



THE COLOR PURPLE

Alice Walker

Teacher's Guide

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SYNOPSIS

ORGANIZED BY LETTER

1
After her mother grows ill, Celie is raped by Fonso, the man she thinks is her father. The novel opens with "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy," which is presumably what Fonso tells Celie after raping her. The pronouncement also explains why the majority of letters are addressed to God.

2
Celie is pregnant with her second child, also fathered by Fonso, and her mother dies.

3
Fonso verbally abuses Celie. She promises to protect her younger sister, Nettie, from his advances.

4
Fonso remarries a woman Celie's age. Mr. _____ meets Nettie in church and begins courting her. He is a widower old enough to be her father.

5
Fonso beats Celie for winking at a boy in church, which she didn't do. She only looks at women because she isn't scared of them. In order to protect her from Fonso, Celie tells Nettie to marry Mr. _____. Celie no longer menstruates.

6
Mr. _____ asks to marry Nettie, but Fonso refuses. Mr. _____ has a number of children from his first wife, who was murdered, and there are rumors about a relationship between him and Shug Avery. He accidentally drops a picture of her while visiting Fonso, which Celie recovers and treasures.

7
After Fonso beats and rapes Celie, Mr. _____ returns to ask to marry Nettie. Fonso flatly refuses and offers Celie instead.

8
Nettie helps Celie study because she was forced to leave school after becoming pregnant and never returned. Mr. _____ visits to examine Celie. Fonso promises him a cow, if he'll marry her.

9
Celie and Mr. _____ marry. His children are undisciplined and neglected.

10
In town, Celie spots a woman and child. Sure that the child is hers, she follows them and casually questions the woman about the girl. The woman's husband, the Reverend Mr. _____, arrives and ends their conversation.

11
Nettie runs away from home to stay with Celie. After a short stay, Mr. _____ makes her leave because she rejects his sexual advances. Celie sends her to the Reverend Mr. _____ and his wife, the only friendly people she knows.

12
Carrie and Kate, Mr. _____'s sisters, visit. They disparage Mr. _____'s former wife and praise Celie. Mr. _____ eventually forces them to leave because they stand up for Celie against him and his children.

13
Harpo, Mr. _____'s eldest child, confides in Celie. He tells her of his plans to marry a woman against her family's wishes.

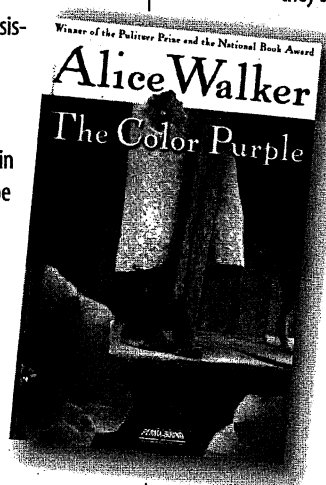
14
Shug Avery, a blues singer, comes to town to play a show. Celie admires her, although they've never met, and longs to go see her sing. Mr. _____ plans to go and has Celie meticulously prepare his clothing.

15
Mr. _____ spends the weekend with Shug Avery.

16
Celie observes that Mr. _____ treats Harpo almost as badly as he treats her.

17
Sophia, Harpo's fiancée, is already pregnant when she meets Mr. _____, who is rude and insulting to her. Harpo observes, but doesn't interfere.

18
Harpo and Sophia are married after the birth of their child. They move into a shack on Mr. _____'s property, which they make inhabitable. Sophia is physically powerful and headstrong.



19

Harpo asks Mr. _____ how to "make Sophia mind." Mr. _____ advises beating her. Celie, too, advises beating Sophia when asked. The next time she sees him, Harpo's face is covered in bruises.

20

By chance, Celie observes a brawl between Sophia and Harpo.

21

Sophia confronts Celie, asking her why she advised Harpo to beat her. Celie says, she was a fool, and that she was jealous of Sophia. They reconcile their differences and start a quilt.

22

Shug Avery becomes sick, reputedly with a "nasty woman disease." No one in the community will care for her, so Mr. _____ invites her to stay with him and Celie. When she arrives, she looks at Celie and says, "You is ugly."

23

Shug is sick and decidedly ill-tempered, insulting both Albert (Mr. _____) and Celie.

24

Shug has had three children with Albert. Celie bathes her, which she finds arousing.

25

Celie tricks Shug into eating again.

26

While Celie brushes her hair, Shug composes a song.

27

Mr. _____'s father comes to berate him about letting Shug stay in his house. He says to Celie, "Not many women let they husband whore lay up in they house." Later Tobias, Mr. _____'s brother, comes to see Shug. Celie begins teaching Shug how to quilt.

28

Shug donates an old dress to Sophia and Celie's quilt, which Celie cherishes. Harpo begins force feeding himself large amounts of rich foods.

29

Celie finds Harpo crying on the porch. He's upset because he wants Sophia to obey him like Celie obeys Mr. _____. Celie tells him that he should be happy because he and Sophia love one another, and there's no love between Celie and Mr. _____.

30

Sophia is considering moving in with her sister because her relationship with Harpo is strained.

31

Sophia and her children move in with Odessa, her sister.

32

Sophia has been gone six months. Harpo converts his house into a "jukejoint" with his friend Swain.

33

Harpo opens Harpo's, his club. He and Swain convince Shug to sing a show. Mr. _____ tries to prevent Celie's attendance, but Shug insists. She sings "Miss Celie's song," the song she composed while Celie brushed her hair.

34

Shug, fully recovered, decides to leave. Celie tells her, "He [Mr. _____] beat me when you not here." Shug promises not to leave until "Albert won't ever think about beating you."

35

Shug continues her sexual relationship with Albert. When she asks Celie's permission, Celie admits that she's never felt sexual attraction to him. When she confesses that she's never enjoyed coitus, Shug tells her that she's still a virgin and informs her about the clitoris.

36

Sophia comes to Harpo's with Henry Broadnax, her boyfriend. Squeak (Mary Agnes), Harpo's girlfriend picks a fight with her, and Sophia knocks two of her teeth out.

37

Sophia is jailed for being disrespectful to the Mayor and his wife, Miss Millie. The police beat her severely. Celie visits her in jail to tend her wounds.

38

Sophia is sentenced to twelve years in jail. Squeak (Mary Agnes) and Odessa care for her children.

39

Celie, Albert, Squeak (Mary Agnes), Henry Broadnax, and Sophia's sisters try to devise a plan to get Sophia out of jail. The men all suggest violence or escape. Squeak reveals that Jimmy Hodges, a black relation to the warden, is her father.

40

They dress up Squeak (Mary Agnes) and send her to talk to Bubber Hodges, her uncle. She plans to trick him into releasing Sophia by telling him that Sophia enjoys jail and thus isn't suffering.

41

Bubber Hodges rapes Squeak (Mary Agnes) when she implies that he is her uncle. He tells her that he wouldn't rape her if she were his niece, so she must not be. Squeak begins insisting on being called by her name, Mary Agnes.

42

Six months later, Mary Agnes begins singing.

43

Celie visits Sophia, who is working as a nanny/maid for the Mayor and Miss Millie. The son treats her badly, but Eleanor Jane, the daughter, stands up for her.

44

Sophia teaches Miss Millie how to drive her new car. Since Sophia hasn't been able to see her children for five years, Miss Millie offers to drive her home for a visit. Sophia only spends fifteen minutes with her children before Miss Millie strips out the gears of the car trying to back out of the yard and makes Sophia ride with her to get a mechanic.

45

Shug and her new husband, Grady, come visit Celie and Albert in their new Packard car.

