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***The Color Purple***  
BY ALICE WALKER



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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pre-Reading

### Themes

Objective: Learning the themes of the novel

Activity:

The scholar Felipe Smith observes:

“In [Alice] Walker’s philosophy of redemptive art, *to save* means, first, to collect and thereby preserve the subject from loss by immortalizing it in art; by reclaiming the past the artist insures its availability to the future. The second meaning of *to save* involves providing the wisdom of the past...to serve as a blueprint for personal and communal survival for those who require artistic models. *To save* someone, in Walker’s eyes, includes the obligation to liberate her / him from an oppressive cycle of violence. *To be saved* means to have achieved an ‘unself-conscious sense of collective oneness; that naturalness, that (even when anguished) grace.’”

In small groups, choose your topic from the list below. Consider your topic and how “the wisdom of the past” can “serve as a blueprint for personal and communal survival.” Make a list of the benefits, either to individuals in the group or to the country as a whole, that have been gained due to the event. After you list all the benefits you can think of, list one conflict the event created, and as a group, decide if the conflict has been resolved.

Topics to Discuss:

- Slaves gaining their freedom
  - *Benefit: Freeing the slaves moved the country closer to true equality;*
  - *Conflict: There was a backlash by whites, especially in the South, where laws continued to oppress blacks;*
  - *Resolution: The Civil Rights laws of the 1960s corrected some problems, but some racism still exists today.*
- Women gaining the right to vote
- Women gaining the right to file for divorce against their husbands
- Children gaining the right to have free public education
- Laborers gaining the right to form unions
- Biracial couples gaining societal acceptance
- Same-sex couples gaining more of the same rights as heterosexual couples

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Letters 1 – 21****Narration**

**Objective:** Understanding why the novel is written in the form of letters

**Activity:**

Celie has been through much trauma at a young age. She has been told by her father if she tells what he has done to her, he will kill her. She has no one to turn to, and so, to safely release and unburden the mental turmoil she is going through, she writes her experiences in the form of letters to God. This activity is intended to help the reader understand why Celie might choose to tell her story in the form of letters and what effect this expostulatory technique has.

Individually, write two separate documents about the same event. No one else, not even your teacher, will see what you write. Think about an actual incident where you were made to feel embarrassed, intimidated, or victimized. Write one paragraph as if what you are writing will go into a formal record that you know will be read and witnessed by many people, maybe even the people who made you feel uncomfortable. Write a second paragraph about the exact same incident, only this time, write it in the form of a letter to a higher, comforting power.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Letters 1 – 21****Characterization**

**Objective:** Interpreting characters through the perspective of a first person narrator

**Activity I:**

Celie is the sole writer of Letters 1 – 21. She has a limited education and a limited vocabulary, but despite these limitations, she paints a full picture of each of the characters in the novel, including herself. She lets us know in some way how each character looks and acts. These characters include:

- Nettie
- Mr. \_\_\_\_\_
- Alphonso
- Shug Avery
- Celie
- Harpo
- Sofia

Divide into small groups. You are to take the character your group is assigned and answer the questions on the following page.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Letters 22 – 43**

**Found Poem**

**Objective:** Creating a found poem

**Activity:**

A “found” poem is a poem made up entirely of phrases or quotations found in the text. Go back through Letters 22 – 43, and make up a found poem of your own. The poem could tell the reader something about Celie’s emotional state in these letters, but this is not necessary; your poem may be totally unrelated to the action of the story, which is one of the best parts of writing a found poem.

Your poem should be at least 10 lines long. The lines do not need to rhyme, but they certainly may. You can arrange the phrases in any way you like and change the punctuation, but do not deviate from the actual words. Give the poem a title, which may or may not come from the book. Below is an example taken directly from Letters 22 – 43.

**Strong**

“I keep my head up, best I can.”  
“He look at me like maybe I’m planning something bad.”  
“My hands tremble and my breath short.”  
“I notice something crazy in his eyes.”  
“Start hum a little tune.”  
“I’m a good prisoner, she say.”  
“Celie, he say, you have my sympathy.”  
“Some womens can’t be beat, I say.”  
“Men say stuff like that to women, Girl, you look like a good time.”  
“But what good being mad gon do?”

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Letters 44 – 69****Newspaper**

**Objectives:** Identifying important moments from *The Color Purple*  
Presenting events in the form of a newspaper article

**Activity:**

In Letter 55, Nettie writes about her trip to Harlem. This is a transformative moment for Nettie, as she sees black people living a quality of life similar to that of white people.

Write a front-page article detailing this scene in Harlem. You do not need to write from Nettie's point of view or include Nettie in the article, but you must include the details Nettie provides about Harlem. Write the story in the factual, unbiased style that is used by newspaper reporters.

Criteria for your article:

- There must be an attention-grabbing headline that sums up the content of the article.
- The first paragraph should concisely describe who, what, when, where, and why, so that a reader may know the basic facts surrounding the event after reading only the first paragraph.
- The subsequent paragraphs should follow in a logical order, offering further details and substance for readers who want more information.
- The last paragraph should have a clear conclusion.
- Include a drawing or photo to accompany the article.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Letters 70 – 90

Dialect

Objectives: Understanding dialect  
Writing in a dialect

## Activity:

*The Color Purple* is written from the perspective of two characters, Celie and Nettie. Celie's letters are written in a southern, less educated dialect. Nettie's letters, on the other hand, are written in Standard English. When we render Celie's narrative into formal English and re-read the letters, we get a sense of how much the dialect adds to the tone of the novel and helps the reader visualize the characters and what is happening in story.

The following is part of a letter written by Celie. Translate the passage into Standard English, the dialect spoken by Nettie. Then, explain how the change in tone affects how the passage is read.

I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants now in every color and size under the sun. Since us started making pants down home, I ain't been able to stop. I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants Shug tease me. I didn't know what I was starting, she say, laughing. Pants all over her chairs, hanging all in front of the china closet. Newspaper patterns and cloth all over the table and the floor. She come home, kiss me, step over all the mess. Say, before she leave again, How much money you think you need *this* week?

Then finally one day I made the perfect pair of pants. For my sugar, naturally. They soft dark blue jersey with teeny patches of red. But what make them so good is, they totally comfortable. Cause Shug eat a lot of junk on the road, and drink, her stomach bloat. So the pants can be let out without messing up the shape. Because she have to pack her stuff and fight wrinkles, these pants are soft, hardly wrinkle at all, and the little figures in the cloth always look perky and bright. And they full round the ankle so if she want to sing in 'em and wear 'em sort of like a long dress, she can. Plus, once Shug put them on, she knock your eyes out.

The next passage is part of a letter written by Nettie. Translate it into the dialect that Celie uses. How does this change affect how you read the passage?

Because we had spent so much of our money on tin roofs and the voyage over, it had to be a poor man's month in England. But it was a very good time for us. We began to feel ourselves a family, without Corrine. And people meeting us on the street never failed (if they spoke to us at all) to express the sentiment that children looked just like the two of us. The children began to accept this as natural, and began going out to view the sights that interested them, alone. Leaving their father and me to our quieter, more sedate pleasures, one of which was simple conversation.

Samuel, of course, was born in the North, in New York, and grew up and was educated there. He met Corrine through his aunt who had been a missionary, along with Corrine's aunt, in the Belgian Congo. Samuel frequently accompanied his aunt Althea to Atlanta, where Corrine's aunt Theodosia lived.