

alice walker everyday use

alice walker everyday use is a widely studied short story that delves into the complex relationships within an African American family, cultural heritage, and the meaning of identity. Written by Alice Walker, this narrative explores the differing attitudes toward tradition through the characters of Mama, Dee, and Maggie. In this comprehensive article, we will examine the plot, major themes, symbolic elements, character analysis, and the lasting impact of "Everyday Use." Readers will gain a deep understanding of how Walker's work reflects cultural preservation and the generational divide in interpreting heritage. Whether you are a student, educator, or literature enthusiast, this guide provides valuable insights, detailed analysis, and key takeaways to enrich your appreciation of this celebrated piece of literature.

- Plot Summary of "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker
- Key Themes in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"
- Character Analysis and Development
- Symbolism and Imagery in the Story
- Cultural Heritage and Its Significance
- The Lasting Legacy of "Everyday Use"

Plot Summary of "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" tells the story of an African American family living in the rural South during the 1960s or 1970s. The narrative is delivered from the perspective of Mama, a hardworking and practical woman. She lives with her shy and scarred younger daughter, Maggie, who bears physical and emotional scars from a past house fire. The story begins with Mama and Maggie awaiting a visit from Dee, Mama's older daughter who has left home to pursue an education and a new life. Dee arrives with her boyfriend, Hakim-a-barber, and surprises her family with her new Afrocentric identity, including a new name, Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo.

As the visit unfolds, Dee expresses interest in various household items that symbolize her family's heritage, particularly a set of hand-stitched quilts. Conflict arises when Dee insists on taking the quilts as artifacts of her heritage, while Mama intends to give them to Maggie for practical use. The story climaxes when Mama decides to give the quilts to Maggie, recognizing her genuine connection to their true everyday use. This decision highlights the tension between preserving heritage as a living tradition versus treating it as a static display.

Key Themes in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"

Cultural Heritage and Identity

One of the central themes in "Everyday Use" is the concept of cultural heritage and its role in shaping identity. Walker portrays the contrasting attitudes toward heritage through the characters of Dee and Maggie. Dee seeks to reclaim her African roots in a way that is outward and symbolic, while Maggie embodies the lived, day-to-day experience of her ancestry. The story raises important questions about what it means to honor one's heritage—through preservation, display, or practical use.

Family Relationships and Conflict

The family dynamic is a focal point in the narrative. The mother-daughter relationship between Mama, Dee, and Maggie is explored through dialogue and conflict. Dee's sense of superiority and detachment from her family's humble life creates tension, while Mama's loyalty and affection for Maggie reveal deeper layers of familial love and understanding.

Education and Social Change

Dee's education and exposure to new cultural movements highlight the theme of social change. Her transformation represents the broader shifts occurring in African American communities during the Civil Rights era. The story addresses the potential gap between formal education and authentic understanding of one's roots, emphasizing the importance of humility and respect in the pursuit of self-discovery.

Character Analysis and Development

Mama (Mrs. Johnson)

Mama is depicted as a strong, practical, and nurturing woman. Her narrative voice is candid and straightforward, offering insight into her values and worldview. Mama's identity is closely tied to her rural life and her connection to tradition. She is both protective and fair, demonstrating growth when she asserts herself during the conflict over the quilts.

Dee (Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo)

Dee is characterized by her confidence, ambition, and desire for self-definition. Her adoption of a new name and embrace of African culture reflect her search for identity, but also her tendency to view heritage as a collection of artifacts rather than a living tradition. Dee's character serves as a catalyst for the story's central conflict and thematic exploration.

Maggie

Maggie is presented as shy, reserved, and physically scarred from a traumatic past. Despite her quiet demeanor, she possesses a deep, authentic connection to her heritage. Maggie's understanding of family traditions and her skills in quilting demonstrate her appreciation for the everyday use of cultural legacies.

