

The Meaning of Heritage in "Everyday Use"

According to renowned animator and entrepreneur Walt Disney, "Our heritage and ideals, our code and standards - the things we live by and teach our children - are preserved or diminished by how freely we exchange ideas and feelings." In this quote, Disney extends the meaning of heritage beyond Webster's Dictionary and touches on one of the key themes of themes in short stories and video presentations. In recent decades, Americans have given inordinate thought to and various meanings to the word "heritage" as each person seeks to ascertain his own true identity and cultivate the traditions handed down from ancestors. Consequently, "heritage," in keeping with current interest, has become a recurring theme in American literature. One of the most popular writers to proliferate a focus on heritage is African-American poet and raconteur Alice Walker. In one of her short stories, "Everyday Use," Walker develops a conflict between a mother and a daughter over their heritage. For two of the characters in her story, Mama and her daughter Maggie, heritage is a matter of everyday living, or "everyday use" as the title of the story suggests. Mama and Maggie are not conscious of their heritage because it is so much a part of their lives. For Mama's daughter Dee, however, heritage is a matter of style, a fashionable obsession with one's roots. **As Alice Walker develops the theme of heritage in "Everyday Use," these contrasting attitudes are reflected through the characters' appearance, actions, and appreciation of family possessions.**

From the onset of the novel, the author introduces the conflicting attitudes toward heritage through vivid descriptions of the characters' appearance. In . . .

I. Appearance

A. Maggie's Appearance

1. Burned

2. Plain

B. Dee's Appearance

1.
2.

II. Actions

A.

B.

III. Appreciation

A.

B.