46

Shug no longer feels attracted to Albert, and Celie still doesn't.

47

Shug comes to bed with Celie, who recounts her rape by her father. They begin a sexual relationship.

48

Shug encourages Mary Agnes to pursue a career singing.

49

Celie reads the first letter from Nettie. Shug remembers that Albert sometimes gets letters with foreign-looking stamps.

50

Shug finds that Albert has been hiding Nettie's letters. She steals one post-marked with English and African stamps, which they read and then reseal and replace. Celie begins to consider murdering Albert.

51

Shug and Celie find Nettie's letters in Albert's trunk. They take the letters but leave the envelopes.

52 NETTIE'S LETTERS BEGIN

Nettie's first letter. She writes that Albert followed her when he forced her to leave and tried to rape her. When she fought and escaped him, he vowed to prevent any contact between the sisters.

53

Nettie writes that she has moved in with Samuel, Corrine, and their adopted children (Celie's children), Adam and Olivia.

54

Nettie writes that Samuel and Corrine are preparing to go to Africa as missionaries.

55

Nettie is in Africa with Samuel, Corrine, Adam, and Olivia.

56

Nettie recounts her trip to New York in preparation for the voyage to Africa.

57

Nettie describes her trip to England.

58

Nettie compares her experiences in Senegal and Liberia.

59

Grady and Albert come home while Celie and Shug are reading Nettie's letters. Shug hides them in her suitcase. For the duration of the stay, Shug sleeps with Celie.

60

Although Celie and Shug sleep together, Celie's anger prevents a sexual relationship. Shug convinces her to make her first pair of pants.

61

Nettie tells of the journey to their final destination, the Olinka village.

62

Nettie describes her life with the Olinka and the tribal prejudices against women.

63

Nettie goes into more detail about the treatment of women in Olinka society. The missionaries are told to teach only boys, that women are defined by their relationships to men.

64

Nettie's letter includes: the arrival of the road builders, the death of Tashi's father, and Corrine's request that Samuel and Nettie only see one another in public.

65

Nettie's letter recounts: the "betrayal" by the road builders, the English plans for a rubber plantation on Olinka land, and Corrine's illness.

66

Nettie writes that Corrine accuses Nettie of being Adam and Olivia's biological mother.

67

Nettie learns from Samuel that Fonso is not their father, that their biological father was lynched because of the success of his store.

68

Shug wants Celie to move to Memphis with her.

69

Celie's first letter to Nettie. She confronts Fonso, and he blames her father for his own lynching. Fonso says that he remains in business by bribing white people. Celie and Shug unsuccessfully try to find her father's grave.

70

Nettie writes that she and Samuel tell Corrine that Celie is Adam and Olivia's mother.

71

Nettie recounts how she convinces Corrine that she is Adam and Olivia's aunt, not mother. She shows her a quilt made from the fabric that Corrine bought when Celie followed her into a store. Corrine finally believes her and then dies.

72

Nettie's letter includes: Olivia and Tashi's first menstruation, the arrival of English engineers, and her inheritance of Corrine's wardrobe.

73

Celie writes to Nettie and explains why she doesn't write to God anymore. The letter includes an extended theological conversation between Celie and Shug.

74

After eleven and a half years, Sophia comes home. At the welcoming dinner, Shug and Celie announce that they are moving to Memphis. Albert objects, and Celie faces him down, cataloging his wrongs of her. Mary Agnes decides to also move to Memphis to pursue singing, and Sophia agrees to watch her children.

75

Celie, Shug, Grady, and Mary Agnes leave for Memphis. Celie curses Albert.

76

Celie moves in with Shug. While Shug travels, Celie makes pants, which become increasingly popular.

77

Celie hires Darlene and Jerene to help with her pants business. Darlene tries to continue Celie's education.

78

Celie visits Harpo and Sophia. Sophia's mother has recently died. Grady has begun growing marijuana for sale in Memphis.

79

Celie sees Albert, whose transformation is shocking. He is clean, pleasant, and hard working. Sophia and Harpo's relationship is on the mend.

80

Nettie's letter includes: her marriage to Samuel in England, the displacement of the Olinka, her introduction to Doris Baines, her increasing disillusionment with missionary work, and Tashi's decision to undergo the traditional cliterodectomy and facial scarification.

81

Nettie's letter includes: Tashi's cliterodectomy and facial scarification, the family's growing unease in Africa, the burgeoning relationship between Adam and Tashi, and the gradual destruction of the Olinka lifestyle.

82

Fonso dies, and Celie inherits his house, property, and dry goods store.

83

Shug leaves Celie for Germaine, a young flutist.

84

Celie describes Henrietta's fight with a rare blood disease and her growing friendship with Albert.

85

Celie receives a letter from the Department of Defense. Nettie's ship has been sunk by a German mine off the coast of Gibraltar.

86

Nettie's letter includes: Tashi's flight to the mbeles, Adam's leaving to find her, and the family's decision to move to America.

87

Shug and Germaine visit her children. Sophia confronts and rebukes Eleanor Jane, when Eleanor Jane insists on asking if Sophia loves Reynolds Stanley, her son. Celie teaches Albert how to sew, and their friendship grows as they discuss Shug, love, and African theology.

88

Nettie writes that Adam returns from the jungle with Tashi. He undergoes facial scarification, and Samuel marries them.

89

Germaine leaves Shug. Sophia works in Celie's store as a clerk for African-American customers. Albert begins making shirts. Shug comes back to Celie.

90

Nettie, Samuel, Adam, Olivia, and Tashi come home to live with Celie.

LETTER #	PAGES	FROM	TO
1	1	Celie	God
2	2	Celie	God
3	3	Celie	God
4	4	Celie	God
5	5	Celie	God
6	6	Celie	God
7	7-8	Celie	God
8	9-11	Celie	God
9	12	Celie	God
10	13-15	Celie	God
11	16-18	Celie	God
12	19-21	Celie	God
13	22-23	Celie	God
14	24-25	Celie	God
15	26	Celie	God
16	27	Celie	God
17	28-32	Celie	God
18	33-34	Celie	God
19	35-36	Celie	God
20	37-38	Celie	God
21	39-42	Celie	God
22	43-46	Celie	God
23	47-48	Celie	God
24	49-50	Celie	God
25	51-52	Celie	God
26	53	Celie	God
27	54-57	Celie	God
28	58-61	Celie	God
29	62-63	Celie	God
30	64-66	Celie	God
31	67-68	Celie	God
32	69-70	Celie	God
33	71-73	Celie	God
34	74-75	Celie	God
35	76-79	Celie	God
36	80-83	Celie	God
37	84-87	Celie	God
38	88-89	Celie	God
39	90-92	Celie	God
40	93-94	Celie	God
41	95-97	Celie	God
42	98-99	Celie	God
43	100-101	Celie	God
44	102-106	Celie	God
45	107-108	Celie	God