Symbolism and Imagery in the Story

The Quilts

The handmade quilts are the most prominent symbol in "Everyday Use." They represent the family's heritage, history, and the women who came before. The quilts are stitched from scraps of clothing worn by ancestors, embodying both practical and sentimental value. The conflict over the quilts illustrates the story's central theme of how heritage should be respected and preserved.

The House and Everyday Objects

The family's house, churn, benches, and other everyday objects also serve as symbols of continuity and tradition. These items are not only functional but hold memories and stories passed down through generations. Their use in daily life reflects the living nature of heritage as opposed to its preservation as mere artifacts.

- Quilts: Symbolize family heritage and generational ties.
- Churn and benches: Represent resourcefulness and tradition.
- The house: Embodies the family's history and resilience.

Cultural Heritage and Its Significance

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" invites readers to consider the true meaning of cultural heritage. The story critiques the superficial appreciation of heritage, as seen in Dee's desire to display family artifacts, and champions the value of living traditions. Through Mama and Maggie's actions, Walker advocates for a respectful, practical engagement with culture—one that honors the past while sustaining the present. The narrative addresses wider issues within African American communities, as well as universal questions about memory, tradition, and identity.

The Lasting Legacy of "Everyday Use"

Since its publication, "Everyday Use" has become a staple of American literature studies, celebrated

for its rich symbolism and nuanced portrayal of family dynamics. The story continues to resonate with readers for its exploration of heritage, identity, and the generational divide. Its inclusion in anthologies and curricula demonstrates its enduring relevance and influence. Alice Walker's skillful storytelling and evocative characterization ensure that "Everyday Use" remains a touchstone for discussions about cultural memory and belonging.

Q: What is the central conflict in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"?

A: The central conflict revolves around the differing views on heritage between Dee, who wants to display family artifacts as symbols of cultural pride, and Mama and Maggie, who value using these items in everyday life as a continuation of tradition.

Q: How does Alice Walker use symbolism in "Everyday Use"?

A: Alice Walker uses objects like the quilts, the family house, and household items as symbols of heritage, identity, and generational continuity, highlighting the tension between preserving culture as a living tradition versus treating it as mere artifacts.

Q: What do the quilts represent in "Everyday Use"?

A: The quilts symbolize the family's heritage, history, and the skills passed down through generations. They are central to the story's message about the importance of practical, everyday use of cultural legacies rather than preserving them solely for display.

Q: How does the character of Dee differ from Maggie?

A: Dee is confident, educated, and seeks to redefine her identity by embracing an outward display of African heritage, while Maggie is shy, reserved, and embodies a genuine, lived connection to family traditions and daily practices.

Q: Why does Mama give the quilts to Maggie instead of Dee?

A: Mama gives the quilts to Maggie because she recognizes Maggie's deep, authentic appreciation for their family heritage and trusts that Maggie will use and cherish them as intended, rather than treating them as decorative objects.

Q: What is the significance of Dee changing her name to Wangero?

A: Dee's decision to change her name to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo signifies her desire to reject her immediate family history and adopt a broader African identity, reflecting her struggle with cultural roots and self-definition.

Q: How does "Everyday Use" address the theme of generational differences?

A: The story explores generational differences through the contrasting attitudes of Mama, Dee, and Maggie toward heritage, with each character representing a different approach to tradition, progress, and cultural memory.

Q: What role does setting play in "Everyday Use"?

A: The rural Southern setting grounds the story in a specific cultural and historical context, emphasizing the family's connection to their land, traditions, and the simplicity of everyday life.

Q: Why is "Everyday Use" considered an important work in American literature?

A: "Everyday Use" is celebrated for its insightful portrayal of African American family life, its exploration of cultural heritage, and its rich use of symbolism, making it a significant and enduring piece in American literary studies.

Q: What lesson does Alice Walker convey through the ending of "Everyday Use"?

A: The ending emphasizes the value of genuine, lived tradition and the importance of honoring heritage through everyday actions rather than through superficial displays or gestures.

