*
* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided. Class discussion of the TDQs for the story should help to clarify the students’ understanding of the story. Through discussion on these questions, the teacher should be able to discern whether or not the students are prepared to write.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should remind students to use any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions.

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| Mama’s daydream and self-admission when she awakes, paragraph 1-3. Regarding her relationship with Dee, she dreams of “Dee embracing me with tears in her eyes.” Regarding her appearance, mama describes herself in the dream state on television with Dee and compares it to reality, stating on television “I am the way my daughter would want me to be”, more slender and with lighter skin. | The reader is first aware of the tension in the relationship between mama and Dee through Mama’s dream of an emotional scene on television where Dee embraces her in tears and she is more slender with lighter skin the way her daughter would want her to be. It is apparent mama idealizes a closer relationship with her daughter who is clearly dissatisfied with her mother’s appearance. |
| Mama describes Dee through her recollection of the house fire and memories of Dee beginning in paragraph 4 through 6. Her description of Dee indicates Dee is quite different than her other daughter Maggie and she has disdain toward her impoverished state during childhood as mama speculates she wanted to “do a dance around the ashes” of their family home as it burned. | Dee’s detachment from her family is brought out by the author as she watches her sister being burned in the house fire from a safe distance. Her cold response indicates she does not care for her mother and sister, nor she does want to help them. Additionally, we learn she has hatred for the house through Mama’s speculation that she wants to “do a dance around the ashes.” Mama also recalls Dee always wanted nice things as described in her style of dress and seemed to be drawn to a sophisticated lifestyle early in life. |
| At the arrival of Dee and her companion to visit to the family home, Mama, and Maggie, Dee asserts her newfound identity both visually through her style of dress, wearing a long, flowing, “loud” dress in hot weather. She is also wearing lots of gold jewelry and her hair “stands straight up like the wool on a sheep,”and verbally through her greeting in which she says “Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!” and her companion’s exclamation, “Asalamalakim!” | Dee is wearing a long, flowing, “loud” dress in hot weather. She is also wearing lots of gold jewelry and her hair “stands straight up like the wool on a sheep.” This image alludes to traditional African American dress that is foreign to Mama and Maggie and somewhat out of place in their rural community. Dee’s greeting, “Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!” and her companion’s exclamation, Asalamalakim!”are also unusual for the setting and underscore Dee’s verbal assertion of her new identity. |
| Dee takes carefully staged photographs of her mama and Maggie in front of their family home, she includes the dilapidated house n every photo. | Dee is careful to include the dilapidated house in every photo she takes of her mama and Maggie and they are staged carefully as evidence of her rural upbringing and poor family history. This alludes to the fact that Dee views her family and home as artworks and artifacts rather than in a sentimental manner. |
| When Dee returns home, she has changed her name to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo because she “…couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me.” Mama reminds her that she was named after her aunt Dicie who was called Big Dee. | Dee informs her mother and sister that she has adopted a new name, “Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo” , and that her previous name was a symbolic reminder of the oppression experienced by her people. Mama is confused by her daughter’s decision and has difficulty accepting it as she interchanges the old and new names of her daughter. |
| Dee attempts to collect more ordinary objects from their family home such as a butter dish, churn and dasher quite forcefully, she says of the benches in the home that “I never knew how lovely these benches are.” (pg. 81). She also wants the family quilts for their aesthetic, artistic value and is concerned that “Maggie can’t appreciate these quilts”…”she’d probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use.”. | The reader senses that Dee’s life experience has influenced her perspective. While sitting on a bench at dinner, she states “I never knew how lovely these benches are.” (pg. 81). Mama intends for the quilts to go to Maggie when she gets married but Dee believes that the quilts are “priceless” and should be hung and preserved as artifacts. She believes “Maggie can’t appreciate these quilts”…”she’d probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use.” |
| In the climax of the story beginning on page 82 paragraph 19, Mama has an epiphany and decides to stand up to Dee and does something she…”never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room.” | She compares her action to a spiritual experience and does something she…”never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room” snatching the quilts out of “Miss Wangero’s” hands and dropping them into Maggie’s lap. By taking back the quilts, she defies Dee and attempts to show Maggie that this is not how life needs to be. Mama has changed because she confronts Dee for the first time and defends Maggie. This action gives worth and voice to herself and her daughter Maggie. |
| After the confrontation, Dee puts on sunglasses “that hid everything about the tip of her nose and her chin.” | While things change for Dee because for once she does not get her way with her mother, she leaves hiding behind her sunglasses suggesting her superficiality has not been altered by the exchange. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

