REAs Lesson Plan for 
Alice Walkers

The Color Purple

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**SECTION ONE**

**Introduction**

*The Life and Work of Alice Walker*

Alice Walker is one of the most famous and beloved writers of our time, and this is largely due to the novel *The Color Purple*. Born on February 9, 1944, Walker was the youngest of eight children and the daughter of sharecroppers. She was always a precocious child, but after being blinded in one eye at age eight in an accident with a BB gun, Walker became more insecure and withdrawn. Walker has always given credit to her mother for encouraging her to make something of herself; her father and four of her five brothers failed to give her a positive male role model. She was especially influenced by her father’s brutality, which served as a model for Mr.____ in *The Color Purple*. She reconciled her feelings with her father once she understood the difficult life he had led and the abuse that he himself experienced (his mother was murdered coming out of church).

Walker entered Spelman College on a scholarship in 1961. Although Spelman was a mainstream college with a moderate point of view, Walker took part in civil rights demonstrations. In 1964, she transferred to Sarah Lawrence College. It was during this time that she would suffer a personal crisis that would deeply affect her life. After a trip to Africa, Walker returned to America pregnant, which isolated her from her family and threw her into a deep depression. Even though her father had expected his sons to experiment with sex, he had warned his daughters not to become pregnant. (Winchell, 28). Walker contemplated suicide, and even slept with a razor blade under her pillow, but “...a friend saved her life by giving her the phone number of an abortionist” (Winchell,
9). She recorded her experiences during this phase of her life in a book of poems, which became her first published collection.

Walker became a literary scholar after her graduation, but her work was impeded by “the blind spot” that she felt was in the education that she had received. Walker was fascinated by female writers such as Flannery O’Connor but eventually became frustrated by the lack of black women writers in the curriculum of colleges. Even when she did find black writers being taught, only prominent male writers such as Richard Wright and Langston Hughes were ever discussed. Walker eventually “discovered” the works of Zora Neale Hurston, a writer in the mid-twentieth century whose apolitical work was shunned in favor of authors such as Wright. Hurston became the biggest influence on her literary career and life. Walker eventually edited a collection of Hurston works and is largely responsible for her posthumous popularity. Hurston is best known for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which has become a classic in twentieth century American literature.

Like Hurston, Alice Walker’s lifestyle has been controversial and chaotic. She married the white civil rights attorney Melvyn Leventhal in 1968 but divorced in 1976. Unlike Hurston, Walker has been fiercely political; she has been a prominent lesbian and feminist, and her political views have been made the focus of her novels. Her first novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *Meridian*, both dealt with violence towards black women by black males. *The Color Purple* also shared many of these themes. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* was a 1992 novel that dealt with female circumcision, which is used in some African rituals. Critics of Walker have stated that she has portrayed black men as cruel in her works, which has sustained stereotypes of black male violence.

*The Color Purple* was Walker’s third novel, written in 1982. Her novel received the Pulitzer Prize for literature and an American Book Award. A film was made in 1985, which was critically acclaimed despite the fact that the screenplay departs dramatically from the novel. The most obvious differences are the exclusion of Nettie as a central character, and the almost complete removal of the subplot of Nettie, Corrine, and Samuel in Africa. The lesbian relationship between Shug and Celie is toned down as well, al-
though the violence towards Celie seems as chilling in the movie as it is in the novel. The movie went on to receive 11 Academy Award nominations. In addition to her other novels, two of which, *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, form a loose trilogy with *The Color Purple*, Walker has published two collections of short stories, poems, and political essays.

For more information on Alice Walker and her works, read the excellent biography by Donna Haisley Winchell (1992). Two other recommended books concerning black female writers are *The Common Bond*, a collection of essays edited by Lillie P. Howard, and *Black Women Novelists*, by Barbara Christian.

**Historical Background**

Alice Walker was active in the social events in her time, speaking out against injustice during civil rights demonstrations in the 1960s. Her feminism and activism in women's issues reflect the novels of Zora Neale Hurston, a writer in the 1930s. Alice Walker sets *The Color Purple* during the same time period as Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston's then contemporary novel drew criticism for its portrayal of black men as abusive. Hurston was criticized by her black peers as well; it was believed that by commenting upon the unequal relationships between black men and women, Hurston diverted attention from the social inequality of blacks and whites. The novel concerns the efforts of Janie Crawford to escape the oppressiveness of her first two husbands. When Janie finally does find love, it is with a man 18 years her junior. Essayists writing about *The Common Bond* have commented that *The Color Purple* is a reworking of Hurston's plot with added elements such as lesbianism and the success of women outside the typical framework of marriage.

It is impossible to fully understand the ideas and plots of Alice Walker without first reading the works of Zora Neale Hurston, particularly *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. One gains valuable insight by reading these works. Walker, like Hurston, was very interested in African folklore, particularly the religious themes of the presence of God within nature. This theme is used very effectively in *The Color Purple*. Like Hurston, Walker does touch upon the social issues of 1930s
America, but focuses upon the broader picture of how men and women relate with each other today. Walker perhaps focuses more upon the relationships between men and women, rather than white and black, which has caused her to be the target of critics, much as Hurston was a target in her day. Walker has managed to comment on social issues while focusing upon character development in her works. *The Color Purple* is unquestionably a novel with a social message, but the larger issues in it concern a woman’s personal struggle for freedom, and how she accomplishes this in a society where women are looked upon as inferior.

**Master List of Characters**

**Celie**—The protagonist of *The Color Purple*. *She is 14 at the beginning of the novel.*

**Nettie**—Celie’s younger sister.

**Mr. ____ (Albert)**—A local farmer who wants to marry Nettie, but is talked into marrying Celie by Alphonso.

**Shug Avery**—A nightclub singer who has had an ongoing relationship with Mr. ____ despite his marriages.

**Harpo**—The eldest son of Mr. ____ from a previous marriage. *He is 12 years old when Celie and Mr. ____ marry.*

**Sofia Butler**—Harpo’s independent wife.

**Celie’s father (Alphonso) and mother**—Alphonso is the owner of a farm and store; his first wife dies at the beginning of the novel.

**May Ellen**—Alphonso’s second wife.

**Olivia**—The daughter of Celie and Alphonso, she is given to Samuel and Corrine at birth.

**Adam**—The son of Celie and Alphonso, he is given to Samuel and Corrine at birth.

**Samuel (The Reverend Mr. ____)**—The local reverend, and husband to Corrine.

**Corrine**—Wife to Samuel, she is a missionary preparing to leave for Africa.
Squeak (Mary Agnes)—Harpo’s girlfriend.

Old Mr.____—Mr.____’s father and landlord to Mr.____’s farm.

Kate and Carrie—Mr.____’s sisters.

Tobias—Mr.____’s brother.

Odessa and Jack—Sofia’s sister and brother-in-law, they also take care of Sofia’s children.

The Mayor and Miss Millie—The couple who take Sofia as their maid after she is arrested.

Eleanor Jane and Billy—The daughter and son of Miss Millie and the Mayor.