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Alice Walker's "Everyday Use": A Deep Dive into Heritage, Identity, and Family

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," a poignant short story, transcends its seemingly simple narrative of a mother and her two daughters. This exploration delves into the complexities of the story, analyzing its themes of heritage, identity, and the fractured relationships within a Black family. We'll dissect the characters, examine the symbolism, and uncover the lasting impact of Walker's powerful prose. This comprehensive guide provides in-depth analysis, making it a valuable resource for students, literature enthusiasts, and anyone seeking a deeper understanding of "Everyday Use."

Understanding the Central Conflict: Heritage vs. Assimilation

The core conflict in "Everyday Use" centers on the contrasting views of heritage held by Mama and her daughters, Maggie and Dee (Wangero). Dee, having embraced a more outwardly visible and arguably performative Black identity, seeks to reclaim her heritage through the acquisition of physical artifacts – the quilts and other family heirlooms. This represents a form of assimilation, using her heritage as a fashionable statement rather than a living tradition. Maggie, in contrast, embodies a more quiet, ingrained understanding of her heritage. She values the quilts for their practical use and the history woven into their very fabric, representing a continuation of family legacy. This difference highlights the complexities of Black identity in a society that often appropriates and commodifies cultural elements.

Character Analysis: Mama, Maggie, and Dee (Wangero)

Mama: The narrator and central figure, Mama represents a grounded, practical approach to heritage. She is the embodiment of resilience and quiet strength, forged through years of hardship and unwavering dedication to her family. Her decision regarding the quilts reveals her deep understanding of the true meaning of heritage: its continuity and practical application within the family unit.

Maggie: Shy and insecure, Maggie represents a generation grappling with the complexities of self-identity within a changing world. She embodies a quieter, more traditional understanding of heritage, recognizing its value not in its aesthetic appeal but in its tangible connection to family history and practicality.

Dee (Wangero): Dee's transformation into Wangero symbolizes a rejection of her rural upbringing and embrace of a more overtly political and fashionable Black identity. While her desire to reclaim her heritage is understandable, her approach reveals a superficial understanding, prioritizing aesthetics and symbolic value over the lived experience and continued tradition represented by the quilts.

Symbolism: The Quilts and Their Significance

The quilts are not merely fabric; they are powerful symbols representing the interwoven history and legacy of the family. Each stitch tells a story, representing generations of women who crafted them, imbuing them with love, labor, and family history. For Maggie, they represent the ongoing legacy of her family, a tangible link to the past and a continuation of tradition. For Dee, they are mere artifacts, objects to be displayed and admired rather than utilized and cherished. This disparity highlights the central conflict of the story – the difference between a performative and an authentic connection to one's heritage.

Setting and its Impact on the Narrative

The rural setting of the story plays a crucial role in establishing the context of the characters' lives and their perspectives on heritage. The simplicity and quiet dignity of the rural environment contrast with Dee's more urban, outwardly expressed aspirations. This contrast underscores the clash between tradition and modernity, and the different ways in which heritage is understood and valued. The setting itself becomes a character, influencing the characters' actions and shaping their understanding of their identity and place within the world.

The Lasting Legacy of "Everyday Use"

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" remains relevant decades after its publication due to its exploration of enduring themes. The story challenges readers to contemplate the complexities of heritage, identity, and the dynamics of family relationships. It provokes conversations about cultural appropriation, authenticity, and the different ways individuals connect with their past. The enduring power of the story lies in its ability to resonate with readers across diverse backgrounds and experiences, fostering introspection and a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of identity.

Conclusion

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" is far more than a simple tale of a family dispute; it's a powerful meditation on the multifaceted nature of heritage, identity, and the complex relationships within families. The story's enduring relevance lies in its ability to prompt critical reflection on the meaning of tradition and the ways in which we choose to connect with our past. Through the contrasting personalities of Mama, Maggie, and Dee, Walker crafts a narrative that is both deeply personal and universally resonant.

