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The Color Purple
Alice Walker

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The Color Purple
Alice Walker



Prestwick House

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938

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ISBN 978-1-60389-525-5

Item No. 303031

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Response Journal for *The Color Purple*

Background/Pre-Reading

1. Alice Walker, the author of *The Color Purple*, was the youngest of eight children in her family. One might imagine that Walker, the child of poor sharecroppers, would spend her childhood in hand-me-down clothes and in a constant competition with her older siblings for attention, special treats, extra helpings of food, and enough room to sleep in a crowded bed.

Psychologists have conducted many studies on the various ways in which birth order affects the development of children. These ways include the formation of personality, the relative assertiveness of children, and the ways that children form relationships in their adult lives.

In your own family, where do you fall in the birth order? How many siblings do you have? Write a journal entry of at least two paragraphs in which you state your place in the birth order of your family, and describe at least one personal experience in which you feel that your birth order has affected you.

2. Share-cropping in the American South was an incredibly exploitative agricultural system. It arose during the Reconstruction era, when southern planters needed to keep their labor costs near where they had been during the time of slavery. However, since slavery no longer existed, planters had to find a way to compensate their laborers and still keep costs low.

The share-cropping system involved planters loaning plots of land to workers, and at the end of each growing season, collecting one-third of the harvest from each of them. Furthermore, the share-cropper had to use credit to buy things such as fertilizer, tools, and crop seed as well as his own food and clothing at the plantation store. At the end of the season, the share-cropper had to pay his store bill in addition to a share of the crop. Since the planter could set a fixed price for the crops, and the planter was the sole accountant, there was plenty of room for fraud. The planter could keep the share-croppers poor and dependent on him.

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Letters 1-10

5. As you read, note the extensive use of dialect—language that is written as it sounds, and reflects how the characters actually talk instead of using conventional English. Dialect is used to make first-person narration seem more realistic and poignant.

Consider how your conversations with your friends, whether in person, over the phone, in text messages, or instant messaging differ from standard English in the ways that grammar is used and how spelling of words are changed or shortened to make popular abbreviations in those conversational contexts.

Using one of the methods listed above, write a dialogue that you and a friend might have about something important that happened to you. The dialogue should be approximately a page long and sound authentic, using your own unique way of speaking.

6. Despite the traumatic events she has witnessed in her young life, Nettie finds a boyfriend who is her father's age and who seems to have many of the same impulses as her father when it comes to choosing a mate.

Think about how Nettie must have felt watching her sister get raped by their father. Look at the situation from Nettie's perspective: what motivation would she have to marry the first man she could find, no matter what his age or circumstances?

Now, imagine how Nettie would feel after coming home from her first meeting with this man. Write a diary entry as Nettie, explaining your feelings for him and; about your situation in general.

7. In Nettie's community, girls are expected to engage in sexual activities we would consider abusive. These girls are too young, however, to know anything about physical intimacy and the impact sexual behavior has on their future lives. There is even a naïveté about what actually has to happen for a woman to (get big.)

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21. After a few days of having Shug Avery in her home, Celie concludes, “She sicker than my mama was when she die. But she more evil than my mama and that keep her alive.”

What does this statement mean? What do you think Celie means when she says Shug is “sick” and “evil”? Does she mean this sentence to be understood literally? In addition, why does it give Celie pleasure to see that Shug Avery is more sick and evil than Celie’s mother?

Write a letter to a classmate who doesn’t understand this passage and explain what Celie means in these two sentences. Be sure to emphasize what forces and ideas strengthen Shug that did not strengthen Celie’s mother?

22. One bonding experience that Celie and Shug share is Celie’s combing of Shug’s hair. At first, Shug wants Celie to hurry up and finish, but as she continues combing, the close contact reminds Shug of the way that her grandma combed her hair when she was a girl.

Celie depicts this incident in a very interesting way. She pretends Shug is a doll, who Celie names Olivia. Olivia was a newborn baby who was taken from Celie years ago. Olivia remains an important, but conceptual, part of Celie’s life, and this shows that the mother-child connection is alive within Celie.

Write this scene from Shug’s point of view instead of Celie’s. What do you think is going through her mind while she is having her hair brushed?

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38. While Shug and Celie are creating a new relationship with one another, Grady and Albert take the car out and are gone almost until dawn. While this is a period of bonding for the two women, this has to be a difficult situation for both men.

If you were in Albert's situation, what would you talk about with the man who is married to the woman you truly love? If you were in Grady's situation, how would you respond?

Write the dialogue you imagine between these two men. Your dialogue should include how you think both men would interact with each other. Since the only information we receive about their evening is that they are out all night, be creative.

39. Neither Celie nor Shug Avery likes Grady's pet name for Shug. He calls her "Mama," and this receives an irate reaction from Shug.

Think about which of Grady's character traits that might help explain why he keeps using this pet name for his wife even though he knows she doesn't like it. Also, what is it about this name that you think Shug finds unpleasant? Why do you think Celie doesn't like when Grady refers to Shug as "Mama"?

Write a letter to Grady in the persona of Celie, that is at least half a page in length. In the letter, detail the reasons why you think Grady should stop calling Shug "Mama." Be sure to use specific details about Shug and Celie's perspective to support your opinion.