Grady—Shug’s husband, a marijuana grower and mechanic from Nashville.

Tashi—A young African girl from the Olinka tribe.

Tashi’s mother (Catherine) and father—Members of the Olinka tribe.

Joseph—The guide of the missionaries.

Henry Buster Broadnax—Sofia’s well-built boyfriend.

Swain—Harpo’s friend and guitar player at the local nightclub.

Daisy—Alphonso’s third wife.

Jolentha (Suzie Q)—The little daughter of Squeak and Harpo.

Henrietta—The little daughter of Sofia.

Jerene and Darlene—Twins who help Celie with her sewing. Darlene becomes interested in teaching Celie how to speak.

Doris Baines—An eccentric, successful author and missionary from England.

Harold—A small African child and the adopted grandson of Doris Baines.

Althea and Theodosia—Samuel’s aunt and Corrine’s aunt, respectively, they spent their lives together working as missionaries.


Germaine—A young musician who becomes involved with Shug.
Stanley Earl and Reynolds Stanley—Eleanor Jane’s husband and son.

Summary of the Novel

The novel focuses upon the growth and development of a girl named Celie. Raped at 14 by her own father and then forced into a marriage with a cruel older man, Celie learns to be quiet and submissive. The person she cares most about, her sister Nettie, is forced out of her own home and kicked out of Celie’s home by her husband, Mr.____. Mr.____ had married Celie so that she could take care of his children and work for him, since he is already in love with Shug Avery.

When Shug Avery falls ill, Mr.____ keeps her at his home. Thanks to Celie’s care, Shug is able to recover and the two women begin a friendship. Over time, Celie learns to stand up for herself and gain self-respect. Celie also learns how to love, as the two women become lovers as well as friends. Shug promises Celie that she will stay and protect her from the abuse of Mr.____.

Nettie, meanwhile, finds refuge at the home of Samuel, the local reverend, and his wife, Corrine. Corrine and Samuel have two adopted children, Adam and Olivia. Celie is actually the mother of these children; they were taken from her by her father before she married Mr.____. Eventually the entire family, including Nettie, is sent to Africa for work as missionaries. They attempt to teach African children about Christianity. Nettie becomes involved in the struggle to educate a young African girl, Tashi, despite the wishes of her father, who believes that women should follow the custom of striving to become good wives. Nettie also enters a conflict with Corrine, who believes that Adam and Olivia are the result of an affair Nettie had with Samuel. Corrine is convinced that this is what happened because the children resemble Nettie so closely.

Nettie finally tells Samuel and Corrine that Celie is the children’s original mother, but by now Corrine doesn’t believe anything she says. When Corrine falls ill with a fever and comes close to death, Nettie becomes more desperate to make her believe the truth. Finally, Corrine remembers an early meeting that she had with Celie and dies understanding that Nettie had never had a relationship with Samuel. As the years pass, however, Net-
tie and Samuel fall in love and marry. Eventually, the missionaries are unable to save the Olinka tribe, whose land has been taken by developers. They plan to return to America and rescue Celie from her unhappy marriage. Nettie chronicles her adventures in Africa by writing letters to Celie twice a year. These letters, however, are taken by Mr.____ and hidden from Celie, who believes her sister is gone forever.

When Celie, with Shug's help, finds out that Mr.____ has been hiding these letters, she makes a stand and leaves Mr.____'s house. She learns how to live life on her own and how to take care of others, all the while waiting for Nettie. After her departure from Mr.____'s farm, Mr.____ and his son Harpo learn to be kinder to each other and to others. Celie enjoys a life of independence and eventually accepts and reconciles with the people who have treated her cruelly. The climax of the novel occurs when Nettie returns with Samuel, Olivia, Adam and Tashi, who has married Adam. After a tearful reunion, Celie, after all her suffering, is the happiest she has ever felt in her life.

The unique structure of the novel should be noted. Walker uses first-person narration, that is, the action of the novel is written through the eyes of the character Celie.

Celia's narration takes place in the form of letters, first to God, then to her sister Nettie. Nettie's adventures are told through her point of view, through letters written to Celie. Therefore, the plot of the text is actually two separate stories, loosely connected through Celie's relationship with Nettie. Celie and Nettie comment on their shared experiences, such as Celie's relationship with Mr.____ and the discovery of Celie's children, allowing the reader to fill in the gaps left by only one perspective in narration.

**Estimated Reading Time**

The 295-page novel is divided into 90 “letters,” most of which are between one and two pages long. For the sake of convenience, the study guide is broken into 21 sections, based upon logical pauses in the action of the novel. Readers should be able to complete the novel in 10-12 hours.
SECTION TWO

Study Questions & Suggested Study Topics
New Characters:

**Celie:** a 14-year-old girl who is the protagonist of *The Color Purple*

**Alphonso and his wife:** Celie’s mother and father

**Nettie:** Celie’s younger sister

**Mr. ____:** a local farmer who wants to marry Nettie, but ends up marrying Celie

**May Ellen:** Alphonso’s second wife

**Harpo:** the 12-year-old son of Mr. ____ from a previous marriage

**Study Questions**

1. Who is Lucious?
2. What is Celie’s answer when her mother asks her “Whose child is it”?
3. What does Celie think happened to her second child?
4. How old is Celie’s new mother?
5. How did Mr. ____’s previous wife die?
6. Why is Celie beaten by her father after she goes to church?
7. How many children does Mr. ____ have?
8. Why does Celie’s father reject Mr. ____’s request to marry Nettie?
9. According to Celie’s father, why will Celie be a better wife to Mr.____ than Nettie?

10. How long does it take for Mr.____ to decide to marry Celie?

**Answers**

1. Lucious is Celie’s newborn brother.

2. Celie says that the child is God’s.

3. Celie thinks that her father killed her first child, but believes that he sold her second child.

4. Celie’s father marries a woman who is as old as Celie.

5. Supposedly, Mr.____’s previous wife was shot by her boyfriend when she left church.

6. Her father hits her because he thinks that she winked at a boy in church.

7. Mr.____ says he has three children, but Celie discovers that he actually has four children.

8. Nettie’s father thinks Nettie is too young for a man like Mr.____. He has heard the rumors about the death of Mr.____’s previous wife and his relationship with Shug Avery. He also has made plans for Nettie to become a schoolteacher.

9. Celie is not as pretty as Nettie, “but she ain’t no stranger to hard work,” according to her father. He also says that “God done fixed her,” meaning that Mr.____ can still do whatever he wants without worrying about interference from Celie.

10. Three months pass before Mr.____ decides to marry Celie.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. How come we do not know Mr.____’s last name? How does this symbolize the behavior of men in this society?