FAQs

1. What is the significance of the title "Everyday Use"? The title itself is ironic, highlighting the difference in how the quilts are valued by Maggie and Dee. Maggie represents the everyday use and continuous tradition, while Dee wants to display them, rendering them unusable in their traditional context.
2. How does the story portray the complexities of Black identity? The story showcases the diverse ways Black individuals navigate their identity, showcasing both the internalized struggles and the external pressures of a society grappling with its own racial history.
3. What is the symbolism of the butter churn and the benches? These objects, alongside the quilts, represent the accumulated history and heritage of the family, further highlighting the contrast between Maggie's appreciation of their practical value and Dee's desire to possess them as mere artifacts.
4. What is the significance of Dee's name change? Changing her name to Wangero is a conscious effort to embrace a more outwardly African identity, a move that, while seemingly empowering, reveals a potentially superficial understanding of her heritage.
5. What is the ultimate message of the story? The story emphasizes the importance of understanding and valuing heritage authentically, appreciating its lived experience and continuity within a family rather than simply appropriating its symbolic elements.

Walker's story *Everyday Use*; contains background essays that provide insight into the story; and features a selection of critical response. Includes a chronology and an interview with the author.

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musical. Lauded as a literary masterpiece, this is the groundbreaking novel that placed Walker “in the company of Faulkner” (The Nation), and remains a wrenching—yet intensely uplifting—experience for new generations of readers. This ebook features a new introduction written by the author on the 25th anniversary of publication, and an illustrated biography of Alice Walker including rare photos from the author’s personal collection. The Color Purple is the 1st book in the Color Purple Collection, which also includes The Temple of My Familiar and Possessing the Secret of Joy.

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Warren examines the philosophy and worldview present in all of Walker's writing. Warren contends that Walker is a literary theologian, citing the transformative changes that take place in the author's fictional characters. Warren also points to Walker's bravery in approaching taboo subjects, her generosity of spirit, and her love for humanity, which are represented throughout her poems, novels, short stories, children's books, and essays. This analysis is further supplemented by primary sources from Walker's unpublished material, including notes and scrapbooks. By exploring the spirituality evident throughout the author's work, this volume shows how Walker challenges readers to recognize and understand their responsibility to the earth—and to one another. Providing a fresh, accessible look at one of the twentieth century's most prolific women writers, Alice Walker's *Metaphysics: Literature of Spirit* will appeal to both academics and fans of the author's varied literature.

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alice walker everyday use: Understanding Alice Walker Thadious M. Davis, 2021-08-20 Understanding Alice Walker serves both as an introduction to the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner's large body of work and as a critical analysis of her multifaceted canon. Thadious M. Davis begins with Walker's biography and her formative experiences in the South and then presents ways of accessing and reading Walker's complex, interconnected, and sociopolitically invested career in writing fiction, poetry, critical essays, and meditations. Although best known for her novel The Color Purple and her landmark essays In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, Walker began her career with Once: Poems, The Third Life of Grange Copeland, and In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women. She has remained committed not merely to writing in multiple genres but also to conveying narratives of the hope and transformation possible within the human condition and as visualized through the lens of race and gender. Davis traces Walker's literary voice as it emerges from the civil rights and feminist movements to encourage an individual and collective search for justice and joy and then evolves into forceful advocacy for world peace, spiritual liberation, and environmental conservancy. Her writing, a rich amalgamation of the cutting-edge and popular, the new-age and difficult, continues to be paradigm shifting and among the most important produced in the last half of the twentieth century and among the most consistently prophetic in the first part of the twenty-first century.

