

# Preparing to Read

## Everyday Use For Your Grandmama

By Alice Walker

### LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: CHARACTER TRAITS

**Character traits** are the qualities and features that make a person unique. These qualities can include anything from behaviors, to beliefs, to habits. Real people have character traits. So do characters in stories. Think about the fairy-tale character Goldilocks. She tries three types of porridge and chairs. From her behavior, we know that curiosity is one of her character traits. In the following selection, notice how the character traits of the three women make them very different from each other.

### READING SKILLS FOCUS: MAKING INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTERS

An **inference** is an intelligent guess. You make inferences based on evidence. In a story, evidence includes what characters say or do. By “listening” and “watching” characters, you can infer, or guess, what the characters are like. Suppose that a character adopts stray dogs and helps her elderly neighbors. Even if the author does not tell you directly, you can infer that the character is a caring person. Making inferences while you read helps you know more about the characters than the author tells you.

### VOCABULARY

With a partner, practice using these words in complete sentences.

**sidle** (SY DUHL) *v.*: move in a slow, sideways manner.

**furtive** (FUR TIHV) *adj.*: secretive; trying not to be seen.

**cowering** (KOW UHR IHNG) *v.*: used as *adj.*: crouching or hiding in shame or fear.

**oppress** (UH PREHS) *v.*: hold down unfairly.

### INTO THE SHORT STORY

This story is set in the American South in the 1960s. At this time, the civil rights movement was taking place. African Americans struggled to gain equal treatment. In the South, African Americans had been treated like second-class citizens since the time of slavery. Finally, southern African Americans’ lives were changing. Their expectations were also changing. You will see how this affects the way the characters in the story behave.



#### Reading Standard 3.4

Determine characters’ traits by what the characters say about themselves in narration, dialogue, dramatic monologue, and soliloquy.

# EVERYDAY USE

## For Your Grandmama

By Alice Walker



Quilts on the Line (1990) by Anna Belle Lee Washington/SuperStock

I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house.

10 Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: She will stand hopelessly in corners, homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eyeing her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. **A** She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that “no” is a word the world never learned to say to her. **B**

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### **A** HERE'S HOW

#### Language Coach

Because Maggie is ashamed of the way she looks, I think *homely* means “unattractive.” **Antonyms** are words that have opposite meanings. I think *attractive* would be a good antonym for *homely*.

### **B** HERE'S HOW

#### Reading Focus

I just read that Maggie will hide in corners when her sister is around. From this evidence, I can **infer** that Maggie is shy. I think Maggie feels she is not as good as her sister.

**A** HERE'S HOW

**Vocabulary**

I am not sure what the word *embrace* means. I know that the family on TV is happy to see each other. I read on and learned that when the child sees her parents, she “wraps them in her arms.” I think the family members are hugging. I looked up *embrace* in my dictionary, and it means “hug,” so I was right.

**B** YOUR TURN

**Vocabulary**

Circle the word in this sentence that tells you what *orchids* are.

**C** HERE'S HOW

**Literary Focus**

This paragraph gives me a good physical description of the narrator, Mama. I learn that the narrator is a large woman with “rough, man-working hands.” I think this description gives me a sense of the narrator’s **character traits**, as well. The narrator works outside all day and does tasks usually reserved for men. I think a character trait of the narrator is that she has a strong work ethic.

You’ve no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has “made it” is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other’s faces. **A**

20 Sometimes the mother and father weep; the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.

**IN OTHER WORDS** I wait for her in the yard Maggie and I cleaned yesterday. Maggie will be nervous when her sister is with us. Maggie will stand in corners by herself, embarrassed at how she looks. Maggie has burn scars down her arms and legs. Maggie will look at her sister with both respect and jealousy. She thinks her sister has had an easy life. There are TV shows where successful children meet their parents again. They hug and cry on TV. I have seen TV shows like these.

Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson<sup>1</sup> who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage, and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she had told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers. **B**

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In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing; I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it

1. **Johnny Carson** was the former host of *The Tonight Show* who lived from 1925 to 2005.

comes steaming from the hog. **C** One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledgehammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course  
40 all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.

But that is a mistake. I know even before I wake up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in  
50 flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. **D** Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature. **E**

**IN OTHER WORDS** Sometimes I dream that my daughter Dee and I are on a TV program. The TV host tells me what a good daughter I have. I picture myself as my daughter would want me to look and act. In my dream I am beautiful, smart, and I have an answer for everything. In real life I am the opposite of my dream. I am a large woman who works hard all day. I would never look a strange white man in the eye, as I did in my dream. But Dee would look anyone in the eye.