2. Look at the symbols of education in this section (the books, Miss Beasley...). How are they connected with the sisters’ desire for a better life?
Letters 10–12

New Characters:

**Olivia:** *Celie's daughter, taken from Celie at birth*

**The Reverend Mr.____ (Samuel):** *Olivia's adopted father and husband to Corrine*

**Corrine:** *Olivia's adopted mother*

**Kate and Carrie:** *Mr.____’s sisters*

**Study Questions**

1. How does Celie know that it is her daughter at the store?

2. What is Olivia's foster mother buying at the general store, and why?

3. How old is Olivia now?

4. Why does Nettie show up at Mr.____’s farm?

5. Why does Celie start to feel good about herself?

6. How does Celie react to Nettie's concern about leaving her alone with Mr.____?

7. Why do Mr.____’s sisters begin to gossip, even though “it not nice to speak ill of the dead”?

8. How does Celie compare with Mr.____’s previous wife, according to Kate and Carrie?

9. What color does Celie want for her dress, and what color does she end up buying?

10. Why does Harpo refuse at first when Kate asks him to bring in a bucket of water?

**Answers**

1. The little girl has Celie's eyes.

2. Olivia's foster mother is buying some fabric and thread so that she can make dresses for herself and her daughter.

3. Olivia will be seven in November.
4. Nettie couldn't take living at home with Pa and might try to find help for the smaller children.

5. Nettie passes on all the compliments that she receives from Mr.____ to Celie.

6. Celie is philosophical, saying that God is still with her.

7. Even though they gossip about Annie Julia, Mr.____’s last wife, they insist that it is still the truth.

8. Celie is a much better housekeeper than Annie Julia ever was, according to Kate and Carrie. Furthermore, she takes care of the children and cooks very well. Kate and Carrie both consider Mr.____ to be a bit ungrateful to have such a good wife and not appreciate her.

9. Celie wants a purple dress, but can't find any purple fabric. She settles for a blue dress.

10. Harpo tells Kate that fetching water is “women work.”

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. Examine the mannerisms of the reverend's wife and compare her to Celie. What do you think makes her more confident than Celie? What does she have that Celie does not?

2. What insight do we get from Mr.____’s character after seeing him attempt to flirt with Nettie?
Letters 13-18

New Character:

**Sofia Butler:** *Harpo's new wife*

**Study Questions**

1. What is the reason that Mr.____ gives Harpo for beating his wife?

2. How old is Harpo when he falls in love, and how old is the girl with whom he falls in love?

3. How does Celie know that Shug Avery is going to play at the Lucky Star?

4. Why does Celie want to go to the club?

5. Why does Celie follow Mr.____ back from the cotton fields?

6. Describe Harpo's recurring nightmare.

7. What does Sofia ask Celie for?

8. Where do Sofia and Harpo eventually marry?

9. Why does Mr.____ start to pay Harpo wages for working?

10. What does Mr.____ mean when he says to Harpo, “I see now she going to switch the traces on you”?

**Answers**

1. Mr.____ says that he beats her because she is his wife and “she stubborn.”

2. Harpo is 17, and the girl he is in love with is 15.

3. Celie finds an advertisement for the club.

4. Celie wants “to lay eyes on her.”

5. Celie thinks that Mr.____ is sick, when he is still not over his weekend with Shug Avery.

6. Harpo dreams that he is a witness to his mother’s murder, and ends up cradling his dead mother in his arms.
7. Sofia asks Celie for a glass of water.

8. Sofia and Harpo marry at Sofia’s sister’s house.

9. Mr.____ thinks that wages will encourage Harpo to work harder.

10. Mr.____ means that Sofia is treating Harpo like he is a work-horse. It also implies that Harpo is not acting like “a man” because he does what Sofia wants him to do.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. What insight does Harpo receive about Mr.____’s character? Look at what Mr.____ says to him in this chapter.

2. Why does “a shadow” go across Sofia’s face in her argument with Mr.____? What is Harpo’s role in this argument?
Letters 19–21

Study Questions

1. Why are Sofia and Harpo arguing at the beginning of this section?
2. Describe Harpo’s wounds.
3. What excuse does Harpo give for his wounds?
4. What does Celie do to try to make herself sleep?
5. How much does Sofia pay Celie for use of her curtains?
6. What will happen if Celie continues to advise Harpo?
7. Why does Sofia feel sorry for Celie?
8. How many children does Sofia’s father have?
9. What does Celie mean when she tells Sofia that sometimes she has to talk with Old Maker?
10. What does Sofia think Celie should do with Mr.____?

Answers

1. Harpo thinks that Sofia spends too much time with her sister.
2. Harpo has a black eye and a cut lip. He also has a hurt hand and he is walking stiffly.
3. Harpo claims that he was kicked by an angry mule, and then walked into the crib door at home. Then, during the evening, he accidentally closed the window on his hand.
4. Celie tries to stay up as late as possible. Before she goes to bed, she takes a warm bath. Then, she puts a little witch hazel on her pillow and makes sure the room is completely dark. If that doesn’t work, she tries drinking a little milk, counting the fence posts, and reading the Bible to fall asleep.
5. Sofia tries to give Celie a dollar for the use of her curtains.
6. Sofia says that if Celie wants a dead son-in-law she should simply keep on advising him like she did before.
7. Celie reminds Sofia of her own mother, who never stood up to her husband.

8. Sofia’s father has 12 children—six boys and six girls.

9. Celie means that she talks with God whenever Mr.____ begins to abuse her.

10. Sofia thinks that Celie should kill Mr.____ now and think about heaven later.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. Why wouldn’t Harpo want Sofia to visit her sisters? Use examples from the text to support your answer.

2. How would Mr.____ react to Harpo’s excuses? Construct a dialogue in which Harpo tries to explain to his father why his face is bruised.
New Characters:

**Shug Avery:** a nightclub singer, and girlfriend of Mr.____

**Old Mr.____:** Mr.____’s father

**Tobias:** Mr.____’s brother

**Study Questions**

1. What is Shug Avery’s nickname?
2. How does the priest characterize Shug in his sermon?
3. Celie says that there is “one good thing” about the fact that Mr.____ doesn’t do any work on the farm. What is that thing?
4. How does Shug survive when she is sicker than Celie’s mama when she died?
5. How many kids has Shug had with Mr.____?
6. Where are Shug’s kids now?
7. Describe Mr.____’s father.
8. What can Mr.____ vouch for about Shug?
9. What does Tobias bring for Shug?
10. Why does Tobias wish his wife, Margaret, was a lot more like Celie?

**Answers**

1. She is known as the Queen Honeybee.
2. Shug is the nameless “strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin.”
3. Since Mr.____ never does work in the field, Celie and Harpo never miss him when he leaves the farm.
4. Celie says that Shug is able to survive because she is “more evil than my mama.”
5. Shug Avery has had three children with Mr.____.
6. Shug’s children are now staying with her mother.

7. Old Mr.____ is “a little short shrunk up man with a bald head and gold spectacles.” He clears his throat “like everything he say need announcement.”

8. Mr.____ knows that all of Shug’s children have the same father.

9. Tobias brings a box of chocolate for Shug.

10. Tobias wishes that Margaret was “always busy” like Celie so that she could save [him] a bundle of money.

Suggested Essay Topics

1. What symbols of security are present in this section of the novel? How does Celie use such symbols (the bath, food) to comfort Shug?

2. Compare the relationship Mr.____ has with his father to the one that he has with his son. Is there any real difference in these relationships or is it a cycle of abuse from father to son?
Letters 28–31

Study Questions

1. What reasons does Celie give for eating?
2. What is clabber?
3. List what Harpo eats when he visits Celie.
4. What is meant when Harpo is asked “When is it due?”
5. Where does Harpo end up sleeping after his fight with Sofia?
6. After Harpo and Sofia fight, Harpo appears at Celie’s house with two black eyes. What bruises does Sofia have?
7. When Mr.____ and Celie have sex, how long does it take for both of them to fall asleep?
8. What does Sofia take when she leaves?
9. Describe Sofia’s sisters.
10. What does Harpo pretend to do while Sofia packs up her things?

Answers

1. Celie says that some people eat because “food taste good,” while others “love to feel they mouth work.” Sometimes, it also “might be a case of being undernourish.”
2. Clabber is the thick, sour milk that collects on a butter churn.
3. Harpo eats a piece of fried chicken, a slice of blueberry pie, a glass of clabber, and a slice of cornbread.
4. Harpo has become so fat that he begins to look like he is pregnant.
5. Harpo sleeps in a bed next to Shug’s room.
6. Sofia has only a scratch on her wrist.
7. Both Celie and Mr.____ are asleep in ten minutes.
8. Sofia takes the children and their clothes, as well as her own clothes. In addition she takes a mattress, a looking glass, and a rocking chair.

9. To Celie, Sofia’s sisters “look like amazons.”

10. Harpo is pretending to make a fish net while he is waiting for Sofia to leave.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. What are some of the chores that Harpo does? What insight does the reader receive into Harpo’s character with respect to these chores?

2. What role does food play in this section? What is it a symbol for? Use examples from the text to support your conclusion.
Letters 32–36

New Characters:

Swain: Harpo's friend

Henry “Buster” Broadnax: Sofia's new companion

Squeak (Mary Agnes): Harpo's new girlfriend

Study Questions

1. What is the name of Harpo's new club?
2. Why is Harpo puzzled by Shug?
3. How does Shug describe the first time she made love with Mr.____?
4. What does having sex with Mr.____ feel like to Celie?
5. What was the best thing about having children for Celie?
6. How does Shug act like a man?
7. What does Harpo consider a scandal?
8. What is Buster's “job,” with regards to Sofia?
9. How did Squeak get her nickname?
10. What does “teenouncy” mean?

Answers

1. Harpo's new club is called “Harpo's.”
2. Harpo is confused by Shug's willingness to say whatever she feels. Harpo's ideal woman would behave like Celie, and do whatever he wants her to do. Harpo still cannot handle an independent woman.
3. Shug says that the first time was an accident. Feeling carried them away.
4. Celie says it feels like Mr.____ is going to the toilet on her.
5. Celie loved to nurse her children because she used to feel a shiver.
6. Shug talks like a man; instead of talking about hair or health, she compliments another woman on her good looks. Celie becomes slightly aroused when she sees Shug walking around in the club.

7. Harpo thinks that it is “a scandless” that “a woman with five children (Sofia) [is] hanging out in a jukejoint at night.”

8. Buster's job is “to love (Sofia) and take her where she want to go.”

9. Harpo gave Squeak that nickname, presumably because of her voice.

10. “Teenouncy” is a cross between tiny and bouncy, which accurately describes Squeak's voice.

Suggested Essay Topics

1. What is the significance of Harpo's weight? Compare this to the time he tries to gain weight in order to fight Sofia.

2. How does Shug's knowledge that Mr.____ had beat Celie change their relationship? Can you predict the changes that will take place in the future?
Letters 37–41

New Characters:

**Odessa:** Sofia's sister

**Miss Millie:** the mayor's wife

**The Mayor:** town official

**Study Questions**

1. How does Harpo mope?

2. What does Miss Millie always do, according to her husband?

3. What does Buster do while Sofia is getting beaten?

4. When the sheriff says that Sofia is crazy, how does Mr.____ reply?

5. How badly is Sofia injured from her beating by the police?

6. Who takes care of Sofia's children while Sofia is in jail?

7. How often is Sofia visited by her friends?

8. What does Squeak remember about her uncle?

9. What is the warden's justification for what he does to Squeak?

10. What does Mary Agnes mean when she asks Harpo if he loves her or her color?

**Answers**

1. Harpo is quiet and spends most of his time walking up and down the aisle in his club. He also totally ignores Squeak despite her best efforts to get him to say something.

2. The mayor says that Miss Millie is “always going on over colored” children.

3. Sofia keeps Buster from joining in the fight and tells him to look after the children. She knows that with six armed policemen around them, Buster would have been shot if he
had tried to make any aggressive move.

4. Mr.____ tells the sheriff that he had tried to tell his son for 12 years that Sofia was crazy. He doesn’t really believe this now, but he is trying to keep on friendly terms with the sheriff in case something can be done for Sofia.

5. Sofia’s skull and ribs are cracked, and one eye has been blinded. Her nose has also been torn, and her entire body is swollen.

6. Odessa and Squeak take care of Sofia’s children.

7. Sofia gets visitors two times a month for half an hour.

8. A few years ago, her uncle gave Squeak and her siblings each a quarter.

9. The warden says that if he is really Squeak’s uncle, what he is doing would be a sin, but “everybody guilty...of a little fornication.”

10. Squeak wants Harpo to know that she is a woman with a strong character, and that if he only loves her superficially, because of her appearance, then he can leave right now. Mary Agnes insists that Harpo respect the person on the inside.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. How does Walker use Sofia’s beating to illustrate the danger of being a woman in a male-dominated society?

2. Use examples from the text, including Squeak’s dialogue, to show her transformation in character.

3. Have you ever had a personal experience when a tragedy proved to be beneficial in the long run?
New Characters:

**Eleanor Jane:** the young daughter of Miss Millie  
**Billy:** the young son of Miss Millie  
**Jack:** Odessa’s husband

**Study Questions**

1. Who writes the songs that Mary Agnes sings?  
2. Is Mary Agnes still mad that Sofia knocked out her teeth?  
3. Why do Sofia’s children love Mary Agnes?  
4. Why does Celie consider it impossible to “kill off” the whites?  
5. Why does Miss Millie ask the mayor for a car?  
6. How does the mayor get revenge for Millie’s insistence?  
7. What does Miss Millie mean when she tells Sofia that “this is the South”?  
8. How do all of Sofia’s children react when she shows up?  
9. What does Miss Millie intend to do?  
10. What actually happens that day with Sofia and Millie?

**Answers**

1. At first, Mary Agnes sings Shug’s songs, then she starts writing her own songs.  
2. Mary Agnes is still mad, but she understands Sofia’s situation.  
3. Sofia’s children love Mary Agnes because she lets them do what they want, which is a big difference from the way Odessa or any other of Sofia’s sisters treat them.  
4. Celie thinks that there are just “too many to kill off.”  
5. Miss Millie feels that “if colored could have cars than one for her was past due.”
6. The mayor buys Millie a car but doesn't teach her how to drive. Every night he rubs it in by asking his wife how she is “enjoying” her car, knowing she doesn't have any friends to teach her.