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alice walker everyday use: Alice Walker's Short Story Everyday Use Martin Eder, 2014-09-22 Seminar paper from the year 2011 in the subject English - Pedagogy, Didactics, Literature Studies, grade: 2,0, University of Passau, language: English, abstract: This term paper provides the concept of a teaching unit concerning the short story Everyday Use by Alice Walker. Apart from the different analyses there should also be given an overview of recommendations and possibilities that could be used for creating a teaching unit. Everyday Use was published in 1973 and is basically about a black mother and her two daughters. Whereas one daughter, Dee, had the possibility to go to school and visit college, Maggie, the younger daughter, still lives with her mother and did not enjoy higher education. One day, Dee, who is accompanied by her boyfriend, visits her mother and her sister at her old home. As the story continues it becomes clear that obvious differences have developed between the opinions of Dee and her mother alternatively her sister.

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Book Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning author's fascinating and far-reaching conversations with acclaimed writers and thought leaders. Spanning more than three decades, this collection of fascinating discussions between Alice Walker and renowned writers, leaders, and teachers, explores the changes that Walker has experienced in the world, as well as the change she herself has brought to it. Compelling literary and cultural figures such as Gloria Steinem, Pema Chödrön, and Howard Zinn represent a different stage in Walker's artistic and spiritual development. Yet, they also offer an unprecedented look at her career and political growth. Noted literary scholar Rudolph Byrd sets Walker's work into context with an introductory essay, as well as with a comprehensive annotated bibliography of her writings. "Read as separate pieces, these conversations offer vivid glimpses of Walker's energetic personality. Taken together, they offer a sense of her marvelous engagement with her world." —Kirkus Reviews

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alice walker everyday use: Fiction Laurie G. Kirsznner, 1993-09-23 Includes the fiction section from Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing 2/e with three student papers and works by women, minority, non-Western and contemporary authors.

alice walker everyday use: The Green Road Anne Enright, 2015-05-05 By the Booker Award-winning and bestselling author of *The Gathering*, *The Green Road* is Anne Enright's virtuoso new novel, her most compelling and powerful to date. A darkly glinting novel set mainly in a small town on Ireland's Atlantic coast, *The Green Road* is a story of fracture and family, selfishness and compassion—a book about the gaps in the human heart and how we learn to fill them. The children of Rosaleen Madigan grow up in the West of Ireland, in a world that is about to change. When her oldest brother, Dan, announces he will enter the priesthood, young Hanna watches her mother retreat in sorrow to her bed. In the years that follow, three of the children leave home for lives they could never have imagined. Dan for the frenzy of New York under the shadow of AIDS; Emmet for the backlands of Mali where he learns the fragility of love and order; actress Hanna for modern-day Dublin and the trials of motherhood. In her early old age, their difficult, wonderful mother, Rosaleen, decides to sell the family home, the house she was born in and where she raised her own family, with all its ghosts and memories. Her adult children visit for Christmas, carrying with them the complications of their present lives and the old needs of childhood as they are brought face to face with their mother's aging and the effects her decision will have on them all. In this extraordinary and intimate story of one family, Enright has also given us a portrait of our times. This is a major work of fiction by one of the most exciting writers of our time.

alice walker everyday use: Alice Walker: Living by the Word Alice Walker, 2011-12-29 'An extraordinarily diverse collection; pure Walker, fresh-eyed and sassy' NEW YORK TIMES *Living by the Word* is a memorable collection of essays, letters and journal extracts from Pulitzer Prize winner, Alice Walker. In her own immaculate prose, Alice Walker opens an intimate window to her world - whether it be her troubled relationship with her father, her upbringing amidst the poverty of rural Georgia, her daughter Rebecca, or simply her joy in choosing plants for her garden, planning the colours of her home, or relishing the taste of freshly picked vegetables. In other essays she explores themes such as the nature of dreams, justice, folklore and the role of ancestors. She details the story of Dessie Woods who was sent to jail for murdering her would-be rapist and highlights the role of racism and prejudice in the law's treatment of black women. Finally we travel with her on her journey to China, to Bali, and a visit to Nine Miles - the birthplace of the legendary Bob Marley.

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