

# The Color Purple

## A Novel

By Alice Walker

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Penguin

Paperback | 978-0-14-313569-2 | 304 pp | \$17.00

Reading Level: Grades 9-12 + AP/IB

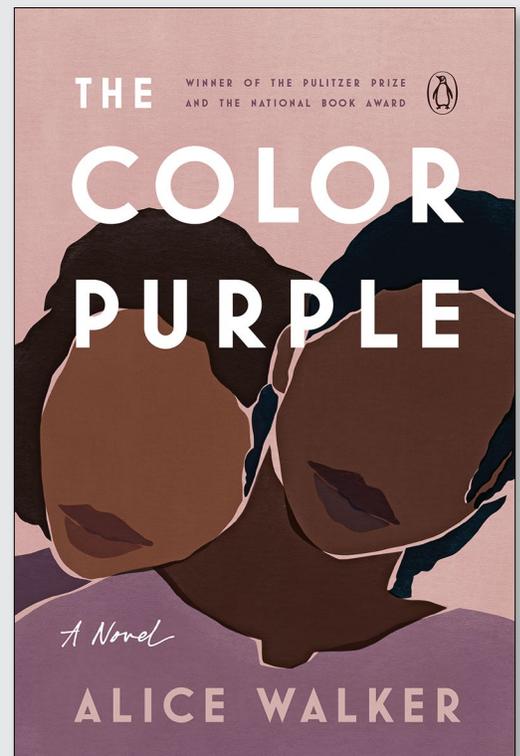
### INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is one of the most celebrated and most challenged novels of our time. It is a survival story, an epistolary novel, a neo-slave narrative, and above all a triumphant tale of arrival. Celie's journey from physical and psychological oppression to a hard fought freedom of body and soul takes readers from the red clay fields of Depression-era, rural Georgia to the West African coast of the early twentieth century. Yet with its themes of institutional racism, systemic sexism, and personal identity, *The Color Purple* is most definitely a novel for now.

Today's students need only open their phones to witness the racial, cultural and gender divisions being played out on the stage of 21st century America. Indeed, current culture's story can be told in hashtags: #BlackLivesMatter; #BlackGirlMagic; #MeToo; #SayHerName. The recent ascension of Black female voices to the political stage confirms the centrality of these issues to contemporary society. Politicians, activists, and artists such as Kamala Harris, Stacey Abrams, Michelle Obama, and Beyonce are highlighting the need for action and the power of female voices. So perhaps now, more than ever, *The Color Purple* needs to be read, discussed, and connected to our past, present, and future. Walker's novel presents a unique opportunity for students to frame their roles in these important issues.

## Teacher's Guide

**INCLUDES: CHAPTER SUMMARIES,  
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS,  
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES,  
AND RESOURCES**



## INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

The contents of this guide address the goals of current college and career ready curriculums. Students are asked to read closely, write critically, make relevant connections and collaborate with peers as they tackle the challenges of a complex text. Teachers may choose to assign all or some of the questions and activities. The following line of inquiry frames the critical reading, writing, and thinking activities found in the guide:

***How do authors and artists address the intersection among race, gender, and identity?***

This complex question echoes the complex history of race and gender in our country and prepares students for the rigor and relevance of reading Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

### Essential Questions

These questions support the line of inquiry, provide a focus for reading the novel, and can be used before, during, and after reading to prompt discussion and writing.

- How do we develop voice when society or circumstance has labeled us voiceless? What factors, both internal and external, shape our identities?
- What does it mean to be a Black woman in America? How have the roles, expectations, and treatment of Black women been challenged, in the past and in current times?
- How are racism and sexism systemic issues in our society? How do individuals and groups confront these issues in a way that facilitates change?
- What is the power of education? What happens when education is denied?
- What is the connection between nature and religion?