7. Millie objects to Sofia sitting in the front seat with her, when in the South, one usually doesn't see “a white person and a colored sitting side by side in a car, when one of them wasn't showing the other one how to drive it or clean it.” Millie doesn't want Sofia in a position of being an equal, now that she isn't teaching her.

8. No one knew Sofia was coming, and only the two eldest children remember her and come up to hug her. Then all the little children start to hug her as well.

9. Miss Millie was going to leave Sofia at Odessa's house and then return at five to pick her up.

10. Jack and Sofia have to drive Millie back to the mayor's house in Jack's pickup, and then Jack and Sofia drive into town to find a mechanic. Finally, Sofia drives Miss Millie's car back to her house at five o'clock.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. What does Miss Millie's car symbolize in this novel?

2. Why is Miss Millie always “scared” to come in contact with Sofia?
Letters 45–48

New Character:

**Grady:** *Shug’s new husband*

**Study Questions**

1. What does Mr.____ think the surprise will be?
2. What doesn’t Celie like about Grady at their first meeting?
3. How did Shug and Grady meet?
4. What would Shug do if she were Celie’s husband?
5. Why does Shug ask Celie if they could sleep together?
6. What are the “freakish things” that Shug thought was only done by “white folks”?
7. What does sleeping with Shug feel like to Celie?
8. How does Grady spend Shug’s money, according to Celie?
9. Where is Grady from?
10. What does Shug mean when she tells Harpo that his night-club singer “can’t get her ass out the church”?

**Answers**

1. Mr.____ thinks that Shug bought him a new car.
2. Celie doesn’t like Grady’s shape, teeth, clothes, or his smell.
3. Grady was the mechanic who fixed Shug’s new car.
4. Shug would work hard for Celie and “cover [her] up with kisses instead of licks” if she were her husband.
5. Mr.____ and Grady go out for a night on the town, and Shug doesn’t like to sleep alone.
6. Celie’s father had raped her while she was cutting his hair, and soon he wants her to cut his hair every time he has sex with her. Shug believed that only “white folks” could be so perverted.
7. Celie tries to compare sleeping with Shug to sleeping with Nettie and her mother, but it feels too different. She decides that it feels “like heaven...not like sleeping with Mr.____ at all.”

8. Celie thinks that Grady spends Shug's money as if he made it himself.

9. Grady is from Memphis, Tennessee.

10. The singer's voice sounds like a woman in a choir, but Shug thinks that good music is “devil's music.” Shug likes Squeak's singing because when people hear her singing, “folks git to thinking bout a good screw.”

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. How does Shug's idea of music compare with her character? Look for examples of music and songs as symbols in this novel.

2. How has Harpo diminished in his role as husband and as a male in this society? Compare his dialogue in this section to earlier sections.
Letters 49–51

Study Questions

1. What do stamps look like, according to Celie?
2. What does Nettie's letter look like?
3. How does Shug cover for Celie's theft of Mr.____'s razor?
4. What is Shug's real name, and why is she called Shug?
5. Describe Shug's relationship with her parents.
6. What did Shug's sister do for a living?
7. List the things Albert used to do when he went out with Shug.
8. How does Shug describe Annie Julia?
9. Why did Shug want Albert to choose her?
10. What does Shug mean when she says “what was good tween us must have been nothing but bodies?”

Answers

1. Celie thinks that all stamps look the same, with “white men with long hair” on them.
2. Nettie's letter, according to Celie, has “little fat queen of England stamps on it, plus stamps that got peanuts, coconuts, rubber trees and say Africa” on it.
3. Shug takes the razor from Celie's hand and thanks her for getting something to take care of her hangnail. Then she puts the razor back in the shaving box.
4. Shug's real name is Lillie, but everyone called her Shug because she was “just so sweet.”
5. Her mother did not like physical contact with her children, and would always push Shug away if she tried to kiss her. Although her father liked to hold her, Shug's mother kept that from happening. Shug admits that she was happy to find Albert so that she could have somebody to hold.
6. Shug's sister worked in a roadhouse as a cook.
7. There are two things that Shug remembers about Albert when he was young. He used to dance all the time, sometimes for an hour. He always used to make Shug laugh.

8. Annie Julia was a beautiful girl, with “big black eyes look like moons.” Shug also says that she was “black as anything, and skin just as smooth.”

9. Shug felt the need for Albert to choose her because she felt that “nature had already done it.”

10. Shug means that it felt so nice physically that she must not have paid attention to his character. She can hardly believe that she went out with and loved such a cruel man.

Suggested Essay Topics

1. Comment on the behavior of Shug’s and Albert’s parents. How does it compare with the behavior of Mr.____ as a father and Celie’s parents? What sort of cycle is being perpetuated?

2. What is found in Mr.____’s trunk? What is symbolized by the trunk and the objects found inside?
Letters 52–60

New Character:

**Adam:** *Celie’s lost son, now the adopted son of Samuel and Corrine*

**Study Questions**

1. Why does Nettie correct herself when she says that Corrine and Samuel have been “like family to me”?
2. Why does Nettie still write to Celie after she realizes that Mr.____ won’t let her have these letters?
3. What does Nettie want to tell Corrine and Samuel about their children, who “were sent by God” to them?
4. When does Nettie come into contact with American prejudice?
5. How do the people of Harlem feel about Africa?
6. How do the so-called “Europeans” of the Missionary Society differ from the “Africans,” according to Nettie?
7. What is the name of the ship that takes Nettie across the Atlantic?
8. List Nettie’s itinerary from England to Africa.
9. What doesn’t Nettie like about the Senegalese?
10. What did Christ want to add on to the end of the commandment, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” and why, according to Shug?

**Answers**

1. Nettie realizes that Samuel and Corrine have been kinder to her than her own family, so she says that they have been like her own family “might have been.”
2. Nettie is very lonely, and she remembers that Celie still writes letters to God whenever she feels the need to write. Nettie takes Celie for inspiration and continues to send letters be-
cause it makes her feel better thinking that her sister might one day read them.

3. Nettie wants to tell them that “God has sent [Olivia and Adam] their sister and aunt.”

4. Nettie, along with the entire family, had to sit in the “sit-down” section of the train, without beds. They were not allowed to use the restaurant, and had to use different toilets. In addition to this, when they meet a white man in South Carolina who asks them where they are going, he turns and says to his wife, “Niggers going to Africa, now I have seen everything.”

5. The people in Harlem love Africa, and even the children contribute their pennies to the missionaries.

6. The “Europeans” or white missionaries were supposedly successful because they didn’t “coddle their charges.” Samuel points out that they have a different agenda from the previous missionaries. While the white missionaries wanted to educate the “savages” in order to spread the word of God, Samuel, Corrine, and Nettie are “black like the Africans themselves.” Their goal is to work for “the uplift of black people everywhere.”

