

Everyday Use Discussion Questions

1. What do you imagine the mother's relationship with Dee was like when Dee was at home? Were they close? How do you think the mother feels about Dee's success? Is she proud or does she have mixed feelings? What is the significance of the daydream where Mother and Dee are together on the TV show?
2. Think about the relationship between Maggie and her mother. How do you imagine they get along? What clues are available to you from the text?
3. What does Dee say or do that reflects a growing interest in preserving her heritage? How is the butter churn used to contrast Dee's relationship with her heritage with Maggie's? Is there anything ironic about Dee's connection to her heritage?
4. What is Hakim-a-barber's purpose in the story? Contrast him with John Thomas, the man Maggie is supposed to marry.
5. Think about the most important object in the story, the quilts. Think about the history of quilts, and discuss how the quilts may be symbols of something deeper.
6. In paragraph 76 the narrator says, speaking of Maggie, "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." What "hit" Mama? What did she understand that she had not understood a moment before? Does anyone else in the story have an epiphany?
7. At the end of the story, Dee tells Maggie, "It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama live you'd never know it." What does Dee mean? Is it a new day for Maggie and Mama? Do they want it to be? Would the new day require them to make sacrifices?
8. We usually admire a person who rises out of poverty to get an education and better her circumstances, but in this story, the reader does not generally identify with Dee or sympathize with her. Why not? Who is the narrator in the story? How does her view color the reader's viewpoint? Do you see Dee as totally unlikable? Do you think those traits that appear to be her shortcomings are actually both common and necessary for someone to progress in life? Should we admire Mama and Maggie who are not willing to change?