

Craft Lesson: Writing the Introduction

Standards: 11.12.2 (Organization) 11.13.2 (Expository Writing)

Objective: To teach students to write an effective introduction to the American Experience in Literature essay

Writing the Introduction

The purpose of writing a good introduction to your essay is to grab your reader's attention and to begin to layout what you have to say about an aspect of the American Experience as it is developed through your character in an organized, succinct—and above all, engaging—manner.

How will you introduce your character and his/her aspirations and ambitions to your reader?

How will you introduce the role or theme of the American Experience and its relationship to your character?

How will you maximize the chances of your reader's acceptance of your analysis of your character with your introduction?

If you're writing an expository essay, your introduction should have within it, in microcosm, what you'll be explaining to your reader about your character at greater length, using supportive evidence, in the body of your essay.

One way to write an introduction is to open or close your introductory paragraph with your thesis statement. In the following examples the thesis statement is highlighted.

Example #1: Opening with thesis statement

In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha is the perfect example of a character who struggles against racism and sexism as she attempts to fulfill her ambitions. When this play was written (1959), American society was on the brink of major cultural and historical upheavals as the civil rights and women's movements began to gain momentum. African Americans began fighting for civil rights and women began questioning their roles as second-class citizens. In many ways, the civil rights and women's movements exposed how the so-called "American Dream" was not open to all people equally. Stereotypes about what African Americans and women were capable of often kept Blacks and women from pursuing and achieving their ambitions to rise above being menial servants or housekeepers.

Example #2: Closing with thesis statement

When *A Raisin in the Sun* was written (1959), American society was on the brink of major cultural and historical upheavals as the civil rights and women's movements began to gain momentum. African Americans began fighting for civil rights and women began questioning their roles as second-class citizens. In many ways, the civil rights and women's movements exposed how the so-called "American Dream" was not open to all people equally. Stereotypes about what African Americans and women were capable of often kept Blacks and women from pursuing and achieving their ambitions to rise above being menial servants or housekeepers. **In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha is the perfect example of a character who struggles against racism and sexism as she attempts to fulfill her ambitions.**

Another way to introduce what you have to say is to ask your reader one or more provocative questions about your character, perhaps relating him/her to someone the reader knows or has known.

Example #3: Provocative lead-in question(s)

Have you ever known someone who goes after whatever they want? Is this person someone who doesn't care what society says is appropriate or acceptable for them to be or do? Sometimes stereotypes about what certain races or genders are capable of can limit what people attempt to achieve. However, other times, stereotypes can be challenged. **In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha is the perfect example of a character who struggles against racism and sexism as she attempts to fulfill her ambitions.**

Finally, here are some other ways to begin your essay:

- Lead off with a quotation from the play or from an authority which leads into your thesis statement. "In his Introduction to *A Raisin in the Sun*, Robert Nemiroff (Lorraine Hansberry's husband) says, "the play presaged the revolution in black and women's consciousness."
- Make a provocative statement: "It is often the role of young people to question authority and the status quo."
- Begin with a metaphor: "Imagine a well cared-for plant that has been nurtured and loved, but is actually being threatened from blossoming because of weeds and worms that are eating away at its roots. Beneatha's ambitions for the future are similar to this threatened plant"
- Begin with an anecdote: "For years my sister has refused to conform to what my parents and the rest of society think she should be and do..."

Now, please take the thesis statement you like best, and write an effective introduction: