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## The Significance Of Heritage In The Story Everyday Use

Heritage is one of the most important factors that represents who you are and where you came from. In "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker the meaning behind this story is to show that your heritage may not be exactly how the textbooks will tell you they are and that everyone has a different idea or perspective of what their heritage is and there is not right or wrong way to perceive it so you can't tell someone that the way they interpret their heritage is wrong.

This story is set in rural Georgia with an African American family. Mrs. Johnson "Mama" and her two daughters Dee and Maggie. Throughout this story you can obviously tell that mama's perceptions of Dee and Maggie are very different. She describes Maggie as "a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car." basically she is comparing her youngest daughter to a dog who has been run over by a car. But on the flip side she describes her older daughter Dee as everything Maggie isn't" Dee is lighter than Maggie with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She's a woman now" this also insinuates that she still sees Maggie as a child. Starting out you can see the prejudice mama has on Maggie. Dee and Maggie were always different anyway Maggie is usually the very furtive unconfident one while dee is the exact opposite. For example, when their house burned down Maggie was burned while mama was pulling her out the house, while Dee was outside dancing by the burning house. So, we can plainly see that dee is the stronger and favorite one.

The story begins with mama waiting for dee to come home after years away at school. She is already set on welcoming dee back as the pride of the Johnson family, Mama sends dee to Augusta Georgia for her education because she believes Dee is the only hope of the Johnson family to climb up the social ladder. she's very excited about her return so much that she even cleaned the house and prepared the whole yard yesterday afternoon. This is just one example of how mama goes above and beyond for dee. Mama has this dream that her daughter will come home and thank her for all the sacrifices and hard work she did to get her to school mama even raised money in the community of the church just to send her to Augusta.

Mama is expecting her daughter to come back as this amazing well-rounded person, but the reality is Dee comes back as this snobbish brat who finds her African identity while at school she even adopts an African name "Wangero Leewankia Kemanjo". Dee who now goes by wangero decides she doesn't want to go by the name of the people who oppressed her. But as mama tries to explain to her she was named after a series of Dee's in her family like her aunt and her grandma. So, the name dee had a lot of significance in their family history. While reading you can tell that dee has a very superficial understanding of what being African American is. So instead of embracing her own family's ancestry she decides to care more about the text book kind of African ancestry. She wants to become like the Africans that used to roam free before white people enslaved them. Now it's not a bad thing that she wants to feel more connected with the African culture but at the same time she really doesn't understand her own family history.

After the welcomes and pictures everyone goes in the house and has the lunch mama prepared. Dee soon tells mama that she wants to take two artifacts in the house that she thinks represents the ancestry, which are the churn top and the quilts. The churn tops represent a part

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of her family history because the churn was made by their aunts two husbands but for dee she just wants to make it a center piece on her table at home. The other artifact is the quilt which was sewn and patched up by different little pieces of fabric that each have a certain significance in the family such as the one little piece which is from their great grandpa Ezra's civil war uniform. Dee probably wants to hang up the quilt to show people how African and cultured she is. But that would mean the quilt would be of no use. Dee thinks she understands African heritage fully and that mama and Maggie don't deserve the quilt and won't be able to appreciate the quilt fully.

Mama quickly tells dee that she cannot have the quilts and that she is saving those for when Maggie gets married. Dee starts to get upset and says "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts! She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use. 'She goes on to say Maggie would probably put them on the bed and after 5 years they would be rugs". Mama explains to dee that she had been kept them safe and away for this long that she hopes Maggie will put them to everyday use and if they are to be torn or messed up that Maggie knows how to make another quilt. And this is the turning point of the story when mama has an epiphany and realizes Maggie is the true embodiment of her family's history and heritage, she is the one who will continue the Johnson legacy not dee.

Lastly, dee leaves home still believing that her mama and sister still don't understand heritage, but little did she know she was the one who didn't understand her own family's heritage. Now by the end of the story most people see Dee as the antagonist of the story and she doesn't deserve the hate because of the way she wants to embrace her heritage. She is just thinking from another perspective about what heritage is. While mama and Maggie are thinking about how to put their heritage into everyday use Dee is thinking about cultural preservation. It's like museums, you wouldn't say museums are bad ideas because it's not putting things to everyday use but instead its preserving culture. But what really makes people despise dee is her attitude towards the family. She hated the house she stayed in while growing up and then comes back to take certain items that she deems culturally valuable. To be far she was probably taught at school that the way to promote culture is to preserve things. Which causes her to forget that some of the items like the churn and quilt have everyday uses.

In conclusion the meaning of this story is to show that your heritage may not be exactly how the textbooks will tell you they are and that everyone has a different idea or perspective of what their heritage is and there is not right or wrong way to perceive it so you can't tell someone that the way they interpret their heritage is wrong. I feel both mama and Maggie and Dee all understand why heritage and culture are important, but both decide to embrace and cherish it in a different way.