LETTER #	PAGES	FROM	TO
46	109-110	Celie	God
47	111-113	Celie	God
48	114-116	Celie	God
49	117-118	Nettie (Celie)	Celie (God)
50	119-123	Celie	God
51	124-125	Celie	God
52	126	Nettie	Celie
53	127	Nettie	Celie
54	128-129	Nettie	Celie
55	130-133	Nettie	Celie
56	134-137	Nettie	Celie
57	138-140	Nettie	Celie
58	141-143	Nettie	Celie
59	144-145	Celie	God
60	146-147	Celie	God
61	148-154	Nettie (Celie)	Celie (God)
62	155-159	Nettie	Celie
63	160-162	Nettie	Celie
64	163-167	Nettie	Celie
65	168-171	Nettie	Celie
66	172-173	Nettie	Celie
67	174-176	Nettie	Celie
68	177	Celie	God
69	178-183	Celie	Nettie
70	184-185	Nettie	Celie
71	186-187	Nettie	Celie
72	188-191	Nettie	Celie
73	192-197	Celie	Nettie
74	198-204	Celie	Nettie
75	205-207	Celie	Nettie
76	208-214	Celie	Nettie
77	215-216	Celie	Nettie
78	217-221	Celie	Nettie
79	222-225	Celie	Nettie
80	226-240	Nettie	Celie
81	241-243	Nettie	Celie
82	244-246	Celie	Nettie
83	247-251	Celie	Nettie
84	252-254	Celie	Nettie
85	255	Celie	Nettie
86	256-258	Nettie	Celie
87	259-276	Celie	Nettie
88	277-279	Nettie	Celie
89	280-284	Celie	Nettie
90	285-288	Celie	God, et al

CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

- 1619** Twenty Africans are sold as indentured servants in Jamestown, VA.
- 1642** Virginia passes a law penalizing people who assist runaway slaves.
- 1664** New York and New Jersey recognize the legality of slavery.
- 1668** Virginia passes a law denying legal equality to freed black slaves.
- 1712** Pennsylvania outlaws the slave trade.
- 1741** South Carolina passes a law that prohibits teaching slaves to write.
- 1787** U.S. Constitution considers one slave three-fifths of a white.
- 1793** The cotton industry expands, increasing demand for slaves.
- 1815** Levi Coffin establishes the Underground Railroad
- 1820** The Missouri Compromise is passed. Missouri enters the Union as a slave state, and Maine enters as a free state.
- 1822** Liberia colonized by black American settlers.
- 1847** Liberia declares independence from the United States.
- 1849** Harriet Tubman escapes slavery.
- 1857** The U.S. Supreme Court rules on the Dred Scott case, deciding that he cannot sue for his freedom.
- 1861** The Civil War begins.
- 1862** President Lincoln officially recognizes Liberia.
- 1863** President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation.
- 1865** U.S. Congress passes the 13th Amendment, which abolishes slavery.
- 1868** U.S. Congress passes the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal rights and citizenship.
- 1870** U.S. Congress passes the 15th Amendment, which grants voting rights to men of any race.
- 1896** The U.S. Supreme Court backs segregation in the "separate but equal" ruling.
- 1905** African-American leaders gather in the first of a series of meetings that culminate in the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).
- 1944** The Navy orders the integration of its ships.
- 1954** The U.S. Supreme Court strikes down segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.
- 1955** Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.
- 1957** President Eisenhower sends troops to enforce the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.
- 1963** Medger Evers is killed in Jackson, Mississippi.
Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers the "I have a dream" speech.
- 1964** The U.S. Congress passes the 24th Amendment, abolishing the poll tax.
President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
Martin Luther King, Jr. is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

- 1965** Malcolm X is killed.
The U.S. Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- 1966** The Black Panthers are founded by Huey Newton and Robert Seale.
- 1967** The U.S. Supreme Court rules that laws prohibiting interracial marriage are unconstitutional.
- 1968** Martin Luther King Jr. is killed.
President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968.
- 1991** President George H. W. Bush signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991.
- 1992** Race riots erupt in Los Angeles after the acquittal of police officers in the Rodney King case.

AUTHOR SKETCH

Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944 in Eatonville, Georgia. She was the youngest child in a large family of sharecroppers, being preceded by five brothers and three sisters. At the age of eight, she was blinded in one eye by a B.B. gun. Her father, often brutal, would eventually become the model for Mr. _____ in *The Color Purple*.



She was valedictorian in her high school and entered Spelman College in 1961 on scholarship. In 1964 she transferred to Sarah Lawrence College, where she majored in literature. After graduation in 1965, she became active in the civil rights movement, eventually marrying civil rights lawyer Melvyn Leventhal in 1968, with whom she had one daughter, Rebecca. They were divorced in 1976. During this period, Walker also became influenced by the work of Zora Neale Hurston and traveled to Florida to find her unmarked grave. She is credited with the rediscovery of Hurston's writing, which had largely fallen from favor in critical circles.

The Color Purple, her third novel, sealed her literary career in 1982, winning both a Pulitzer Prize in Literature and an American Book Award. The 1985 film version, directed by Steven Spielberg, was nominated for eleven Academy Awards. She has written a number of novels and collections of poems, short stories, and essays, including *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973), which was awarded an American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award. Walker remains one of the most prominent American lesbian and feminist writers.

CRITIC'S CORNER

The Color Purple is balanced at the nexus of speech and silence, male and female, strength and powerlessness. The extensive use of dialect, a reflection of speech patterns, firmly roots the novel in the oral tradition. Celie's letters are a substitute for speech, a kind of enforced silence. Forbidden by her father/rapist to speak of her experience, she begins writing, but her letters read more like soliloquies than correspondence. Most are open letters addressed to God. Only once she tells her life's story to Shug Avery does Celie begin addressing her letters to her sister, Nettie.

Celie's silence is the root of her powerlessness; her speech is the root of her empowerment. In silence she endures years of sexual, physical, emotional, verbal, and economic abuse. Once she begins to speak of her life, she realizes the power implicit in speech. When she breaks away from her abusive husband, Celie does so verbally. She curses him, literally and figuratively. With Shug she discovers a separate female community, speech, and sexuality, all radically subversive of the patriarchal norm.

The women of *The Color Purple* are all strong women. However, their various triumphs are all essentially domestic. They successfully pursue love and equality in the family, but they are consistently defeated in the public sphere, which remains male and white. Sophia is beaten and imprisoned. Mary Agnes is raped and beaten. Nettie is powerless to save the Olinka culture from white colonists. Celie's commercial success is the one major exception, but even it is rooted in domestic practice: sewing. This stark division between public and private spheres emphasizes the community established by these women. They may not change The World, but they succeed in shaping their world.

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- The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, 1970
- Meridian*, 1976
- The Temple of My Familiar*, 1989
- Finding the Green Stone*, 1991
- Possessing the Secret of Joy*, 1992
- Everyday Use*, 1994
- By the Light of My Father's Smile*, 1998
- Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, 2004

COLLECTIONS OF POEMS AND STORIES

- Revolutionary Petunias*, 1973
- In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, 1973.
- Once*, 1976
- Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning: New Poems, 1971-1977*, 1979
- You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, 1982

THE COLOR PURPLE Alice Walker

Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful, 1985
Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems, 1965-1990, 1991
The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart, 2000
Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth, 2003
A Poem Traveled Down My Arm: Poems and Drawings, 2003
Collected Poems, 2005

MEDIA VERSIONS

DVD AND VIDEO ADAPTATION

The Color Purple, Warner Brothers, 1985.

LARGE PRINT

The Color Purple, Harcourt, 1992

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze epistolary writing
2. To examine gender roles in literature
3. To investigate race in literature
4. To explore the psychology of battered women
5. To comment on the psychological effects of racism, sexism, and classism
6. To differentiate between "feminist" and "womanist"
7. To discuss the historical effects of colonialism
8. To understand the linguistic components of dialect
9. To evaluate literature as social commentary
10. To discuss the difference between public and private identity

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze Alice Walker's nuanced use of the epistolary form
2. To contrast the rural South with colonial Africa
3. To examine Celie's dialect
4. To explain Celie's self-actualization
5. To unravel racial relations in the novel
6. To understand the theology explored by Celie and Shug
7. To characterize the evolution of gender roles in the novel
8. To investigate the role of God as a silent addressee
9. To account for the novel's focus on domesticity
10. To comment on the community of women in the novel

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

Dialect the use of diction to characterize a regional, social, or economic group. Dialect is rooted in oral tradition; writers use it to show how characters speak. Generally, a dialect is comprised of vocabulary, spelling, and grammar that deviates from "standard" English. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's dialect marks her as uneducated, African-American, and rural Southern.