7. The ship is called the Malaga.

8. Nettie leaves Southampton, England on July 24, and is scheduled to arrive in Monrovia, Liberia on September 12. There will be stops in Lisbon, Portugal, and Dakar, Senegal.

9. The Senegalese in the market were too concerned about selling their products, and Nettie felt that they looked through her “as quickly as...the French white people who lived there” if she didn’t buy anything.

10. Shug thinks that Jesus Christ probably wanted to add “starting with me,” because He realized there were fools in this world that good people would want to kill.
Suggested Essay Topics


2. Do you find Nettie’s attitude (and the attitude of the missionaries) toward Africa condescending?
Letters 61-63

New Characters:

**Joseph:** *the guide of the missionaries*

**Tashi:** *a young Olinka girl and best friend of Olivia*

**Tashi’s mother (Catherine) and father:** *the parents*

**Study Questions**

1. What does Celie learn about the weather in Africa?
2. Describe Joseph, the guide and translator.
3. What does Nettie notice about the Africans’ teeth?
4. How does Nettie describe the jungle?
5. What happened to the white missionary who was at the Olinka village?
6. What food is served at the welcoming ceremony?
7. Describe Nettie’s daily routine.
8. How is Olivia treated at school?
9. What does Tashi’s father want Nettie to do?
10. Why does the way Olinka men speak to women remind Nettie of Pa?

**Answers**

1. Celie learns that it is “hot like cooking dinner on a big stove in a little kitchen in August and July” in Africa.
2. Joseph is short, fat, and soft, “with hands that seem not to have any bones in them.” He is also “a deep chocolate brown.”
3. Nettie is surprised that the Africans all have perfect, white teeth.
4. Nettie says the jungle is “trees and trees and then more trees on top of that. And vines. And ferns. And little animals.”
5. The Olinka buried the last missionary one year ago.
6. They are given a chicken-and-peanut stew, which they eat with their fingers, and palm wine.

7. Nettie wakes up at five o’clock for a light breakfast and morning classes. They stop at eleven o’clock for lunch and household duties. From one to four o’clock it “is too hot to move,” and then she teaches adult classes at five o’clock.

8. She is the only girl at school, and only her brother, Adam, talks to her.

9. Tashi’s father wants Nettie to continue teaching, but only to the male children.

10. There is a total lack of interest in and respect for what Olinka women have to say. An Olinka woman cannot even look at a man’s face while talking. Nettie writes that the way Olinka women behave around men is “our own behavior around Pa.”

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. How does the difference in setting contribute to the atmosphere of Nettie’s story? Compare and contrast symbols of weather and climate with those that exist in Celie’s story.

2. How does the story of the roofleaf establish the plant as a symbol of protection? Analyze the legend.
Letters 64–69

New Character:

**Daisy**: *Alphonso's new wife*

**Study Questions**

1. Why is Nettie proud of the villagers as they talk with the roadbuilders?

2. How have Adam and Olivia changed during their five years in Africa?

3. Describe an Olinka funeral.

4. How is Samuel made uneasy by the relationships between men and women in the Olinka village?

5. What does Nettie mean when she says “a grown child is a dangerous thing”?

6. How does Corrine treat the children now?

7. Why does Corrine want to examine Nettie's stomach?

8. How did Celie's mother become mentally unstable after her first husband died, according to the story?

9. What is the “key” to handling white people, according to Alphonso?

10. Why doesn't Celie's father have a marked grave?

**Answers**

1. Nettie is proud of the people of the Olinka tribe because they always show up with foods and gifts for the roadbuilders, proving that they are a generous and loving tribe.

2. Adam and Olivia are almost as tall as Nettie now. Both have learned so much that Adam is afraid that there will be nothing left for Samuel to teach.

3. The women of the village paint their faces white and wear white shrouds. While they “cry in a high keening voice” the body is wrapped in barkcloth and buried.
4. Samuel's job is “to preach the Bible's directive of one husband and one wife.” He is also confused because the women of the village seem happy and always spend time with one another. They do it in order to keep away from their husbands, not because they are happy with their lives.

5. The Olinka men are “children” because they are spoiled by their wives. They act irrationally, are overly sensitive, and do not understand the consequences of their actions. Nettie feels that this childish behavior is dangerous because Olinka men possess the power of life and death over their wives. A wife can be killed if her husband simply accuses her of witchcraft. This power, coupled with immaturity, makes for a dangerous person.

6. Corrine can't bear to look at the children; she hadn't even told them that they were adopted.

7. She thinks there are stretch marks on Nettie's stomach, which would prove that she was the mother of Olivia and Adam.

8. Celie's mother continued to act as if her husband was alive, and set his place at the table. She would also tell her neighbors grandiose plans for the future that she was making with her husband.

9. Alphonso always believed that the key to handling whites was money. Celie's father was killed because he never gave money to the whites, supposedly, and Alphonso makes it a point to hire a white boy in his store and “just right off offer to give him money.”

10. Celie's father was lynched, and lynch mobs do not provide crosses or headstones for their victims.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. How has Celie's “father” changed over the years? Do you feel that his cruelty has gone unpunished? Use examples from the text to support your decision.

2. How do the villagers react to the stories about slavery? What does this imply about the villagers?
Letters 70–73

Study Questions

1. When Nettie tells Samuel and Corrine the entire story about Celie, what shocks Samuel the most?

2. What did the dry goods store smell like on the day Celie and Corrine met?

3. What does Corrine mean when she says to Nettie, “Don't touch my things. I'm not dead yet”?

4. What did Corrine remember about the clerk at the dry goods store?

5. From what college did Corrine graduate?

6. What do the villagers think about women who menstruate?

7. What is Celie's description of God?

8. Is God a man or woman, according to Shug?

9. Why doesn't God think that sex is dirty according to Shug?

10. What does Shug think about people who always try to please God?

Answers

1. Samuel is shocked that Celie was raped by her “father.”

2. The dry goods store smelled like peanut shells.

3. Corrine thinks that Nettie is cheating her husband, and now wants to take her things as well. Corrine wants to remind her that she is still Samuel’s wife.

4. Corrine was upset that the clerk treated her “like any other nigger.”

5. Corrine graduated from Spelman Seminary.

6. Nettie writes that villagers “...think women who have their friends should not even be seen.”

7. God is “big and old and tall and graybearded and white.” Celie
also says that “he wear white robes and go barefooted.”

8. Shug says that “God ain't a he or a she, but an It.”

9. Sex cannot be dirty because God made it, according to Shug.

10. According to Shug, the people that worry the most about pleasing God never see God “always trying to please us back.”

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. Nettie writes to Celie saying that there is a verse in the Bible which says that Jesus Christ has hair like “lamb's wool.” Where is this passage in the Bible? Could you find other evidence in the Bible that God is not the stereotype invented by whites?

