

everyday use dee character analysis

Everyday Use Dee Character Analysis delves into the complexities and contradictions of one of the central figures in Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use." Dee, who later renames herself Wangero, embodies themes of heritage, identity, and conflict, showcasing how different perspectives on culture can lead to misunderstandings and tension within families. In this article, we will explore Dee's character in depth, examining her motivations, conflicts with her family, and the overall significance of her role in the narrative.

Understanding Dee's Character

Dee is introduced as a strong, assertive young woman who has embraced her African heritage in a way that contrasts sharply with her family's more traditional and practical approach to their roots. Her character is multifaceted, revealing much about how individuals engage with their cultural identities.

Dee's Background

To fully grasp Dee's character, it is essential to consider her background:

- **Education:** Dee has pursued higher education, which has exposed her to different cultural perspectives. This education influences her views on heritage and identity.
- **Family Dynamics:** Dee's relationship with her mother, Mama, and her sister, Maggie, is strained, particularly due to differing values concerning their heritage.
- **Cultural Reclamation:** Dee's decision to change her name to Wangero reflects her desire to reclaim her African roots, distancing herself from what she perceives as a legacy of oppression.

Dee's Personality Traits

Dee exhibits several distinct personality traits that shape her interactions with her family:

- **Confident:** Dee carries an air of confidence that can be interpreted as pride, but it sometimes veers into arrogance.
- **Materialistic:** Her appreciation for material objects, particularly those with cultural significance, suggests a superficial understanding of heritage.
- **Assertive:** Dee is not afraid to voice her opinions and desires, often disregarding the feelings and perspectives of others.

Thematic Elements of Dee's Character

Dee's character is integral to the story's overarching themes, particularly those surrounding heritage and identity.

Heritage vs. Materialism

One of the most significant conflicts in "Everyday Use" is the contrast between Dee's view of heritage and Mama and Maggie's understanding:

- Dee's View: She sees heritage as something to be displayed and celebrated through artifacts. For example, she desires the family quilts not for their practical use but as symbols of her cultural identity.
- Mama and Maggie's View: For them, heritage is a lived experience, represented through everyday use of objects. They value the quilts for their sentimental worth and the memories they carry.

Identity and Self-Expression

Dee's renaming and transformation into Wangero highlights her quest for identity:

- Rejection of Past: By renaming herself, Dee attempts to reject her previous identity, which she associates with oppression and ignorance.
- Conflict with Family: This change creates a rift between Dee and her family, as Mama and Maggie feel alienated by her new persona and the way she positions herself as the arbiter of cultural authenticity.

Symbolism in Dee's Character

Dee is rich in symbolic meaning, representing broader societal issues related to cultural identity and heritage.

The Quilts

The quilts serve as a crucial symbol in the story, representing the intersection of heritage and practical usage:

- Dee's Desire for the Quilts: To Dee, the quilts are artifacts of history that should be preserved and displayed rather than used.
- Mama's Decision: Mama's choice to give the quilts to Maggie instead of Dee emphasizes the idea that heritage is best honored through everyday life and

practical connection rather than mere display.

Clothing and Appearance

Dee's clothing also serves as a symbol of her character and worldview:

- Traditional African Garb: When Dee returns home, she wears traditional African clothing, which she uses to assert her cultural identity.
- Contrast with Mama and Maggie: Her attire contrasts with Mama and Maggie's practical clothing, further highlighting the divide between Dee's perception of heritage and the way her family lives it.

Conflict and Resolution

The climax of the story revolves around the confrontation between Dee and her family members, particularly regarding the quilts.

Confrontation with Mama

During a pivotal moment, Dee confronts Mama about her desire for the quilts, leading to a significant familial conflict:

- Mama's Stand: Mama's refusal to give Dee the quilts illustrates her shift in understanding what heritage means. It becomes a moment of empowerment for Mama, asserting her authority over her own family's history.
- Dee's Reaction: Dee's reaction to Mama's refusal reveals her entitlement and inability to understand the emotional significance of the quilts for Mama and Maggie.

Resolution and Growth

The story concludes without a clear resolution, leaving readers to ponder the implications of Dee's character:

- Dee's Stance: Although Dee leaves dissatisfied, her character prompts critical reflection on the complexities of cultural identity and heritage.
- Mama and Maggie's Bond: The resolution focuses on the strengthened bond between Mama and Maggie, highlighting their shared understanding of heritage rooted in everyday life.

Conclusion

In summary, Dee's character in "Everyday Use" serves as a lens through which readers can explore themes of identity, heritage, and familial conflict. Her journey reflects the struggle many face in reconciling personal identity with cultural roots, serving as a poignant reminder that heritage is not merely about artifacts but is deeply connected to lived experiences and relationships. Through this character analysis, it becomes evident that Dee's complexities enrich the narrative, prompting deeper discussions about what it means to honor one's heritage in a modern context.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key traits of Dee's character in 'Everyday Use'?

Dee is portrayed as confident, assertive, and somewhat self-centered. She embodies a strong sense of identity and cultural pride, but her understanding of heritage is often seen as superficial.

How does Dee's relationship with her family influence her character?

Dee's relationship with her mother and sister is strained. Her desire to assert her identity often leads to a sense of superiority over her family, highlighting her disconnect from their values and experiences.

In what ways does Dee's name change symbolize her character development?

Dee's decision to change her name to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo represents her attempt to reclaim her African heritage. However, this act also reflects her tendency to adopt a performative attitude toward cultural identity.

How does Dee's view of heritage differ from that of her mother and sister?

Dee views heritage as something to be showcased and celebrated, while her mother and sister see it as a lived experience and practical aspect of their daily lives. This difference creates tension in their interactions.

What role does education play in shaping Dee's

character?

Dee's education has given her a broader perspective on cultural identity, making her more aware of her African roots. However, it also contributes to her elitist attitude, distancing her from her family's traditional values.

How does Alice Walker use Dee's character to comment on cultural identity?

Alice Walker uses Dee's character to explore the complexities of cultural identity, highlighting the conflict between genuine connection to heritage and the superficial appropriation of culture for personal gain.

What is the significance of Dee's relationship with the quilts?

The quilts symbolize the family's heritage and the practical use of tradition. Dee's desire to possess the quilts reflects her attempts to claim her ancestry, but her approach is criticized as lacking genuine appreciation for their significance.

How does Dee's character challenge the notion of authenticity in cultural identity?

Dee challenges authenticity by presenting a version of cultural identity that is more aesthetic than practical. Her character raises questions about what it means to truly connect with one's heritage versus merely adopting elements for show.

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