“How do I look, Mama?” Maggie says, showing just enough of her thin body enveloped in pink skirt and red blouse for me to know she’s there, almost hidden by the door.

“Come out into the yard,” I say.

Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to him? **F** That is  
60 the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground.

#### **D** YOUR TURN

##### Literary Focus

Here, the narrator continues to describe herself. What word or words can you now use to describe a **character trait** of the narrator?

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#### **E** HERE'S HOW

##### Vocabulary

I am not sure what *hesitation* means. I know that Dee will look at anyone, so she must be proud and brave. I looked up *hesitation* in the dictionary, and it means “the act of pausing before saying or doing something.” I think this **character trait** shows that Dee is sure of herself.

#### **F** YOUR TURN

##### Reading Focus

*Sidle* means “walk slowly and sideways.” What can you **infer** about Maggie because she *sidles*?

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## A YOUR TURN

### Vocabulary

*Blazed* means “burned or shone brightly.” What has happened that makes it look as though Maggie’s eyes are “blazed open”?

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## B HERE’S HOW

### Vocabulary

I am not sure what the word *dingy* means. It must have something to do with being gray, like the board of the house. I looked it up, and *dingy* means “gloomy or dull.” I think *dingy* describes how the house was plain and worn.

## C HERE’S HOW

### Reading Focus

I can tell that Dee is very different from her Mama and Maggie. This paragraph provides evidence of this. I can **infer** that Dee looks down on her family. Dee thinks that she is smarter than her mother and sister.

## D YOUR TURN

### Language Coach

Think about what Dee thinks of her mother and sister. Then write an **antonym** for *dimwits*.

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Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She’s a woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie’s arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them. **A** And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum tree<sup>2</sup> she used to dig gum out of, a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. **B** Why don’t you do a dance around the ashes? I’d wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much.

**IN OTHER WORDS** Maggie is a very shy girl. She walks like she is a scared animal. Maggie has walked like that since our other house burned down in a fire 10 or 12 years ago. I can still remember that fire. I carried Maggie out of the burning house while Dee watched from the yard. Dee had always hated that house.

I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But that was before we raised the money, the church and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She used to read to us without pity, forcing words, lies, other folks’ habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn’t necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious ways she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand. **C D**

Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy<sup>3</sup> dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she’d made from an old suit somebody gave me. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time. Often I fought off the

2. A **gum tree** is a type of tree in the eucalyptus family.
3. **Organdy** (AWR GUHN DEE) is a light, transparent fabric made from cotton.

temptation to shake her. At sixteen she had a style of her own:  
90 and knew what style was.

I never had an education myself. After second grade the school closed down. Don't ask me why: In 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but can't see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quickness passed her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face), and then I'll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was always better at a man's job. I  
100 used to love to milk till I was hooked in the side in '49. Cows are soothing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way. **E**

**IN OTHER WORDS** I used to think that Dee hated Maggie, just like she hated our other house. But that was before I raised money with the church to send Dee to school. Dee used to read aloud to us even if we did not want her to. She would make us feel stupid, like we were not as good as she was. I stopped school after second grade. Maggie is not smart, either, and she is not pretty like Dee. But Maggie is going to marry John Thomas. Then I will be alone. I could sing church songs to myself, but I'm better at doing men's work on the farm than I am at singing.

I have deliberately turned my back on the house. It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make shingle roofs anymore. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. **F** No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down.  
110 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.

**E**

### YOUR TURN

#### Reading Focus

Underline the description of Dee's reading from the previous page. Then circle the description of Maggie's reading in this paragraph. How are they different? What can you **infer** about what each daughter is like?

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**F**

### HERE'S HOW

#### Vocabulary

I am not sure what a *pasture* is. It sounds like Mama and Maggie live on a farm because Mama has milked cows and killed hogs. I checked a dictionary and a *pasture* is an area with grass for grazing animals. I was right that Mama lives in a rural area and raises animals.

**A YOUR TURN**

**Reading Focus**

Underline a word or phrase that helps you **infer** what Dee's friends thought about her.

**B YOUR TURN**

**Vocabulary**

Re-read this paragraph. What is happening with Dee here? Use your understanding of what is happening to help you write a definition for *recompose*.

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**C HERE'S HOW**

**Reading Focus**

Maggie groans when she sees the man. Then Mama says Maggie's groan is like the sound you make when you see a nearby snake. I can **infer** that Maggie is shocked by Dee's companion.

Maggie and I thought about this and Maggie asked me, "Mama, when did Dee ever *have* any friends?"

She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hanging about on washday after school. Nervous girls who never laughed. Impressed with her, they worshiped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the humor that erupted like bubbles in lye.<sup>4</sup> She read to them. **A**

120 When she was courting Jimmy T, she didn't have much time to pay to us but turned all her faultfinding power on him. He *flew* to marry a cheap city girl from a family of ignorant, flashy people. She hardly had time to recompose herself. **B**

When she comes, I will meet—but there they are!

**IN OTHER WORDS** Our house is small with no real windows, just like the other house that burned. Dee said she would visit us anywhere, but she would not bring her friends. Maggie wondered if Dee had any friends. Dee had a few. She wanted to marry Jimmy T, but he married someone else.

Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. "Come back here," I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe.

130 It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat looking, as if God himself shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhhnnh" is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhhnnh." **C**

Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face

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4. **Lye** (LY) is a chemical that was once used to make soap.

140 warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go “Uhhnnh” again. It is her sister’s hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears. **D**

**IN OTHER WORDS** A car pulls up to the house. Dee is here. Maggie tries to run back inside the house, but I make her stay. A man comes out of the car first. He has long hair all over his face and head. Maggie makes a sound like she has seen a snake. Then Dee comes out of the car in a long, bright dress. Maggie makes that sound again when she sees Dee’s hair. Dee’s hair stands straight up.

150 “Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!”<sup>5</sup> she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short, stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all grinning, and he follows up with “Asalamalakim,<sup>6</sup> my mother and sister!” He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there, and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin. **E**

160 “Don’t get up,” says Dee. Since I am stout, it takes something of a push. **F** You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around in the edge of the yard, she snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house.

5. **Wa-su-zo-Tean-o** is a greeting used by the Buganda people of Uganda that means “good morning.”
6. **Asalamalakim** (AH SUH LAHM AH LAY KUHM) is an Arabic greeting meaning “peace be with you.”

**D YOUR TURN**

**Literary Focus**

Re-read this paragraph. How does Dee’s appearance reflect what you already know about her **character traits**?

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**E HERE’S HOW**

**Reading Focus**

Dee and the man speak to Maggie and Mama in other languages. I can **infer** that Dee has made some changes in her life. I also get the feeling that both Dee and the man feel as if they are somehow better than Mama and Maggie.

**F HERE’S HOW**

**Vocabulary**

I already know that Mama is a large woman, so I think that *stout* means “large.” I looked *stout* up in the dictionary, and I was right.

### A LITERARY ANALYSIS

Dee is taking pictures of the house. How does this fit with your idea of how Dee felt about her childhood home?

### B HERE'S HOW

#### Reading Focus

From the way that the man tries to shake Maggie's hand, I can **infer** that he is trying to show off his manners, which are different from Maggie's or Mama's. Mama also calls the man "Asalamalakim," which refers to the man's greeting when he got out of the car. I can infer that Mama calls him this instead of his real name because she does not like him.

### C YOUR TURN

#### Vocabulary

Use context clues to write a definition for *oppress*. Then check your answer in a dictionary.

### D HERE'S HOW

#### Reading Focus

This paragraph says that "Wangero (Dee) was getting tired." I can **infer** that she is impatient with her mother. Wangero does not think Mama is very smart.

Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car and comes up and kisses me on the forehead. **A**

170 Meanwhile, Asalamalakim is going through motions with Maggie's hand. Maggie's hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie. **B**

**IN OTHER WORDS** Dee gets out of the car and says "good morning" in an African language. The short man from the car gives an Arabic greeting. The man moves to hug Maggie but she backs up. Dee grabs a camera from the car and takes pictures of me and Maggie in front of the house. The man tries to shake Maggie's hand, but Maggie, nervous as ever, does not want anything to do with him.

"Well," I say. "Dee."

"No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"<sup>7</sup>

"What happened to 'Dee?'" I wanted to know.

"She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me." **C**

180 "You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

"But who was *she* named after?" asked Wangero.

"I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.

"And who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

"Her mother," I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. "That's about as far back as I can trace it," I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches. **D**

"Well," said Asalamalakim, "there you are."

7. Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo are names from a variety of groups in East Africa.

190 “Uhhnnh,” I heard Maggie say.  
 “There I was not,” I said, “before ‘Dicie’ cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?”