2. Has Shug always lived her life according to the philosophy that she explains to Celie? Find examples from the text to support your conclusions.
Letters 74–77

New Characters:

**Jolentha (Suzie Q):** the little daughter of Squeak and Harpo

**Henrietta:** the little daughter of Sofia

**Jerene and Darlene:** twins who help Celie with her sewing

**Study Questions**

1. Who is “Mama” to Sofia’s children?
2. What is the “welcome mat” that Celie is going to use to “enter Creation”?
3. What is wrong with Miss Eleanor’s family?
4. Why must Sofia “act nice”?
5. What is the curse that Celie puts on Mr.____?
6. Why does Shug give Celie a bedroom in the back of the house?
7. What kind of pants does Mary Agnes pick out for herself?
8. Describe how Celie designs a pair of pants for Jack.
9. Does Celie care about Darlene’s teaching her to speak correctly?
10. What does Shug feel about Celie’s speech?

**Answers**

1. Sofia’s younger children call Odessa “Mama” and Sofia “Miss Sofia.”
2. Celie wants to use Mr.____’s dead body symbolically to “enter Creation,” since leaving him would be the same to her as entering the Kingdom of Heaven.
3. Jack tells the entire group that there is a lot of drinking in the mayor’s family and that the son (presumably Billy) has had trouble in college.
4. Sofia is still on parole and doesn’t want to end up back in
jail.

5. Celie tells Mr.____ that everything that he has done to her is “already done to” him, and everything that he plans to do will come back to haunt him.

6. Shug knows that Celie likes to wake up with the sun on her face.

7. She picks a pair that is “the color of sunset, orangish with a little grayish fleck.”

8. Celie makes Jack's pants with big pockets so that he can hold “little children's things,” such as marbles and rocks. She decides to make narrow legs so that Jack will be able to run in case a child gets in trouble. She makes them “something he can lay back in when he hold Odessa in front of the fire.”

9. Celie doesn't care because she is happy now.

10. Shug says that Celie “can talk in sign language for all I care.”

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. Look back at how Shug and Celie describe their dream house, and the purpose of designing such a house.

2. What is the relationship between Sofia and Eleanor Jane based upon? Can you predict how this relationship will end?
Letters 78–79

Study Questions

1. How is Harpo’s and Sofia’s house different from before?
2. What will Sofia’s sisters look like as pallbearers, according to Harpo? What is Sofia’s reply?
3. Why must Sofia always have things her own way?
4. How much does one of Grady’s cigarettes cost?
5. Why is marijuana like whiskey, according to Celie?
6. How does Celie reply when Sofia tells her that Mr.____ is “trying to git religion”?
7. What does Mr.____ say about Sofia’s mother?
8. What does Celie try to remember about Nettie’s letters?
9. What was Mr.____ most scared of when he slept alone?
10. Is it easy for Sofia to live with Harpo now?

Answers

1. The new house is bigger, away from the juke joint.
2. Harpo thinks that the three sisters will look like “they ought to be home frying chicken.” Sofia replies that since her three brothers will carry the other side of the coffin, they will “look like field hands.”
3. Sofia’s mother had said a long time ago that Sofia thinks her way is as good as anyone else’s.
4. Grady sells his marijuana cigarettes for a dime each.
5. A little drink of whiskey doesn't bother anyone, but “when you can't git started without asking the bottle, you in trouble.” Marijuana is the same way to Celie; smoking it once in a while doesn't bother her.
6. Celie thinks that a “devil” like Mr.____ can try to become religious, but it doesn't mean that he will succeed. Celie jokes that “trying is bout all he can do.”
7. Mr.____ says that “the woman that brought Sofia in the world brought something.”

8. Celie seems to remember that Nettie had written about a cure for the disease that Henrietta suffers from that is used in Africa.

9. Mr.____ couldn’t bear to hear the sound of his own heart, which was at times as loud as “drums.”

10. Sofia is the first to admit that living with Harpo hasn’t been easy, but nevertheless, she started “to feel again for Harpo.”

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. What does Mr.____ realize as he sleeps alone and hears his own heartbeat?

2. Why do Grady and Squeak continually smoke “reefer,” and how does this affect their characters?
Letters 80–81

New Characters:

**Doris Baines:** an old missionary from England

**Harold:** a small African child, and the adopted grandson of Doris Baines

**Althea:** Samuel’s aunt, a missionary

**Theodosia:** Corrine’s aunt, a missionary and friend to Althea

**Edward DuBoyce:** a young Harvard scholar

**Study Questions**

1. How is Nettie surprised by her own appearance?
2. What do Nettie and Samuel now do for the Olinka tribe?
3. What are the signs all over Africa that a war is coming?
4. Why does Doris decide against becoming a nun?
5. What is the pseudonym of Doris Baines?
6. What pleasure is Doris willing to pay handsomely for?
7. What do people that meet Samuel and Nettie on the street in England always say?
8. What are some of the questions that the Olinka tribe always asked the missionaries?
9. What would have happened if Adam struck Tashi?
10. What does Nettie call Samuel in the postscript of her letter to Celie?

**Answers**

1. Nettie has become “plump and graying.”
2. Nettie and Samuel do nothing now but teach the young children.
3. Roads are being built to where supplies are kept. The trees are being cut down in order to make “ships and captain's
furniture.” Land is being planted with “something you can't eat,” and the natives are forced to work on these fields. Doris takes all of these events as signs of an impending war.

4. Doris Baines wanted nothing more than to be her own boss. If she chose to become a nun, then God would be her boss.

5. Her pen name is Jared Hunt.

6. For Doris, the pleasure of being alone is without price.

7. Passers-by always seem to notice how much Adam and Olivia look like Nettie.

8. Samuel says that the people of the tribe ask missionaries questions like: “Why don’t you speak our language? Why can’t you remember the old ways? Why aren’t you happy in America, if everyone there drives motorcars?”

9. If Adam ever hit her, Nettie says that Tashi would put his head “through her rug loom.”

10. Samuel is called Celie’s brother in Nettie’s letter.

Suggested Essay Topics

1. What do you think the mbeles symbolize in this novel?

2. Female circumcision as a ritual in Africa is examined more closely in a later Walker novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy. What ideas about this ritual are evident in this novel?
Letters 82–85

New Character:

**Germaine:** *a young musician*

**Study Questions**

1. How come Celie still calls Alphonso “Pa”?
2. What does Alphonso leave Daisy?
3. How many children is Daisy left with?
4. What fortune does Celie read from her fortune cookie?
5. What did Shug feel about Grady?
6. What has happened to Grady and Mary Agnes?
7. Why does Shug talk about Cuba?
8. Name a recipe that Mr.____ devises to hide the taste of yams.
9. Why does the thought of getting pregnant make Celie want to cry?
10. What supposedly happens to Nettie's ship?

**Answers**

1. Celie says that it is “too late to call him Alphonso.”
2. Daisy is left all of Alphonso's money, along with the clothes and the car. She also takes all of the furniture from the house, saying that Alphonso bought it for her anyway.
3. Daisy has two children from Alphonso and is pregnant with a third.
4. Celie's fortune says “Because you are who you are, the future looks happy and bright.”
5. Even though Grady was Shug's husband, all he seemed to think about was “women and reefer.” Celie had noticed that Grady “never brought a sparkle to” Shug's eyes.
6. Grady and Mary Agnes now own a marijuana farm in Panama. Mary Agnes still sings, but they both smoke marijuana excessively. She cannot remember all the words to the songs.