“Everyday Use” by Alice Walker is a story that demonstrates that what we value shapes our identity. This story centers on two characters, Mama and her daughter Dee, who have a strained relationship and conflicting perspectives about their heritage. Dee attaches a more superficial value to family heirlooms and the quilts made by their own hands. She wants to collect and display them as artifacts in order to affirm her newly discovered Afrocentric lifestyle, which has developed from her more sophisticated cultural experiences away from her rural home. Mama, however, values the family heirlooms and quilts for their ordinary function and sees value in their “everyday use”. She knows these heirlooms have been passed down through the generations and quilt making is a skill and tradition she has passed on to her willing daughter, Maggie. A transformation takes place for these characters as they both struggle with who they are. For Dee, the transformation is more external and evident in her dress, way of speaking and judgmental exchanges with Mama and her sister, Maggie. For Mama, the transformation is internal as she realizes the oppressive and devaluing nature of her daughter, Dee, and finally confronts her at the climax of the story. In taking back the quilts from Dee, she gives worth and voice to herself and her daughter, Maggie.

The reader is first aware of the tension in Mama’s relationship with Dee and the separation of Dee from the community of her youth through Mama’s dream. She visualizes an emotional scene on television where Dee embraces her in tears and she is more slender with lighter skin—“the way her daughter would want her to be”. It is apparent Mama idealizes a closer relationship with her daughter, who is clearly dissatisfied with her mother’s appearance and values what is on the outside. Dee’s detachment from her family is brought out by the author when she describes her watching her sister being burned in the house fire from a safe distance. Her cold response indicates she does not care for her mother and sister and Mama speculates as Dee “watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall,” that she would rather “do a dance around the ashes… she hated the house that much.” The devaluing nature of Dee toward her mother and sister is further established through personification the author uses to describe the way Dee would read to them. Using aggressive words such as forcing, trapped, washed, burned, pressed, and shove, the reader senses Mama and Maggie’s oppressive perception of Dee’s educated status. Mama also recalls Dee always wanted nice things as described in her style of dress in high school, indicating Dee seemed to be drawn to a sophisticated lifestyle early in life.

At the arrival of Dee and her companion to her family home, she is dressed in vibrant, bold colors, gold earrings “hanging down to her shoulders” and greets them with an unusual expression, “Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!” followed by the Muslim greeting of her companion, “Asalamalakim.” This imagery and language signify the external transformation of Dee in both dress and language. Dee informs her mother and sister that “Dee is dead” and she has adopted a new name, “Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo.” She explains that her previous name was a symbolic reminder of the oppression experienced by her people. Mama is confused by her daughter’s decision and has difficulty accepting it as she interchanges the old and new names of her daughter. During the visit, Dee takes pictures of her sister and mama. She poses them in a staged and artificial manner while being intentional to include the dilapidated house in every photo. She seems to do this because she wants to take home evidence of her rural upbringing and poor family history. This alludes to the fact that Dee views her family and home as artworks and artifacts rather than in a sentimental, relational manner.

When Dee attempts to collect more ordinary objects from their family home such as a butter dish, churn and dasher, the reader senses that Dee’s life experience has influenced her changed perspective. While sitting on a bench at dinner, she states “I never knew how lovely these benches are”. Dee also rifles through Mama’s trunk looking for old quilts. Mama intends for the quilts to go to Maggie when she gets married. Maggie knows the family history behind each quilt that Dee and Mama sewed. Mama also hopes that Maggie will put them to use and does not mind that they become worn or tattered because quilting is a tradition and skill she has taught and passed on to Maggie. Conversely, Dee believes that the quilts are “priceless” and should be hung and preserved as artifacts. She believes “Maggie can’t appreciate these quilts”… ”she’d probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use”. This helps the development of the theme what we value shapes our identity as these two characters have conflicting perspectives on the significance and the purpose of the quilts.

The final internal transformation for mama occurs when she finally defends Maggie and confronts Dee about the quilts. She does something she…”never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room” snatching the quilts out of “Miss Wangero’s” hands and dropping them into Maggie’s lap. Mama realizes Maggie has a fatalistic view of life and believes things will never change for her. When Mama has this realization and something “hits her”, this event is her call to action. By taking back the quilts, she defies Dee and attempts to show Maggie that this is not how life needs to be. Mama has changed because this action gives worth and voice to herself and her daughter Maggie. While things change for Dee because for once she does not get her way with her mother, she puts on her sunglasses hiding “everything above the tip of her nose and her chin”, suggesting her superficiality has not been altered by the confrontation and her transformation is only external.

By the end of the story each of the primary characters has made choices in the way they deal with life, this situation, and each other. Through these choices each of their true identities are revealed. Mama has been changed for the better due to this interaction with Dee by finding the courage to stand up for herself and Maggie, while Dee has remained unchanged and unappreciative of the life she had with Mama and the full scope of her identity.