## PREPARING TO READ THE NOVEL

### SET NORMS

Despite winning both the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award, *The Color Purple* continues to be one of the most frequently banned books in classrooms nationwide. Concerns include its graphic language and content, particularly excerpts depicting rape, incest, and sexuality, as well as its treatment of religion. Therefore teachers should prepare students for reading and discussing this often challenged novel. Creating a set of norms will ensure equity and promote diverse perspectives. Discuss why the book has been challenged and why it is important to read it, especially in our current culture. Together with students, create a set of classroom procedures for how the class will handle sensitive language and scenes. Provide sentence starters for use during small and large group discussions and read-alouds. Model what academic discourse looks like. Facing History, a website dedicated to helping students and teachers confront bigotry and hate, models possible norms for a "classroom contract" that facilitates a reflective and supportive classroom community.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/mockingbird/fostering-reflective-classroom>.

**PREPARING TO READ**  
**THE NOVEL**  
 (CONTINUED)

**BUILD RELEVANCE**

Walker's novel was published in 1982, but its messages about racism, sexism, and identity are just as relevant now. Hook students and build a bridge to the present through the exploration of current art, politics, and culture.

**Music and video**

Immerse students in the music of Beyonce and rap-artist Kendrick Lamar. Introduce the line of inquiry: *How do authors and artists address the intersection among race, gender, and identity?* Ask students to listen to Beyonce and Kendrick Lamar's song "Freedom" while also reading its lyrics <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/32874289/Beyonc%C3%A9/Freedom>. While reading/listening, students should mark any lyrics that are particularly evocative or that align with the prompt. Next, show students the 2016 BET Awards video where the artists perform the song <https://youtu.be/5K5rdO7wwDA>. Direct students to make additional annotations about the performance and how its choreography, costuming, and artistry highlight or extend their understanding of the song's lyrics. Finally, instruct groups to discuss their notes in order to create a group thesis statement that addresses the prompt on intersectionality. Thesis statements can be posted on a shared digital document via Padlet.com or Google Jamboard, where groups can provide each other feedback on content and style.

**Politics and Culture**

Ask students to apply the 4 A's protocol while reading The Children's Defense fund article, *Breonna Taylor and the Invisibility of Black Women and Girls in America* <https://www.childrensdefense.org/blog/breonna-taylor-and-the-invisibility-of-black-women-and-girls-in-america/>. The article frames the lack of attention on Breonna Taylor's shooting as part of a larger pattern where Black women in our society are "dehumanized, undermined and dismissed." Direct students to annotate while reading the article, focusing on the author's *assumptions* as well as the reader's *agreements*, *arguments*, and *aspirations*. In this way, students read with a purpose on author intent and reader reaction. The 4th A, "aspiration," asks students to consider their own role, both now and in the future, in influencing this social issue. Students can either code in pen or highlight in four different colors. After reading, partners or the class as a whole can discuss their thinking, using the text for reference and support. For more information on the 4 A's protocol, visit [http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/4\\_a\\_text.pdf](http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/4_a_text.pdf).

**BUILD KNOWLEDGE**

*The Color Purple* is ripe with literary, historic, and cultural references that may be unfamiliar to some students. In order to provide an equitable environment where all students have equal access to the reading demands and context of this complex text, provide opportunities to build knowledge around the novel. Not all knowledge should be "front loaded." While some topics might need to be investigated prior to reading, others can be explored when they arise in the text. Possible topics, activities, and links are listed below.

