1101-20: Body Paragraph Example Two

When Asagai refers to Beneatha as “Alaiyo . . . one for whom bread or food is not enough,” this signifies his recognition that he has knowledge she wants, underscoring her need for outside validation. Earlier, Asagai teases her about her “mutilated” hair, saying, “Well . . . it is true that this is not so much a profile for a Hollywood queen as perhaps a queen of the Nile . . . But what does it matter? Assimilation is so popular in your country” (62, 63). Because Beneatha feels the need to assert her individuality and to validate her choices, Asagai’s comments are especially cutting and particularly timely. When Asagai implies cultural superiority over Beneatha and even over her country, he places her in a larger context that intensifies her insecurities about herself and her educational and career goals. In other words, she sees even more options to choose from and to measure herself against. Not only that, but Beneatha’s fragile sense of self also makes her vulnerable to Asagai’s confidence and self-assurance. This scene demonstrates that she relies on “educated” people to help her identify philosophies and, as her haircut suggests, even physical attributes that she hopes will enable her to feel self-assured and acceptable. Although Beneatha often comes across as confident and assertive—standing up to Walter, for example, or exuding coolness in the face of Mrs. Johnson’s condescension—her susceptibility to Asagai’s influence demonstrates how fragile she feels both in the context of her family’s criticisms and in her role as an African American woman navigating educational and career opportunities in the tense Jim Crow era. Asagai’s influence intensifies Beneatha’s anxieties related to gender- and race-based stereotypes that put her in a self-defensive position in the first place.

1101-LCO: Body Paragraph Example Three

Walter’s resistance to matriarchal leadership signifies that he feels pressure to gain respect as a provider and sound decision maker for his family, but that he does not yet understand that part of his role is to respect the provision and decisions of the women in his home. In other words, while Walter rejects Ruth’s, Mama’s, and Beneatha’s ideas about what the family needs or how to take care of the family’s individual wants and needs, he continually tries to aggressively persuade them to support his ideas about how to improve their socio-economic situation. He seems to feel unequivocally entitled to this support. However, when Walter and his family stop fighting each other as he stands up to Lindner and they start directing their anger and resolve at oppression outside the home, Walter sees that he needs to earn respect from his family members as well as to respect his family in return. When he tells Lindner “We are proud . . . we are very proud people, and that’s my sister over there and she’s gonna be a doctor and we are very proud” ( ), he demonstrates his recognition that respect and leadership is a mutual endeavor. Before this moment, Walter chided Beneatha about her desire to become a doctor, insisting that she choose something more gender-appropriate. This shift in Walter’s response to his sister’s aspirations signifies his larger recognition regarding the validity of his family’s ideas and opinions. Walter and his family learn together that contributing to the family’s stability and happiness is a precursor to gaining respect and mobility outside the home. The family members realize that they have a common goal, and feel more inclined to work together to change the social and cultural limitations that oppress them. Walter’s maturation, then, develops through the evolution of his family’s unity and mutual respect rather than through his solitary ascension to the role of patriarch.

Key:

Idea

Illustration

Interpretation