He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A<sup>8</sup> car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head. **E**

“How do you pronounce this name?” I asked.

“You don’t have to call me by it if you don’t want to,” said Wangero.

“Why shouldn’t I?” I asked. “If that’s what you want us to call you, we’ll call you.”

200 “I know it might sound awkward at first,” said Wangero.

“I’ll get used to it,” I said. “Ream it out again.” **F**

**IN OTHER WORDS** Dee says her name is now Wangero. She does not want to be named after slave owners. I tell her that the women in our family have had the name Dee, short for “Dicie,” for generations. But I tell Wangero I will call her what she wants to be called.

Well, soon we got the name out of the way. Asalamalakim had a name twice as long and three times as hard. After I tripped over it two or three times, he told me to just call him Hakim-a-barber.<sup>9</sup> I wanted to ask him was he a barber, but I didn’t really think he was, so I didn’t ask.

210 “You must belong to those beef-cattle peoples down the road,” I said. They said “Asalamalakim” when they met you, too, but they didn’t shake hands. Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay. When the white folks poisoned some of the herd, the men stayed up all night with rifles in their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see the sight.

Hakim-a-barber said, “I accept some of their doctrines, but farming and raising cattle is not my style.” **G** (They didn’t tell

8. **Model A** was a type of car produced by Ford in 1903 and again in 1927.

9. **Hakim-a-barber** is a mispronounced version of the Arabic name Hakim al Baba; Hakim means “leader.”

**E YOUR TURN**

**Reading Focus**

*Inspecting* means “looking at closely.” What can you **infer** about Wangero and her friend based on the way they are looking at Mama?

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**F HERE’S HOW**

**Vocabulary**

I am not sure what the expression “ream it out again” means. Mama is asking Dee to repeat her new name, so she can better understand it. The conversation does not seem pleasant, though. I checked a dictionary, and *ream* means “squeeze.” Based on this definition and the context of the phrase, I think Mama is asking Dee to say her new name again.

**G YOUR TURN**

**Vocabulary**

*Doctrines* are sets of beliefs held by a religious group. What does this sentence tell you about Hakim-a-barber?

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**A** HERE'S HOW

**Literary Focus**

I can see that Wangero and Hakim-a-barber have different **character traits**. Hakim-a-barber does not eat certain foods, but Wangero likes all of the food from her childhood.

**B** YOUR TURN

**Literary Focus**

Think about Wangero's **character traits**. Then answer the following question: Why is Wangero delighted by everything?

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**C** YOUR TURN

**Vocabulary**

Re-read these two lines to learn how Uncle Buddy made the churn. Use this information to help you come up with a definition for the word *whittle*. Use a dictionary to check your answer.

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me, and I didn't ask, whether Wangero—Dee—had really gone and married him.)

220 We sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards<sup>10</sup>, and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins<sup>11</sup> and corn bread, the greens, and everything else. **A** She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs. **B**

**IN OTHER WORDS** The man says to call him Hakim-a-barber. There are people who live down the street that use the same Arabic greeting as the man used. One time white people killed their cows. I did not ask if Hakim-a-barber and Wangero were married. We sat down to eat, but Hakim-a-barber did not eat our food. Wangero, though, liked everything.

230 "Oh, Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh, and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn<sup>12</sup> stood, the milk in it clabber<sup>13</sup> by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.

"This churn top is what I need," she said. "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?" **C**

"Yes," I said.

"Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher,<sup>14</sup> too."

"Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the barber.

Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

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- 10. **Collards** (KOL UHRDS) are a vegetable related to the cabbage that has dark green edible leaves.
  - 11. **Chitlins** are the large intestines of a pig, boiled or stewed.
  - 12. A **churn** (CHURN) is a device used to make butter.
  - 13. **Clabber** (KLAB UHR) is thickened or curdled milk, used in making butter.
  - 14. A **dasher** (DASH UHR) is a pole that stirs the milk in a churn.

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“Aunt Dee’s first husband whittled the dash,” said Maggie so low you almost couldn’t hear her. “His name was Henry, but they called him Stash.”

“Maggie’s brain is like an elephant’s,” Wangero said, laughing. “I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table,” she said, sliding a plate over the churn, “and I’ll think of something artistic to do with the dasher.” **D**

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When she finished wrapping the dasher, the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn’t even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light-yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived.

**IN OTHER WORDS**

Dee (Wangero) loved the old benches we sat on. She wanted to take the butter churn with her as a decoration for her house. She saw it as a piece of art, and not the important tool that it was. Uncle Buddy made the churn years ago from a tree. Dee (Wangero) also wanted the pole that stirs the milk inside the churn. You could see where all the hands had used the churn to make butter over the years.