Epistolary novel a novel composed in letters (epistles). The form, probably inspired by Biblical epistles, appeared in the 18th century. Samuel Richardson's

Pamela (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747) are among the earliest notable English examples. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) by Choderlos de Laclos is another important example of the form. Epistolary writing fell out of use in the 19th century and has only occasionally been resurrected since. Recent epistolary novels have been written as exchanges of email. *The Color Purple* is an interesting example of the form. Although it is written as a series of letters, the traditional exchange is interrupted. Celie receives Nettie's letters much later than expected and in a large batch, and if God reads Celie's letters, there is no overt response.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

INTERNET

"Civil Rights Movement Timeline"

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html>

"History of Liberia: A Time Line"

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/libhtml/liberia.html>

MAPS

The Atlas of African Affairs, Routledge

The History Atlas of Africa, Macmillan

The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American South, Routledge

MUSIC

The History of the Blues: The Roots, the Music, the People, Francis Davis

The Music of Black Americans: A History, Eileen Southern

NONFICTION

W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me*

Bell Hooks, *Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory*

Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream" and *Letter from Birmingham Jail*

Gloria Naylor, "Mommy, What Does Nigger Mean?"

Elizabeth V. Spelman, *The Erasure of Black Women*.

NOVELS

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man*

Alex Haley, *Roots*

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Rebecca Cox Jackson, *Gifts of Power*

Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird*

C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (epistolary)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*

Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (epistolary)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Richard Wright, *Native Son*

POETRY

Maya Angelou, *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems*

Nikki Giovanni, *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968-1998*

REFERENCE

Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and the African American Experience: The Concise Desk Reference, Running Press
American Women Writers: A Biographical Dictionary, Checkmark
A Critical Guide to Twentieth-Century Women Novelists, Blackwell
Encyclopedia of Black Studies, SAGE

VIDEOS/FILMS

4 Little Girls
Amistad
To Kill A Mockingbird
Malcolm X
Mississippi Burning
Roots

THEMES AND MOTIFS

THEMES

- sexism
- racism
- self-actualization
- silence and speech
- domestic violence
- womanly strength
- colonialism
- family
- female sexuality
- female community
- domesticity
- individual religion

MOTIFS

- declaring one's freedom after a life of oppression
- realizing one's sexuality
- formulating new religious ideas to better understand one's life
- surviving extensive physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and economic abuse
- experiencing the effects of society-wide racism

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, sentences, or passages from the novel. Explain each in context. Letter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. ~~I am~~. I have always been a good girl. (letter 1, p. 1)
(The crossed out "I am" established Celie as author. She is consciously choosing and rejecting word choice and phrasing. The rejection of "I am" in favor of "I have always been" indicates a change in her status as "a good girl." Presumably, she equates "good" with sexual innocence, which she reveals that she has lost. On its own, the stricken "I am" appears to be an erasure of the self, however the "I" remains in the rest of the letter. Thus the self is revised, not erased.)

2. He look at me like I'm crazy. Lynched people don't git no marker, he say. Like this something everybody know. (letter 69, p. 182)
(Once she realizes that Fonso is not her father, she confronts him. She asks to see her father's grave. Fonso replies that there is no marker because her father was lynched. The lack of a grave marker is a form of erasure. For his perceived transgressions against the white community, Celie's father was destroyed completely, killed and forcibly forgotten. Fonso's reaction to Celie's question seems to normalize her father's fate. Fonso clearly thinks that her father was lynched for violating the natural order of society and that his death and unmarked grave were the inevitable results of such a violation.)
3. Horsepitality, she say. And I git it and laugh. It feel like to split my face Mr. _____, come out the store Say real slow. What you setting here laughing like a fool fer? (letter 10, p. 15)
(Celie meets Corrine and offers to let her and Olivia sit in the wagon, which shields them from the disapproval of passing white people. The pun on "hospitality" causes Celie to laugh, which is significant because Celie generally only laughs in the company of women. This conversation is one of many examples of a female discourse, separate from male discourse. Albert's disapproval of Celie's laughter indicates that he is threatened by the implications of this separate discourse.)
4. I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook But I'm here. (letter 75, p. 207)
(Celie is responding to Albert's saying, "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman you nothing at all. She affirms his basic categories, but inverts his "nothing at all." The "But I'm here" is a statement of physical presence, of Being. This assertion of physical Being is also a reclamation of Celie's body. In her declaration of independence from Albert, Celie reclaims her body, which had been essentially owned by Albert for his pleasure and profit.)
5. You say US where most folks say WE, she say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amuse. What I care? I ast. I'm happy. (letter 77, p. 215)
(Darlene is attempting to educate Celie and erase her dialect. A number of things are happening in this exchange. First, Darlene is pointing out the prestige involved with certain types of speaking. Celie's "What I care?" is a refusal to acknowledge the assumptions people make about her based on how she speaks. More significantly, Celie's "What I care" and, later, Shug's "She can talk in sign language for all I care" elevate the content of speech over its form. This elevation assumes that speech is a transparent means of transmission.)
6. I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it (letter 55, p. 130)
(This memory appears at the beginning of one of Nettie's early letters. In the tradition of the rest of the novel, Nettie is here implicitly asserting the primacy of speech over the written word. Writing is considered less direct than speech and a gesture of shame. Although Celie writes her life's story, it fails to emancipate her. Her eventual empowerment occurs when she tells Shug her story. Nettie's recognition of Celie's writing also reminds the reader of the act of writing. Celie writes throughout the novel, but we never see her holding a pen. Indeed, once her authorship is explicitly recognized here, it seems unlikely. One wonders when she finds time or privacy to write in a life essentially ruled by Albert.)

7. You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy. (letter 1, p.1)
(Presumably spoken by the man Celie assumes to be her father, this instruction provides the basis for the novel. Celie literally obeys this order and addresses her letters to God. The thing which she "better not never tell nobody" is presumably his raping her. Celie continues in the spirit of this command when she tells her mother that her child, the product of the rape, is God's and that God took it. Celie's oppression continues as long as she honors the command to be silent. Once she tells Shug her story and tells Albert that she is leaving, she becomes empowered and addresses her letters to Nettie.)

8. You never enjoy it at all? she ast, puzzle. Not even with your children daddy?

Never, I say.

Why Miss Celie, she say, you still a virgin.

What? I ast.

Listen, she say, right down there ... is a little button that gits real hot when you do you know what with somebody. It git hotter and hotter and then it melt. That the good part. But other parts good too, she say. Lot of sucking go on, here and there, she say. Lot of finger and tongue work. (letter 35, p. 77)

(This conversation between Celie and Shug is a reclamation of female sexuality from repressive patriarchal models. The shift of emphasis to the clitoris from the vagina is revolutionary. It subverts the patriarchal definition of women as sexual objects and makes them sexual subjects. It also negates the importance of reproduction in favor of pleasure. Since the focus of sexuality becomes the clitoris, instead of the vagina, intercourse becomes unnecessary for sexual gratification. Shug's inclusion of non-gender-specific appendages like fingers and tongues implicitly lays the groundwork for lesbianism, excluding men entirely from female sexuality.)

