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Sample

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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Color Purple

by Alice Walker

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Item No: 300205

The Color Purple

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the significance of the title of the novel.
2. discuss the pros and cons of Walker's decision to write this novel in an epistolary format.
3. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following themes:
 - Men and women do not always fit into traditionally defined gender roles.
 - People in a minority culture must learn to adapt to the ways of the dominant culture or face extinction.
 - Physical and emotional abuse in families can be passed down from one generation to another.
4. point out instances of irony in the story.
5. relate incidents from the story to illustrate the following themes about women:
 - Women must work together to overcome the hardships in their lives.
 - A woman's place in the world is changing, so she is no longer content to assume traditionally female roles.
6. discuss the following overall theme of the novel: It is up to each individual to learn to understand and accept the differences in others.
7. cite incidents from the story to trace Celie's emotional growth.
8. relate incidents from the story to illustrate the parallels between the culture of the Olinka people and the lives of African-Americans in Georgia.
9. point out instances of flashback in the text.
10. discuss Celie's relationship with God and how her emerging beliefs are illustrated in the way she addresses her letters.
11. relate significant details about Celie's life and Nettie's experiences in Africa.

The Color Purple

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Celie inherits a beautiful yellow house when Pa dies. Why does she paint her bedroom purple?
2. What theme(s) for the novel do the following incidents suggest?
 - Celie begins to make and then wear pants instead of dresses. Note: Remember that in the first half of the twentieth century women rarely wore pants.
 - The Olinka people do not think there is any need for girls to get an education.
 - Mr. _____ does not approve of Harpo's marriage to Sofia, just as his father did not approve of his marrying Shug.
3. How did Celie's biological father die? What effect did his death have on Celie, and how does Shug handle it?
4. What is Samuel's story about Olivia and Adam? What is Nettie's reaction and to whom does she respond? Why?
5. Some critics believe that the male characters in the book are unfair representations of men at the time. Others point out that Albert does grow and change by the end of the story. Which position do you think the incidents in the story support?
6. List three ways the lives of African-Americans parallel the lives of the Olinka people. Why do you think this is?
7. Why does Celie first address her letters to God and then address her letters to Nettie? Why is the last letter addressed "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God"?
8. How does Celie feel when she learns that Pa is not her biological father. What impact does this information have on her life?
9. List three things Nettie likes about living with the Olinka people. In what way are she and Samuel disappointed in them?
10. Why is Nettie worried about returning to America with Olivia, Adam, and Tashi?

The Color Purple

Letters 1 – 8

Vocabulary

- billfold** – a wallet
- dote** – show fondness for
- dresstail** – the bottom edge of a lady's garment
- duck** – move quickly into
- rouge** – blush
- safe** – a cooled cupboard for perishable items
- spoiled** – sexually used by a man

1. Briefly identify the author of the letters. What is her age, name, and family status?

2. What does Celie believe happens to her two babies?

3. In what way is Celie physically damaged by her father's sexual abuse? What evidence is there in these letters that Celie no longer is interested in or relates to men?

4. Who is Shug Avery? How does Celie first learn about her?

Letters 18 – 31

Vocabulary

- Amazons** – slang for strong women
- clabber** – curdled or thick milk
- feverish** – anxious
- fractious** – cranky
- goose** – to inspire; attract
- lavish** – abundant
- pomp** – to raise hair up with comb
- primping** – dressing up
- rat** – an artificial roll of hair enclosed in a fine net
- seining** – catching fish with a large net
- splosh** – to splash
- squeamish** – easily sickened or disgusted
- strumpet** – a prostitute
- weevil** – a beetle

1. Celie admires Sofia; yet when Harpo asks Celie how to make his wife obey him, she tells him to beat her. Why do you suppose Celie does this? How does she feel about herself afterwards?

2. State a theme for this novel based on the following passage where Sofia describes her family:

Six boys, six girls. All the girls big and strong like me. Boys big and strong too, but all the girls stick together. Two brothers stick with us too, sometime. Us git in a fight, it's a sight to see.

Letters 43 – 51

Vocabulary

beck and call – command to appear

roadhouse – bar usually on a highway on the outskirts of a town

1. Describe Sofia’s attitude toward Billy and Eleanor Jane.

2. List the ways Sofia lives like a slave in the Mayor’s house.

3. Why does Sofia say, “white folks is a miracle of affliction”?

4. How does Celie feel about Shug’s new husband, Grady? What is the one aspect of Grady’s behavior that Celie cannot stand?

5. Why do you think Shug first kisses Celie on the mouth?