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After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee, and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell’s paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra’s uniform that he wore in the Civil War. **E**

**D**

**YOUR TURN**

**Literary Focus**

Wangero sees the churn as art. She does not think of it as a tool. What **character trait** of Wangero’s does this highlight?

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**E**

**QUICK CHECK**

What are these quilts made of?

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**A** HERE'S HOW

**Literary Focus**

I am slightly surprised that Maggie slammed the door. I know her **character traits** include gentleness. This is the first time Maggie has behaved in a way that shows she also feels anger.

“Mama,” Wangero said sweet as a bird. “Can I have these old quilts?”

I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed. **A**

270 “Why don’t you take one or two of the others?” I asked.

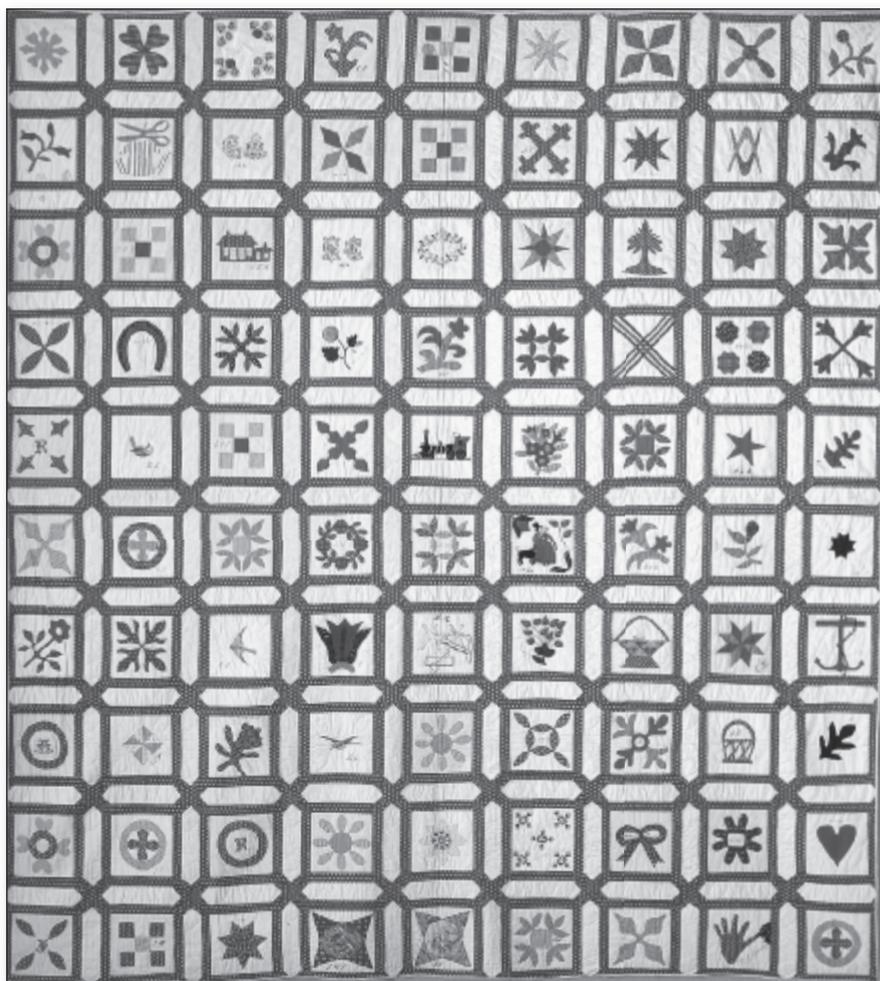
“These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died.”

“No,” said Wangero. “I don’t want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine.”

“That’ll make them last better,” I said.

“That’s not the point,” said Wangero. “These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!” She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

280 “Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her,” I said, moving up to



*Bred's Friendship Medley, 1876.*

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touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

"Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom. **B**

"The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

**IN OTHER WORDS** Dee (Wangero) went into my room and found two old quilts in my trunk. The quilts were made by Grandma Dee, Aunt Dee, and me. Both quilts had patches of Grandma Dee's old dresses in them, along with pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's shirts and Great Grandpa Ezra's Civil War uniform. Dee asked me if she could have the quilts. I heard Maggie slam the kitchen door. I told Dee to take other, newer quilts that would last longer. But Dee held on to the quilts like she already owned them. I told her that I had already promised to give the quilts to Maggie when she marries John Thomas.