9. I don't know where England at. Don't know where Africa at either. So I still don't know where Nettie at. (letter 50, p. 119)

(Shug gives Celie a letter from Nettie covered with English and African stamps, to which Celie responds with the lines above. Celie's response underscores her lack of basic education. More importantly it reflects the scope of her life. Her main concern is knowing where Nettie is, not knowing where England or Africa is. This emphasis reflects the domesticity at the center of The Color Purple. The epistolary format of the novel is a type of private discourse. Generally, the characters experience private victories and public defeats. Nettie's relationship with Samuel and the children is a private victory. Her disillusionment with missionary work and the destruction of Olinka culture is a public defeat. Sophia's refusal to accept Harpo's abuse is a private victory; her humiliation by the Mayor and his wife is public.)

10. I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. (letter 73, p. 195)

(Shug is expressing a form of pantheism. Her refusal to anthropomorphize divinity subverts the authority of whiteness and maleness. If God isn't white and isn't a male, then those groups don't have special access to God or special authority emanating from such access. Shug's claim that "God is everything" is all inclusive. It includes human sexuality, nature, people, and the color purple in a field.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

CHARACTER

1. How does Sophia exemplify strength?

(Sophia is physically strong, independent, and strong willed. Celie calls her an "Amazon." When Harpo, acting on Albert and Celie's recommendations, tried to beat her, she fights back, eventually leaving him. She stands up against the Mayor and Miss Millie, survives physical and emotional hardship in prison, and endures humiliation as Miss Millie's maid. Albert characterizes her as masculine, but Celie disagrees, describing her strength as "womanly.")

SETTING

2. Compare the rural South with Olinka territory.

(The rural South, where Celie lives, and Olinka territory, where Nettie is a missionary, are both primarily agrarian, black-populated, white-ruled, and patriarchal. Celie works Albert's fields, just as Olinka wives tend their fields. Although most characters are black, whites retain most social control. The Mayor and Miss Millie control their town as effectively as the British colonialists control Olinka land. The Olinka patriarchy is more rigidly institutionalized, but both cultures practice a form of male ownership of women. Rape and genital mutilation are both exercises in sexual mastery. Olinka women, like Celie, are denied education. Albert, like Olinka men, lounges while his wife works the fields. Both American and Olinka women are expected to obey their husbands.)

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

3. Describe and analyze Celie's empowerment.

(With Shug's help, Celie becomes personally, economically, and sexually empowered. The foundation of her empowerment is the potency of speech. The novel opens with Celie's rape and a command for silence, which results in letters, writing substituted for speech. Once she regains the power to speak, telling Shug her life's story, she begins to become empowered. She declares her independence from Albert and curses him. Even her curse has potency, bringing Albert unhappiness and misfortune. She discovers her sexuality with Shug, their relationship shifting emphasis to female pleasure from male pleasure, reproduction, and patriarchal definitions of the female body. The success of her business and her inheritance from her mother grant her economic independence.)

ACTION

4. List examples of successful opposition and unsuccessful opposition to racism and sexism.

(Successful: Sophia refuses to be beaten by Harpo. Celie leaves Albert, curses him, and regains contact with Nettie. Squeak demands to be called by her proper name and leaves Harpo to pursue a musical career. Celie and Shug's sexual relationship radically undermines masculine definitions of female sexuality. Nettie clandestinely educates Tashi.)

Unsuccessful: Sophia is beaten and jailed for opposing the Mayor and Miss Millie. Nettie is powerless to save the Olinka from colonization, nor is she able to stop the Olinka tradition of female genital mutilation. The success of Celie and Nettie's biological father's business, an implicit threat to white economic supremacy, results in his being lynched.

Generally, the characters are more successful in opposing sexism than racism. Also, their triumphs are primarily domestic, while their defeats are generally public.)

CONFLICT

5. Characterize the power struggles between male and female characters. *(The main gender-based conflicts revolve around power. Male characters seek to retain and exercise power over female characters, and female characters seek to liberate themselves. The primary types of power at play in the novel are economic, sexual, and physical. Celie's ragged clothing exemplifies Albert's economic control; she gets a new dress only when Albert's sisters confront him. His ejection of Nettie from their home is another example of economic power. Male exercise of sexual power extends throughout the novel. Fonso's rape of Celie, Albert's inattention to Celie's sexual needs, Harpo's inattention to Sophia's sexual needs, Mary Agnes' rape, and Olinka female genital mutilation are all examples. Females are treated as objects for male sexual fulfillment, not as sexual subjects. Physical power manifests primarily in beatings. Albert beats Celie. Harpo tries to beat Sophia. Mary Agnes is beaten. The Mayor has Sophia beaten.)*

INTERPRETATION

6. How does the novel promote civil rights? *(The main characters are all African or African-American, and most of them experience racism from white characters at some point in the novel. Although the gender-based power relations shift over the course of the narrative, the racial relations remain relatively stable. The novel humanizes Africans and African-Americans, but it does not liberate them. Although they are portrayed as being equal, they do not actualize this equality.)*

STRUCTURE

7. Explain Walker's use of the epistolary form. *(Her use of the form is a departure from precedent, mainly because the letters do not function as correspondence. Most of Celie's letters are epistles to God. They read more like journal entries than as letters. Albert intercepts Nettie's letters, so although there is the intent of timely communication, they arrive late and in a group.*

The premise behind Celie's letters to God is that she has been forbidden to speak of her life to anybody but God and she is too ashamed to speak of it, so she writes letters to God. Her writing is a substitute for speech, which is apparent both in the extensive use of oral dialect and the power of speech acts in the narrative.

The use of the epistolary form also renders the narrative more immediate. Walker is able to convincingly use the first person under the guise of writing letters. And because the letters follow the format of actual correspondence, they lend a sense of reality to the novel's events. It becomes easy to forget that the narrative is fiction.)

MOTIVATION

8. Why do Nettie, Samuel, Olivia, Adam and Tashi return to the United States? *(Little remained in Liberia for them. English colonization has essentially destroyed Olinka culture, and the tribe teeters on the verge of extinction. Samuel and Nettie have become discouraged with their missionary work. Their efforts have produced few results, and their faith in their work wanes. Nettie also wishes to be reunited with her sister, Celie. Tashi ostensibly comes with the family because of her relationship with Adam, but the destruction of her native culture undoubtedly plays a role as well.)*

AUTHOR METHOD

9. List distinctive elements of Celie's dialect. *(Celie's writing style, which is a reflection of her speech patterns, is distinguished primarily by deviations in spelling, grammar, and vocabulary from "standard" English.*

SPELLING

Celie uses misspellings like: an for and, ast for asked, bout for about, forgit for forget, git for get, kilt for killed, kine for kind, sposed for supposed.

GRAMMAR

Celie's grammar deviates mainly in her use of verbs and pronouns. She either entirely excludes or substitutes deviant helping verbs: "It call A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and "I sure hope you done change your mind." She uses an alternate conjugation of the verb to be: She be my age. She uses the present tense when speaking of the past: One time he come by the house. She often elides the "s" in the present tense: "She mumble again" and "Harpo say." She uses Us instead of We: "What can us do?"

VOCABULARY

Celie uses distinctive words and phrases like: chifferobe, cut her eyes, darn, the Law, naw, nigger, Nome, and trifling, and Yassur.)