7. Shug talks about having an exciting time in Cuba with Celie in order to distract her from the news that she has fallen in love with Germaine.

8. Mr.____ has the idea of mixing yams with peanut butter to hide the taste.

9. Celie is so unhappy with life because she is all alone following Shug’s departure. Furthermore, she had just told Mr.____ that “men look like frogs.” She is disillusioned with marriage and love between men and women, and pregnancy is a symbol of that love to her.

10. Nettie's ship was allegedly sunk by German mines.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. What do you think Daisy's fate will be? What is the significance of her character?

2. Analyze the scene in which Celie and Shug visit Alphonso's grave. Compare this scene to the scene in which they search for the graves of Celie's real parents.
Letters 86–87

New Characters:

**Stanley Earl:** Eleanor Jane's husband

**Reynolds Stanley:** the baby son of Stanley Earl and Eleanor Jane

**James:** Shug Avery's son

Study Questions

1. Why is Samuel pretty confident that his family will not get malaria, even though there is an epidemic in the village?

2. What sort of church does Nettie and Samuel hope to found in America?

3. Why do the Olinka have “shallow” relationships with the missionaries?

4. Name some of the places that Shug and Germaine visit.

5. What does Eleanor Jane do to Sofia that is more annoying than complaining about her problems?

6. According to Stanley Earl, why do white folks “turn out so well”?

7. How does Sofia feel about little Reynolds Stanley Earl?

8. When did Shug's parents die?

9. What does Mr.____ mean when he says “If a mule could tell folks how it's treated, it would”?

10. How do the Olinka interpret the identity of the biblical Adam?

Answers

1. Nettie, Samuel, Adam, and Olivia have all survived bouts with malaria.

2. Nettie wants to start a church “in which each person's spirit is encouraged to seek God directly.”
3. The Olinka know that eventually the missionaries will leave, making a relationship pointless.

4. Celie receives letters from Shug in New York, California, Arizona, and Panama, where she and Germaine were visiting Grady and Squeak.

5. Eleanor Jane starts to bother Sofia whenever anything good happens, insisting that Sofia say nice things about her husband and son.

6. White folks turn out well because “everybody round here raised by colored.”

7. Sofia doesn't really care about Eleanor Jane's baby one way or the other, as long as he could keep quiet more often.

8. Shug’s parents had died nine or ten years ago.

9. Mr.____ is no longer mad that Celie told Shug how he treated her, because the bigger crime was treating her that way in the first place. A work animal would complain about the injustice if it could speak, and Celie was treated like an animal, so it was only natural that she complain.

10. According to Olinka legend, every person that came before Adam was black. But then, women started to give birth to “colorless” babies, for some unknown reason. At first, these babies were killed, but they kept being born. Adam is the first white baby that wasn't killed.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. How does Sofia's relationship with Eleanor Jane compare with her relationship with Miss Millie? Who had the upper hand in each relationship? Discuss and compare them.

2. Discuss the significance of yams in this section. To what themes are they related?
Letters 88–90

Study Questions

1. How long were Adam and Tashi gone?
2. What would Tashi still have if Adam deserted her?
3. What happens when Sofia is called “auntie” by a white man?
4. What was the only thing Albert ever wanted in life?
5. Why does Albert think we are here on this earth?
6. What has happened to Germaine?
7. Will Shug ever sing again?
8. Why did Mary Agnes leave Grady?
9. What do people like to eat in Africa, according to Tashi?
10. Why does Celie feel a little peculiar around the children?

Answers

1. Adam and Tashi were gone for two and a half months.
2. Even if Adam deserted her, Tashi would still have Olivia. Olivia promises she will always be Tashi’s sister.
3. Sofia asks him which colored man married his mother’s sister.
4. The only thing that Albert wanted in life was Shug Avery.
5. Albert decides that people are here “to wonder,” and “in wondering bout the big things…you learn bout the little ones.”
6. Germaine went off to college after his split with Shug.
7. Shug contemplates retirement, although she would still sing one or two nights at Harpo’s.
8. Mary Agnes was tired of being stoned all the time, and Grady was “no good influence for no child.” She now lives in Memphis, with her mother and Suzie Q.
9. Tashi says that Africans love to eat barbecue.

10. The children seem to think that all of the older people “don’t know much what going on.” But Celie knows better.

**Suggested Essay Topics**

1. Is the ending of this novel “closed”? Is there anything more the reader wishes to know about Celie and Nettie?

2. What is the significance of the Fourth of July in this novel?
Topic #1

Follow the development of clothes as symbols in *The Color Purple* and explain how clothes become symbols of protection.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *In The Color Purple, characters who wish to protect others from harm make clothes for them. Clothes become a symbol of protection because the making of clothes is an act of support from one to another.*

II. Early examples of this symbol
   A. Celie dresses up to try to protect Nettie from Alphonso
   B. Corrine’s dress for Olivia
   C. These symbols do not help Celie

III. Those that help Celie
   A. Kate’s wish to make a dress
   B. Shug
      1. Donates a dress for Celie’s quilt
      2. Gives Celie the idea for pants

IV. Celie as protector
   A. Sews pants for herself
   B. For Sofia
C. For Nettie
D. For everyone

**Topic #2**

Use examples from the text in which the setting is either inside or near a church. Compare scenes with churches to illustrate the theme of God in *The Color Purple*.

**Outline**

I. Thesis Statement: *The church is used as a symbol for God in The Color Purple. Early in the text, violence and injustice occur near churches in order to illustrate the inequity with which women are treated in so-called “God-fearing” towns.*

II. Victims of church
   A. Annie Julia is killed near a church
   B. Celie is slapped after coming home from church

III. The ideal of God
   A. Celie’s God (stereotype)
   B. Shug’s God

IV. God and church
   A. Celie’s God is found in the town church
      1. The people of that church have never been kind to Celie
   B. God without church
   C. God is found in nature

**Topic #3**

Compare Celie, Sofia, and Squeak as they fight the suppression that follows them throughout their lives.

**Outline**

I. Thesis Statement: *How the women deal with oppression in The Color Purple differs, but Celie, Sofia and Squeak all eventually*
become self-determining women.

II. Squeak
   A. The weakest of the three
   B. Draws inspiration from other women
      1. Celie
      2. Shug
      3. Sofia
   C. Becomes sidetracked with Grady, but eventually breaks away

III. Sofia
   A. Has the strongest character to begin with
      1. Easily defeats Harpo
   B. Becomes weak once in jail
   C. Oppressed first by Miss Millie, then by Eleanor Jane
      1. Eventually asserts herself to Eleanor Jane

IV. Celie
   A. The most heroic transformation
   B. Draws inspiration
      1. Sofia
      2. Shug
   C. Becomes inspiration to other women
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