PREPARING TO READ  
THE NOVEL  
(CONTINUED)

### Setting

Ask students to analyze an image(s) from the U.S. Farm Security Administration's "Documenting America" photography project that spanned American life between 1935-1944. Photographers such as Dorothea Lange, Gordon Parks, and Jack Delano brought to focus the day to day lives of real Americans during the Great Depression. Delano's 1941 photos of Black tenant farmers in Greene County, Georgia are of particular relevance since they align with the time and place of *The Color Purple*. Students might apply the "See, Think, Wonder" routine to analyze one of Delano's photos. In this protocol, students ask themselves, What do I see? (what details stick out?) What do I think? (what about the image makes me think that?) What does this make me wonder? (what broader questions does this image raise?) With each question, students apply a more critical lens. As an example, the class might study Delano's photo of a Black sharecropper's child preparing a meal <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017794952/>. Students should notice the young boy cooking inside his family's modest cabin, and they should also see the massive stretch of fields that are framed in the home's open doorway. They may think his life seems laborious and wonder why he isn't in school. An alternative tool for image analysis can be found at The Library of Congress's website. [https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/documents/Analyzing\\_Photos\\_and\\_Prints.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/documents/Analyzing_Photos_and_Prints.pdf). Other photos from the Documenting America project that align with Walker's novel are included here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8c07445/>; <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017794680/>; <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017795028/>.

### Literary Traditions

*The Color Purple* can be considered a "neo-slave narrative," a modern, first-person story about the journey from bondage to freedom. Build knowledge around the slave narrative tradition by "jigsawing" the introduction to *Documenting the American South: North American Slave Narratives* <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>. This text outlines the historic and literary contexts of slave narratives and neo-slave narratives, as well as their importance to our nation. Divide the class into four groups and assign one of the four text sections to each group. These "expert groups" read and summarize their section, agreeing upon a short, bulleted list of the main ideas. Next, the expert groups disperse and form new groups where each student shares a piece of the text "puzzle" while the others take notes. Alternatively, groups can meet online in digital breakout rooms, each group preparing one slide in a shared Google Slides, Peardeck, or Powerpoint slide deck. Main ideas should include that slave narratives address not only physical, but psychological freedom. Talking points should also include how "slave narratives and their fictional descendants have played a major role in national debates about slavery, freedom, and American identity that have challenged the . . . historical consciousness of the United States ever since its founding." Discuss how in the novel, Celie's letter writing serves to free her from physical and psychological oppression, and how in writing *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker engages in a form of advocacy. For further exploration into non-fiction slave narratives written during the novel's setting, students might peruse the Library of Congress collection *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>

**PREPARING TO READ  
THE NOVEL  
(CONTINUED)**

**BUILD CAPACITY**

**Themes Tracker**

College and career-ready standards ask students, rather than teachers, to determine themes and central ideas and to analyze their development and interaction over time. With this in mind, ask students to keep a “themes tracker” for patterns they will uncover in *The Color Purple*. As students read and begin noticing a theme developing, they create a new entry in their tracker. Possible themes for Walker’s novel might include: identity and the development of voice; feminism, gender roles, and female relationships; the connection between nature and religion. Students can track these themes digitally or by hand. Students might share their themes and central ideas with each other and add new entries from classmates’ ideas. If students need help getting started, choose one theme and model how to track its development. Alternatively, suggest students use different color highlighters to identify themes as they read. Margin notes can be used to analyze how themes are developing.

**Dialectical Journal**

To promote active, close reading, ask students to keep a dialectical response journal while reading. Dialectical response journals are typically double column pages that list specific quotations and excerpts from the novel on the left and responses to text on the right. Responses might include analysis, questions, connections, reactions, or any other notes that help students engage with the text. These response journals can be brought to book circles, small group activities, and class seminars, providing students with textual evidence to support their thinking and discussion. The journals can also provide ideas and support for culminating writing products.

**READING THE NOVEL**

**Text-Dependent Questions**

These questions ask students to focus on specific sections of text and can be used for independent written responses and/or collaborative discussion.

1. The novel’s protagonist begins her narrative with “I am” but immediately replaces this with “I *have* always been a good girl” (1). She waits until her seventh letter to write down her name. What do these narrative choices reveal about Celie’s self image?
2. What does Pa mean by referring to women as “soiled” or “fresh?” (7-8) Discuss the irony in this depiction.
3. Mr. asks if Celie’s cow comes with her to the marriage. What is the implication here?
4. Nettie says leaving Celie with Mr. and his children is “like seeing you buried” (17). In what ways does Celie seem “buried?”
5. Celie wants to see Shug Avery sing at the juke joint, not to play cards or even for the music, but simply “to lay eyes on her” (25). Why? What does Celie see when she looks at Shug?