UNITY

10. Explain the pacing of the novel, i.e. who writes which letters to whom. *(Celie writes letters 1-48 to God. Letter 49 includes a message from Nettie to Celie and Celie's reaction, which she addresses to God. Celie writes letters 50 and 51 to God. Nettie writes letters 52-58 to Celie. Celie writes letters 59 and 60 to God. Letter 61 is another script from Nettie to Celie alongside a reaction from Celie to God. Nettie's letters to Celie continue from 62-67. Letter 68 is Celie's penultimate letter addressed to God. In letter 69, she begins addressing Nettie. Nettie writes letters 70-72 to Celie. Celie continues writing to Nettie in letters 73-79. Nettie writes to Celie in letters 80 and 81. Celie responds to Nettie in letters 82-85. Nettie writes Celie in letters 86 and 88; Celie writes Nettie in letters 87 and 89. Celie's final letter begins: Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God.*

The first forty-eight letters reflect Celie's isolation from Nettie and her silence about her life. The large batch of letters from Nettie occurs when Celie discovers the letters in Albert's trunk. Celie's substitution of Nettie for God as an addressee reflects a desire to communicate with her sister and a revised understanding of religion. The final letter, addressed to Everything brings the novel to a full close.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Walker introduces characters through their speech and actions as witnessed by Celie and Nettie. Consider these examples, which reflect each character's personality and ideas.

1. Albert's misogyny is clearly stated in his response to Celie's intention to move to Memphis: "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddamn, he say, you nothing at all."

The first statement is a ring structure, with emphasis on the first and last terms, indicating that blackness and femaleness are particularly worthless characteristics, with ugliness and poverty exacerbating her nothingness.

2. Nettie's changing understanding of divinity mirror's Celie's: "God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like someone or something—a rootleaf or Christ—but we don't."

Celie, too, exorcises the image of God as an elderly white man from her mind. The main difference between their parallel progressions is gender. Nettie still refers to God as "he," while Shug and Celie imagine an "it."

3. About Shug's affair with Germaine, Celie writes:
*My heart broke.
Shug love somebody else.*

This portion of text verges on the poetic. "Broke" breaks the line. The first line alternately reads "My heart broke" (past tense) and "My heart [is] broken" (present tense in dialect). In a letter, the drop to the next line also reads as a hesitation, a pause. The "Shug love" is staccato, then "somebody else" patters off quietly. The telegraphic brevity of the message heightens the sense of loss.

4. Celie describes her first view of her children and Nettie after years of separation: "A big tall whitehaired man with a backward turn white collar, a little dumpy woman with her gray hair in plaits cross on top her head. A tall youngish man and two robust looking youngish women."

The lack of verbs paints the scene as a still life. Nothing is moving; no action is taking place. This stillness is breathless. It indicates Celie's astonishment and anxiety. The vague descriptions heighten the drama of the moment. Celie's recognition slowly unfolds, until it is confirmed by Albert's "It's Nettie." The "whitehaired" and "gray hair" also convey aging and thus the passage of time, the long years since Nettie and Celie have seen one another.

5. Tashi makes an acute observation about internalized racism: "she had seen the magazines we receive from home and . . . it was very clear to her that black people did not truly admire blackskinned black people like herself, and especially did not admire blackskinned black women. They bleach their faces, she said. They fry their hair. They try to look naked."

The "naked" refers to the Olinka concept of whiteness as nakedness. The disregard for blackskinned black women that Tashi notices occurs elsewhere in the novel. Harpo is initially attracted to Sophia because she is "bright," bright skinned. Similarly, Harpo takes Mary Agnes, who is "yellow," as a lover after Sophia leaves him. Celie, whom others call "ugly" is dark skinned. So if light skin color is desirable and dark skin color is not, then "white" skin must be most desirable. Although the novel does not call it such, this equation seems to be an example of internalized racism. The disenfranchised (African-Americans) adopt the paradigm of the powerful (Caucasians) in an attempt to participate in that power.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

DRAMA

1. Rewrite the scene in which Celie confronts Albert about his treatment of her (letter 74) as dialogue and act it out. Try to preserve exact quotes. Discuss the significance of the scene in relation to the novel as a whole.
2. Read aloud several of Celie's letters, while people mime the actions involved. Discuss the sound of Celie's writing, its cadences and grammar.

SCIENCE, HEALTH, AND FIRST AID

1. Make an oral report on ritual female genital mutilation. What processes are used? How do the processes affect the short and long term health of the woman? Where did the process originate? Is it still practiced, and if so, where?
2. Create a health brochure for travelers to Africa. Include common ailments, their symptoms and means of transmission, preventative measures, and recommended vaccinations.
3. Research and write a short essay about the connection between malaria and sickle-cell anemia.
4. Make an oral report about the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. Comment on its historical circumstances, scientific merit, and effects on racial relations.

GEOGRAPHY

1. Make maps of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Africa. On each map, mark political boundaries, major geographic features, notable historic events, capitol cities, and primary industries and agriculture.
2. Using a wall map, explain in a chalk talk the slave trade routes. Comment on major suppliers and buyers of slaves, economic and social effects of the trade, historical circumstances, and the timeframe of each route. Note when each colonial power began and ended its participation in the slave trade.

ART

1. With a group, design a brochure for a fictitious quilt museum. Include examples of different patterns, information on quilting as a folk art, visiting hours, admission price, and a short history of quilting.
2. Start a quilting circle and make Cat of Nine Tails quilt squares. Each group member should donate an old item of clothing to be cut into squares. It's not necessary to actually finish the quilt. The purpose of the exercise is to 1) experience and comment on sewing as a social activity and 2) observe the recontextualization of a familiar item of clothing.
3. Using a computer art program or images cut from magazines, make a mural contrasting the role of women in *The Color Purple* and in contemporary society. Present the mural and comment on significant advances in women's rights and facets of women's roles in society which have remained unchanged.
4. Make a web site that uses hypertext links to illustrate the various relationships between characters in *The Color Purple*. The main page should be a character list, and each character should link to a page showing his or her relationships to other characters. Advanced: cross-reference the relationship pages. Ex: index.html links to celie.html, albert.html, sophie.html, shug.html, etc. Celie.html shows her relationships to Albert, Sophie, Shug, etc, and each name is a hypertext link that links to the correct relationship page. Thus on celie.html, "Albert-husband" would link to albert.html.
5. Draw portraits of how you imagine the main characters. Using references to the book, explain your choices.

LANGUAGE

1. Analyze any ten pages of Celie's letters and draw up a list of her dialect's distinctive features, including grammar, vocabulary, and spelling/pronunciation.
2. Draw a chart mapping contemporary English dialects in America, including Northeastern, deep Southern, Appalachian, mid-Southern, Cajun, "standard" Midwestern, Ebonics, and West Coast. List each dialect's native region, distinguishing characteristics, and socio-economic associations. Are some dialects more prestigious than others? What dialects are primarily used in mass media? What assumptions do you make about a person based on their speech patterns?
3. Give a presentation on a sub-Saharan African language. Provide background information on the language, basic pronunciation, and interesting grammatical features. Teach the class how to greet one another in the language.
4. Make a list of demeaning language used by male characters about female characters in *The Color Purple*. Discuss language as a source of power.