Additional Tasks

* *Another theme in the story “Everyday Use” is that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and it can be found in everyday things. Consider the events of the story and examine the way Mama and Dee each value “everyday” things. Construct an argument for whose perspective is more valid and why. Write a one-page paper using textual evidence to support your answer.*
  + Sample Answer

The characters, Mama and Dee, in “Everyday Use”, attach value to “everyday” things based on their life experience, however Mama’s perspective about beauty in everyday things is richer than Dee, who only perceives beauty on the surface level. Evidence that mama’s perspective on their family heirlooms is deeper than her daughter’s is most apparent during Dee’s visit to their family home. Dee begins to take photographs and “never takes a shot without making sure the house is in it”. Instead of being certain that Mama and Maggie are in the photographs as would be typical for a sentimental visit with family, Dee’s positioning of her mama, sister and the house for the photographs is more staged and less authentic than capturing memories of the visit as they occur. Later, Dee forcefully takes family heirlooms without really asking and begins to think of how she can do something “artistic” with the dasher from the churn. Conversely, Mama appreciates the dasher and recalls how each of the unique markings on it were made by the working hands of relatives. Her ability to notice the small “sinks” and the “beautiful light-yellow wood from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived” reveal a more complex and significant value and appreciation for the beauty found in the used and worn shape. Her attachment to the dasher is due to the connection with her family’s past.

Finally, as Dee begins “rifling” through the trunk in search of quilts, she is unaffected by the fact that mama had intended the quilts to go to Maggie. She has a new interest in the quilts despite being offered the same ones when she went off to college and refused them because they were “old-fashioned, out of style.” Her superficial interest in the quilts and the aesthetic affirmation of her new identity represented by them is also apparent when she is angered that Maggie would put these quilts to “everyday use” and wants instead to “hang them”. Mama, however, can identify the exact patterns quilted and stitched on them and knows the family history behind each of the pieces of material, including “scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn more than fifty years ago” and “bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarell’s paisley shirts”. To her, the quilts embody their patterned family history and using the quilts is a way to keep that history more close and familiar, rather than distant and artificial.

Note to Teacher:

* An additional Big Idea/Key Understanding in the story is: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and it can be found in everyday things. This idea is the basis for the Additional Task.

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**“Everyday Use”**

1. In the initial description of the outdoor setting, the narrator compares the yard to an “extended living room”. What can we infer about the setting of the story from the details in the introduction?
2. This sequence is an account of a daydream that does not actually happen in the action of the story. Compare and contrast the way the narrator wishes she was in her dream to the way she is in real life. What is the impact of the usage of this structure?
3. What does this daydream tell us about how the mother perceives her relationship with daughter, and how does this manipulation of time and sequence increase tension in the story? Use evidence from the text to support your response.
4. We learn there was a house fire. Re-read the paragraph and describe how Dee reacts to the house fire. What do we learn about her from this passage?
5. The author uses several personifications to depict the way Dee reads to her family. Identify examples of personification and the effect that they have on the meaning and tone of the text.
6. Mama describes Dee and Maggie. Given this information, describe Maggie and contrast her to what we know about Dee. How are they similar? How are they different? How might their differences contribute to the kinds of interactions they have, and how does this affect the story?
7. What do you notice about the way Dee and her companion are dressed and the way they greet Mama and Maggie? What conclusions can you draw about them from these details?
8. Dee takes several pictures with her polaroid camera and then puts it away. What is Dee careful to include in every shot? Why do you think Dee does this and what can we infer about how she views her family and home?
9. When Dee returns home, she has changed her name to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo because she “…couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me.” Mama reminds her that she was named after her aunt Dicie who was called Big Dee. Dee continues to probe her mother about the origin of her name. What conclusions can you draw about the different ways Dee and Mama view heritage from this exchange? What might we infer about the significance of Dee’s decision to change her name?
10. Find textual examples that indicate the items mentioned in this section are still used on a regular basis. What significance do these items have for each of the Johnson women?
11. Notice the different references to Dee’s name. Explain why the author uses different configurations to refer to this character throughout the remainder of the story.
12. The author chooses the word “rifling” to describe Dee’s exploration of Mama’s trunk. What is the connotation of this word and what does this tell you about Mama’s feelings towards Dee’s action?
13. Compare and contrast Mama’s expectations for the quilts versus Dee’s. How do they each think the quilts should be used and what value do they attach to the quilts? How does this interaction help develop the theme of the text?
14. What changes for Mama, Maggie, and Dee as a result of Mama taking the quilts back from Dee? What effect does this have on the characters and the story?

1. *This story is a “duplicate.” (It is found in other anthologies, as well.) This particular revision was completed by a teacher who uses a different anthology than you, so the page numbers have been removed. This may require you to make some adjustments/add page numbers to some of the questions.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)