

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"

Discussion Questions

Focal Point: Narrator's Feeling and Point-of-View Question 1: Explain the mother (the narrator) in this story. What kind of person is she? How does she seem to feel about Dee? How does she feel about Maggie?

Focal Point: Foreshadowing of Dee Question 2: What elements prepare the reader for Dee before she arrives on the scene? What do we find out about Dee before she arrives?

Focal Point: Dee's Position/Role in the Family Question 3: How did Dee relate to her family before she left home? What role did she assume for herself? Does her role change after she leaves home and returns again?

Focal Point: Opinions of Dee Question 4: How do you feel about Dee? Do you sympathize with her desire to "improve" herself and her family? Or do you disagree with Dee's motives for coming home?

Focal Point: Binary Opposition in Sisterhood Question 5: Discuss the relationship between Maggie and Dee.

Focal Point: Documentation as Remembrance Question 6: What is suggested by Dee's prolonged picture-taking with her Polaroid? What about her kissing her mother on the forehead? What do you make of these actions? Do they display sincerity?

Focal Point: Interpreting Heritage

Question 7: Why has Dee assumed African dress, hairstyle, and name? What is significant about Dee changing her name to Wangero? What is heritage? How does this reflect a shift in the values of heritage?

Focal Point: Judging the Characteristics and Attitudes of Characters Question 8: How would you characterize the attitudes of her and her new husband/boyfriend toward their race? Consider: Positive or negative attitudes? Honest/Genuine or simply "politically correct?"

Focal Point: The New Persona Question 9: Discuss Dee's mother's and sister's reactions to her new persona, "Wangero." Do you sympathize with them? Who do you identify more with- Dee and Maggie or Wangero? Why?

Focal Point: Significance of Dee's Wishes Question 10: How would you describe the way that Dee reacts to the food and objects in her mother's house? What does she want? What does she want to do with these items? Does she get them?

Focal Point: Significance of the Conclusion Question 11: Why does Mrs. Johnson decide to stand up to Dee and not allow her to take the quilts at the end of the story? Why do you think Maggie is so content at the end?

Focal Point: Significance of Associations of Race in the Text Question 12: Could this story just as well have been about a mother and her daughters of a different race? Aside from the African or Muslim names, does anything distinguish Dee's relations with her mother and Maggie as especially African American? Is this a quality of strength or weakness in the story?