ECONOMICS

1. Make a timeline of African-American economic advancement in America, spanning from being property (slaves) to owning property to heading multinational corporations. Include major laws, access to vocational training, relevant statistics, and African-American firsts, such as the first African-American doctor, lawyer, C.E.O., and millionaire.
2. Write a theme investigating the economic oppression of women and African-Americans in *The Color Purple*. Consider who owns property and means of production in relation to who wields power. Incorporate Celie's self-actualization in relation to her economic independence. Draw conclusions about the correlation between economic and social equality.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Make a web site about the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Include: Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas; Emmett Till; Rosa Parks; Martin Luther King, Jr.; Malcolm X; the Montgomery bus boycott; Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas; the Woolworth's sit-in; James Meredith; Eugene "Bull" Connor; NAACP; Medger Evers; the March on Washington; Sixteen Street Baptist Church; 24th Amendment; Freedom Summer; Civil Rights Act of 1964; Ku Klux Klan; Blood Sunday; Executive Order 11246; Black Panthers; Loving v. Virginia; James Earl Ray; Civil Rights Act of 1968.
2. In a chalk talk, describe an average day in the life of a sharecropper.
3. Make an oral report on the slave trade's effects on the Western hemisphere. Which countries imported slaves? How did the slave trade determine each country's economic development, social structure, and racial diversity?
4. Using a computer art program, make an illustrated timeline of the history of Liberia. Include pre-colonial civilizations, colonization, independence, and contemporary events.

Music

1. Using sound samples, make an oral report on blues. Comment on its historical origins, musical influences, major blues musicians, Delta blues, Memphis blues, Chicago blues, Louisiana blues, Swamp blues, Detroit blues, Piedmont blues, and the use of blues samples in contemporary hip-hop.
2. Make a mural depicting African-American contributions to American music. Include gospel, blues, jazz, rock and roll, rap, R&B, hip-hop, and Dixieland.
3. Rewrite the lyrics of a blues standard to reflect your own experiences. If you are able, perform or record the song for the class.
4. Make a web site about blues instrumentation. Describe each instrument, its role in a blues band, and provide sound samples. Include: acoustic guitar, electric guitar, slide guitar, bass guitar, trumpet, saxophone, percussion, kazoo, harmonica, and piano.

COMPOSITION

1. Write a poem in which you express: Celie's feelings for Shug, Sophia's defiance of convention, Albert's transformation, Sophia's experience of imprisonment, Shug's understanding of God, Squeak's desire to be a blues singer, Harpo's memory of his mother, Celie's attitude towards men, Nettie's isolation in Africa, Tashi's ambivalence about ritual scarification and genital mutilation, the decay of Olinka culture, or the quality of rural Southern life.
2. Write a journal entry about your life in Celie's dialect. Consider how the differences in grammar and diction affect your ideas.
3. Compose the events of letter 74 (pp 198-204) in the format of a scene from a play. Render the conversation as dialogue and include stage directions.
4. Write a short story set in an African matriarchal society. Would gender roles simply be the reverse of those in *The Color Purple*, or would women wield social power differently? Include the arrival of a European explorer. How would the Africans react to him or her?

CINEMA

1. Watch *The Color Purple*, directed by Steven Spielberg. Make a list of significant differences from the novel and formulate explanations for those artistic decisions.
2. Using a home video camera or digital video camera, make a short video using selected letters from *The Color Purple*. Each shot should be still (no camera movement), with the letters narrated in a voiceover. Use a different scene for each letter.

JOURNALISM

1. Set up a radio interview with Celie about the phenomenal success of her clothing company. Question her about how she learned to sew, why she makes pants, how she formed the company, and her initial expectations of success.
2. Compose a list of questions for an interview with Nettie about her experiences in Africa. Include questions about daily life with the Olinka, the success of her missionary work, her reasons for going to Africa, her reasons for coming home, and the effect of English colonization on traditional African life.
3. Host a talk show with the female characters of *The Color Purple*. Question them about the difference between their relationships with men and women, the meaning of "womanish," their attitudes about work, their feelings about being mothers and wives, their understanding of religion, and their experiences of racism and sexism.
4. Write an editorial about race relations in contemporary America and note significant advances in equality and areas for improvement.

LITERATURE

1. Write an essay exploring the role of silence and erasure in *The Color Purple*. What characters remain silent? What happens when they break their silence? Why is the "I am" crossed out in the first letter? Why are characters' family names blanked out?
2. Using examples from the book, comment on the community of women in *The Color Purple*. What experiences do they share? What activities bring them together? What social roles do they have in common? What characteristics do they develop in response to male dominance?
3. Draw a diagram of the complicated romantic relationships between characters. Discuss the meaning of the lack of fidelity in the novel.
4. Make a list of the letters, noting each letter's author and addressee. What conclusions can you draw about the pacing of the novel in relation to its content? Why are Nettie's letters clumped together? Why does Celie start writing to Nettie, instead of God?
5. Write an essay contrasting the depictions of sexuality and love in the novel.
6. Analyze the importance of the novel's epistolary format. How does the format change the content? How does it reflect an oral tradition? Does the novel fit in the tradition of epistolary novels, or is it a re-invention of the format?

PSYCHOLOGY

1. Make an oral report on psychological abuse. Include: how to recognize it, how often it occurs in America, causes, effects, treatments for both parties, alternatives available to women.
2. Make a bulletin board contrasting the motivating factors behind racism and the psychological effects of experiencing racism.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

1. Using a computer art program, design an illustrated history of European and American missionary efforts in Africa. Discuss their relative successes and failures.
2. Make an oral report on pantheism and panentheism. Discuss Shug's idea that God is in everything.
3. Research and write an essay on Womanist theology. What are its main concepts? How is it different from mainstream theology? How does it reflect the experience of African-American women?
4. Analyze Shug and Celie's discussions about religion. Try to formulate a coherent understanding of the nature of God from the ideas expressed in their conversations.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Compose a short story explaining how Nettie, Samuel, Tashi, Adam, and Olivia survived the sinking of their ship. Were they on the ship when it sank, or had they missed boarding and taken another? If they were on the ship, how were they rescued?
2. Discuss the similarity between African-American male treatment of African-American women and white treatment of African-Americans. Include physical violence, economic oppression, and psychological and verbal abuse.
3. Contrast Sophia and Celie.
4. Make a character list, noting distinguishing characteristics of each character and changes in personality and behavior over the course of the novel.
5. Read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. Compare it to *The Color Purple*.
6. Read *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Meridian*, *The Temple of My Familiar*, *Finding the Green Stone*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *Everyday Use*, *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, or *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* by Alice Walker. Identify and discuss common themes.

VOCABULARY TEST

1. ostracism
 - a. banishment or exclusion
 - b. self-imposed ignorance
 - c. imitation of Eastern European mannerisms
 - d. a desalination process
2. pidgin
 - a. a rock dove
 - b. a language indigenous to Siberia
 - c. a simplified form of language
 - d. a small flightless bird native to Indonesia
3. verbosity
 - a. speechlessness
 - b. wordiness
 - c. contains verbs
 - d. speech-based learning
4. ululation
 - a. vibration
 - b. the motion of a pendulum
 - c. an 18th century African philosophy
 - d. howl or wail
5. paraffin
 - a. tuber cultivated in the southern United States
 - b. waxy substance used to make candles
 - c. folk-remedy painkiller
 - d. a fish oil substitute
6. trifling
 - a. short of stature
 - b. frivolous or trivial
 - c. overweight
 - d. savory
7. eccentric
 - a. moving in a circle
 - b. focused on ecology
 - c. odd or whimsical
 - d. containing a circle
8. blaspheme
 - a. to address without respect
 - b. a kind of word root
 - c. the smallest particle of a compound
 - d. to travel without luggage
9. reparations
 - a. multiple divisions of an object
 - b. secondary preparations
 - c. portions of food cooked twice
 - d. payment for damages
10. drudge
 - a. to remove silt from a river
 - b. menial worker
 - c. to walk slowly
 - d. a heavy wedge
11. brazen
 - a. bold
 - b. engraved
 - c. embossed
 - d. soft
12. conscientious
 - a. careful
 - b. awareness
 - c. unscientific
 - d. religious
13. complicity
 - a. complication
 - b. mutual attraction
 - c. association with a misdeed
 - d. housework
14. despot
 - a. storage facility
 - b. tyrant
 - c. father figure
 - d. river bank
15. sanctified
 - a. purified
 - b. permitted
 - c. guarded
 - d. divided

COMPREHENSION TEST A

PART I: CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION (30 POINTS)

Name the characters who fit these descriptions.

