

## *Clybourne Park*

Author	Bruce Norris
Published by	Nick Hern, London
Published in	2010
Price	€11.99
Genre	Social satire
Length	96 pages
Summary	<p>In the first act, Bev and Russ Stoller have just sold their house in order to escape the memories of their deceased son, Kenneth, who hanged himself in the staircase of the house. Since they wanted to get out of the house as soon as possible, the couple sold it below market value making it affordable for an African-American family. The white community of Clybourne Park is strictly against a black family moving into the house. Hence their spokesman, Karl Lindner, makes a counteroffer to the black family and tries to convince Russ and Bev not to sell their house to this particular family. Lindner accuses Bev and Russ of destroying the property values of the neighborhood by selling their house at such a low price and argues that a black family would not fit into this community. According to him, and the young minister Jim, who is also visiting Bev and Russ, African-Americans have a completely different lifestyle than whites. He tries to prove his point by questioning Bev's black housemaid, Francine, and her husband Albert, but fails, and the conversation heats up more and more. While Karl and Jim try to stay "politically correct", hiding their racist intentions behind arguments of property values, Russ finally completely loses his temper, aggressively blaming Karl and the community for his son's death, because they would not accept him in the community or give him a second chance after his return from the Korean War.</p> <p>In the second act, as feared by Karl Lindner, the demographic situation of Clybourne Park has completely changed. It is now a mainly black neighborhood and, as shown by the changed stage setting, deterioration has also taken place. The area is now mainly inhabited by African-Americans, but it is in the process of gentrification and is on its way to become a respected neighborhood again. The colored inhabitants, however, for whom the neighborhood is historically important, being a symbol for their social advancement, are less enthusiastic about this change. Thus the white family that is planning to move into 406 Clybourne Street now, after completely rebuilding and enlarging the house, is received with rather hostile</p>

	attitudes. Lena and Albert, the couple representing the black community of the neighborhood, express their concerns about the new family's plans to raze and rebuild the house. They point out that the new house will destroy the visual integrity of the neighborhood, and furthermore will not be received very well by the community because of the historical importance these houses have for them. The meeting about the renovation plans turns into a heated conversation, which culminates in an outburst of racial resentment.
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two acts (taking place in 1959 and 2009), no subdivision in scenes</li> <li>• Parallel action in both acts, tension is built up in a very similar way</li> </ul>
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race and housing properties</li> <li>• Racism then and now (lack of change in society)</li> </ul>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very colloquial, natural language</li> <li>• Conversation consists mainly of short utterances</li> <li>• Often overlapping and interrupted speech</li> </ul>
Suitable Age	11 <sup>th</sup> or 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Literary Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contemporary American drama</li> <li>• Response to Lorraine Hansberry's <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i></li> </ul>
Can be treated within a unit about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American society</li> <li>• African-American history</li> <li>• Civil Rights Movement</li> </ul>
Activities	<p><b>Pre-reading activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of cover picture (chess board) in order to introduce topic</li> <li>• Description of column picture</li> </ul> <p><b>While-reading activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative writing:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Inner monologue of Francine or Albert, or a conversation between Francine and Albert about their feelings during Karl's interrogation</li> <li>➤ Conversation between Karl Lindner and the black purchasers of the house</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Organized in-class discussion:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Formal discussion in the community council of Clybourne Park about the planned demolition of the house</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- Analysis of the play:
  - Sum up changes that have occurred in Clybourne Park between Act 1 and Act 2.
  - Detailed analysis of a few pages (e.g. pp 35-37), in order to examine the specific kind of dialogue Norris uses
  - Analysis and comparison of the structure of both acts in form of a diagram indicating the rising and falling action.
- In between the acts:
  - Overview over the Civil Rights Movement/African-American History of the last 50 years in form of a mind map

**Post-reading activities:**

- Evaluation of cover picture: “Does it represent the topic of the play adequately?”
  - Designing new cover pictures
  - Discussion of the idea of change
  - Short introduction to Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* and reading one or two central scenes of this play
  - Alternatively: student presentation of *A Raisin in the Sun*
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