Noor Hasan

GEEN 2312

Prof. Commander

March 28, 2023

“Everyday Use” by Alice Walker

The story “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker opens an important discussion on how the past and our heritage should be appreciated and what type of attitudes and mentalities we should have when we do that. The story and short film both present two clashing ideals. One is the attitude Dee has towards her past and the other is the attitude Mama and Maggie have. The first thing I noticed after reading the story and watching the film is the embarrassment Dee has towards her family and their home, as well has how much she avoids interacting with her roots. “This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No doubt when Dee sees it, she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we "choose" to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends.” This excerpt from the story portrays the derision and disgust she seems to have towards the way of life her family lives. In the film this is most clearly seen when Mama confronts Dee on why she has only sent 2 letters in the 5 years she has been away and how different she is to her family, driving up in a shiny new car. Her only sending 2 letters truly demonstrates how much she wishes to distance herself from the life she once led. In the story, Dee is described as wanting “nice things”. This attitude coupled with being the only one in her family with an education, gives her an entitled and haughty manner toward her mother and sister, telling them that they don’t understand “their heritage” even though they are the ones truly living their authentic heritage, following in the steps of their ancestors and their teachings.

In contrast to how Dee views things related to their culture as material possession that are meant to be put on display, Mama and Maggie see these things with the same attitude of those who made them, made with the purpose of being used. They consider the things that visually display their culture and way of life as less important compared to the memory and past behind them. Dee considers objects like the quilt and the dasher more for aesthetic purposes, whereas Mama, and specifically Maggie, are aware of how they were created and how they relate to their family and lineage. Maggie remembers how the dasher was made, “Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash, his name was Henry, but they called him Stash.” While Dee’s only remarks are about how things look, “I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints,”. During the argument over the quilts, Maggie says, “She can have them, Mama, I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts.” Displaying how she hold memories dearer than material possessions, and instead of having an aggressive and insulting attitude like her sister, exhibitions an ability to be the bigger person. In contrast, Dee clearly sees her sister and mother as lesser and less intelligent than her, “Maggie can't appreciate these quilts! She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use.” Insulting words like this are what show how Dee does not appreciate her culture in a deeper sense but only superficially and in a way that she believes to be fashionable.