She gasped like a bee had stung her.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use." **C**

290 "I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

"But they're *priceless!*" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

"She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

300 Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point is *these* quilts, these quilts!"

"Well," I said, stumped. "What would *you* do with them?"

**B YOUR TURN**

**Reading Focus**

Re-read the previous two paragraphs. What can you infer about Dee (Wangero) based on her actions? Be sure to list the evidence that supports your inference.

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**C LITERARY ANALYSIS**

Re-read lines 285–289. How does the title of this story seem more important now?

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**A LITERARY ANALYSIS**

Why does Dee (Wangero) like the quilts?

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**B YOUR TURN**

**Reading Focus**

What can you **infer** about how Mama feels about Maggie? What can you infer about how Mama feels about Dee at this moment? Underline parts of the story that are evidence for your answer.

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“Hang them,” she said. As if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts. **A**

Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

“She can have them, Mama,” she said, like somebody used to never winning anything or having anything reserved for her. “I can ’member Grandma Dee without the quilts.”

**IN OTHER WORDS**

Dee (Wangero) could not believe that I was going to give the quilts to Maggie. She said Maggie should not have the quilts. I once tried to give Dee one of the quilts but she did not want it back then. She thought it was too old-fashioned. Maggie would use the quilts all the time, but Dee thought the quilts should hang on the walls. Maggie came in and said that Dee could have the quilts. Maggie said she could remember Grandma Dee even if she did not have her quilts.

310 I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff, and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear, but she wasn’t mad at her. This was Maggie’s portion. This was the way she knew God to work.

When I looked at her like that, something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I’m in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero’s hands, and dumped them into Maggie’s lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open. **B**

320

“Take one or two of the others,” I said to Dee.

But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber.

“You just don’t understand,” she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

330 “What don’t I understand?” I wanted to know.

“Your heritage,” she said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, “You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. **C** It’s really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live, you’d never know it.”

She put on some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and her chin.

Maggie smiled, maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle, I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed. **D**

**IN OTHER WORDS** When I saw the way Maggie looked at Dee in fear, something hit me. I did something that I had never done before. I went over to Maggie and I hugged her. I brought her into the room with me. I took the quilts out of Miss Wangero’s hands and gave them to Maggie. Maggie just sat on my bed with her mouth open. She was surprised. I told Dee (Wangero) to take one of the other quilts. Dee told me that I just do not understand my heritage. She then told Maggie that it was time for her to make something of herself. Dee put big sunglasses on that hid most of her face. Dee and Hakim-a-barber got in the car and left. Maggie smiled. She was not scared anymore.

**C** HERE’S HOW

**Vocabulary**

I do not know the exact meaning of the word *heritage*. Based on what I have read, I think *heritage* might have to do with the past. It also has the same root as the verb *inherit*.

**D** YOUR TURN

**Literary Focus**

What new **character trait** does Maggie show at the end of the story?

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# Skills Practice

## Everyday Use For Your Grandmama

### USE A CHARACTER TRAITS CHART

**DIRECTIONS:** List the **character traits** that the story reveals about Mama, Maggie, and Dee (Wangero) in the boxes to the right.

#### Character Traits

Mama	→	1.
Maggie	→	2.
Dee (Wangero)	→	3.

# Applying Your Skills

## Everyday Use For Your Grandmama

### LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: CHARACTER TRAITS

**DIRECTIONS:** Choose one of the following characters from the story: Mama, Maggie, or Dee (Wangero). Think about the **character traits** the story reveals about that character. On the lines below, write a short paragraph that describes the character you chose. Use the exercise you completed on the Skills Practice page to help you.

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### READING SKILLS FOCUS: MAKING INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTERS

**DIRECTIONS:** Complete the chart below by **making inferences** about the characters in “Everyday Use: For Your Grandmama.” One has been provided as an example.

Character	Evidence	Inferences
Maggie	thinks she is unattractive; ashamed; looks at her sister with envy and awe	Maggie feels inferior to Dee. She may be jealous of Dee’s good looks.
1. Mama		
2. Dee		

### VOCABULARY REVIEW

**DIRECTIONS:** Each sentence below includes an underlined vocabulary word. Circle the sentence in which the underlined word is used correctly.

1. The dictator worked to oppress his people by creating cruel laws.
2. I saw the woman sidle around the track, her hair flying behind her.