- _____ 1. is jailed for sassing the Mayor's wife
- _____ 2. goes to Africa with Samuel and Corrine
- _____ 3. undergoes traditional Olinka scarification and genital mutilation
- _____ 4. marries Albert
- _____ 5. dies in Africa
- _____ 6. plays guitar at Harpo's club
- _____ 7. knocks out Squeak's teeth
- _____ 8. moves to Panama
- _____ 9. takes Celie to Memphis
- _____ 10. hides Nettie's letters
- _____ 11. nurses Shug Avery back to health
- _____ 12. has a rare blood disease
- _____ 13. marries Samuel in England
- _____ 14. travels the country with Germaine
- _____ 15. makes pants

PART II: FACT OR OPINION (20 POINTS)

Mark the following statements either T for true, F for false or O for opinion.

- _____ 1. The Olinka are indifferent to missionaries.
- _____ 2. The Olinka treat women as property.
- _____ 3. Shug Avery uses Germaine to feel young.
- _____ 4. Samuel and Nettie drown when a German mine sinks their ship.
- _____ 5. Albert learns to cook after Celie moves to Memphis.
- _____ 6. Sonia learns to love Eleanor Jane and her son.
- _____ 7. Celie is unattractive.
- _____ 8. Henrietta enjoys yams.
- _____ 9. Harpo's mother dies of tuberculosis.
- _____ 10. Celie inherits her father's property.

COMPREHENSION TEST A (PAGE 2)

PART III: CAUSE AND EFFECT (20 POINTS)

Complete each of the following statements with specific details.

1. Celie tells Harpo to beat Sophia because

2. Adam scars his cheeks because

3. Celie marries Albert because

4. The Olinka build tin-roofed houses because

5. Squeak visits her uncle because

6. Celie considers killing Albert because

7. Shug Avery moves in with Albert and Celie because

8. Sophia seldom sees her children because

9. Celie's father is lynched because

10. Albert stops beating Celie because

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the following page.

1. Describe Albert's transformation during the novel.
2. Compare the treatment of women in Olinka and Southern society.
3. Explain why Celie's early letters are addressed to God.
4. Account for the differences in style between Nettie and Celie's letters.
5. List examples of racism found in *The Color Purple*.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

PART I: IDENTIFICATION (30 POINTS)

Identify the speaker of the quotation.

- _____ 1. "I used to hunt game with a bow and arrow."
- _____ 2. "It say I got the hots for a boy of nineteen."
- _____ 3. "He saw the Hodges in me And he didn't like it one bit."
- _____ 4. "She ugly But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean."
- _____ 5. "Wives is like children. You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand."
- _____ 6. "Something I made up. Something you help scratch out my head."
- _____ 7. "He beat me when you not here."
- _____ 8. "Men look like frogs to me."
- _____ 9. "Took me long enough to notice you such good company"
- _____ 10. "I try to beat her, she black my eyes."
- _____ 11. "Why Miss Celie . . . you still a virgin."
- _____ 12. "What you mean, Dis her house? She walk out on you."
- _____ 13. "Every time they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you."
- _____ 14. "They calls me yellow / like yellow be my name"
- _____ 15. "I start to wonder why us need love. Why us suffer. Why us black."

PART II: SHORT ANSWER (20 POINTS)

Provide an answer to each of these questions.

- _____ 1. What is Tashi's favorite food?
- _____ 2. Who are Celie's children?
- _____ 3. Why does Albert hide Nettie's letters?
- _____ 4. What does Albert begin to design and sew?
- _____ 5. What kind of house do Celie and Shug Avery design?
- _____ 6. How does Celie imagine God?
- _____ 7. What plant is central to Olinka life?
- _____ 8. Why do the mbeles hide in the jungle?
- _____ 9. What letter does Albert deliver to Celie?
- _____ 10. Whom does Celie hire to work in her store?

COMPREHENSION TEST B (PAGE 2)

PART III: FILL-IN (20 POINTS)

Fill in the words that complete each statement.

1. Corrine thought that _____ was Adam and Olivia's _____.
2. _____ makes a living as a _____ singer.
3. _____ teaches _____ how to drive.
4. Eleanor Jane makes a _____ to mask the flavor of _____.
5. _____ move the Olinka in order to build a _____.

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the following page.

1. Describe Celie's final understanding of God.
2. Characterize the relationship between Shug Avery and Celie.
3. Discuss the changes in gender roles that occur throughout the novel.
4. Analyze the significance of the title.
5. Account for Celie's gradual empowerment.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 9. d |
| 2. c | 10. b |
| 3. b | 11. a |
| 4. d | 12. a |
| 5. b | 13. c |
| 6. b | 14. b |
| 7. c | 15. a |
| 8. a | |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

PART I: CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION (30 POINTS)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Sophia | 9. Shug Avery |
| 2. Nettie | 10. Mr. _____ (Albert) |
| 3. Tashi | 11. Celie |
| 4. Celie | 12. Henrietta |
| 5. Corrine | 13. Nettie |
| 6. Swain | 14. Shug Avery |
| 7. Sophia | 15. Celie |
| 8. Squeak (Mary Agnes) | |

PART II: FACT OR OPINION (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. O |
| 3. O | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. T |

PART III: CAUSE AND EFFECT (20 POINTS)

- she is jealous of Sophia's independence.
- he wants to establish an equal relationship with Tashi.
- she had no choice.
- the colonists destroy their rootleaf fields.
- she thinks she can persuade him to release Sophia.
- he has been hiding her letters from Nettie.
- she is sick and has nowhere else to go.
- Miss Millie will not let her go home.
- the success of his business is seen as a threat to white business owners.
- Shug tells him to stop.

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

PART I: IDENTIFICATION (30 POINTS)

- Sophia
- Shug Avery
- Squeak (Mary Agnes)
- Fonso (Celie's step-father)
- Mr. _____ (Albert)
- Shug Avery
- Celie
- Celie
- Mr. _____ (Albert)
- Harpo
- Shug Avery
- Squeak (Mary Agnes)
- Sophia
- Squeak (Mary Agnes)
- Albert

PART II: SHORT ANSWER (20 POINTS)

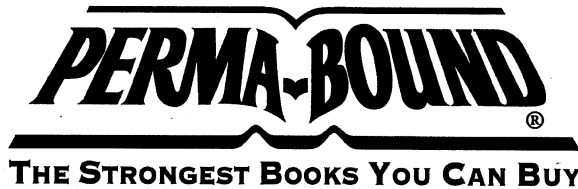
- barbeque
- Olivia and Adam
- because she refused his advances
- shirts
- round
- old, white, and bearded
- rootleaf
- to preserve their way of life
- the telegram stating that Nettie's ship sank
- Sophia

PART III: FILL-IN (20 POINTS)

- Nettie, mother
- Shug Avery, blues
- Sophia, Miss Millie
- tuna casserole, yams
- English colonists, rubber plantation

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Answers will vary.



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