## READING THE NOVEL

(CONTINUED)

6. When Mr. characterizes Sofia's pregnancy as "you done got yourself in trouble," Sofia responds "I ain't in no trouble. Big, though" (30). What do we learn about Sofia with this response? In what ways is Sofia "big?"
7. After their baby is born, Harpo shares childcare duties with Sofia. Mr. says "Yeah, I see now she going to switch the trace on you" (34). What is his meaning? How does this statement continue to develop Mr.'s character and the treatment of gender in the novel?
8. Discuss multiple reasons that Harpo first strikes Sofia. Why does he continue to try and make her mind?
9. Why is Celie determined to make Shug well? Is it simple infatuation or something more? How might curing Shug help Celie?
10. As Sofia wears pants, engages in physical labor, and refuses to mind her husband, Harpo eats until "he begin to look like he big" (60). What is suggested by this imagery and diction?
11. Why is Celie so emotional upon hearing Shug sing "Miss Celie's Song?" (72). What is the implied connection between Celie's name and identity?
12. How is Sofia's new "prizefighter" boyfriend a contrast to Harpo? (81)
13. Celie tells Squeak to "make Harpo call you by your real name" (84). What does this imply about Celie's personal growth?
14. Why does Shug return to Mr.'s bed after she has started a relationship with Celie? Is this an act of subjugation or an act of power? Explain.
15. Nettie writes of her missionary work, "We and the Africans will be working for a common goal: the uplift of black people everywhere" (136). What is the connection between Celie and Nettie's worlds? Why does Walker set much of the novel in Africa?
16. Celie takes up "a needle and not a razor" in her hand in order to oppose Mr. (146). What is she doing by sewing pants to wear?
17. Nettie explains that the Olinka do not believe in educating their girls. How does this connect to Celie's experience?
18. Nettie explains that "because (Olivia) is where they are doing "boys' things," they do not see her" (155). What female character at home does Walker parallel here?
19. Why do pictures of Christ, Mary, and missionaries such as Speke and Livingstone make Nettie feel "small and unhappy" in her African hut? (158) What broader point is Walker making here about the missionary movement in Africa?
20. How does the approaching road into the Olinka's village contradict their hopes and expectations? What larger idea does the new road symbolize?
21. Nettie sends Celie Christmas greetings from the "dark" continent (166). Why does Nettie (and the author) choose to use quotation marks here?
22. How is Samuel's secret about Nettie and Celie's parentage both liberating and oppressive at the same time? What has been gained? What has been lost? (173-76)

## READING THE NOVEL (CONTINUED)

23. Why does Shug assert “God ain’t a he or a she, but a It” (194). How does this belief connect to the novel as a whole? How might this view impact Celie’s growth journey?
24. What does Shug mean when she says God would be mad “if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it” (195). Why is this comment so significant Walker chooses it for the text’s title?
25. Celie stands up to Mr. in a manner that is completely out of character (198-199). Why does the author choose to depict Celie this particular way at this particular time? How does the scene help develop the protagonist’s character?
26. Discuss the changes in Sofia’s character since leaving her imprisonment and servitude (197-203) Is she completely changed? Why or why not?
27. In what ways do Celie’s pants “fit” their wearers? (210-213) How does her business reflect Celie’s personal growth?
28. Harpo disapproves of the female pallbearers, saying “Women weaker . . . People think they weaker, say they weaker, anyhow” (216). How is Harpo the same and how has he changed?
29. Why does the thought of anybody getting pregnant make Celie want to cry? (252) What might pregnancy represent in the broader sense?
30. Nettie writes, “Not being tied to what God looks like, frees us” (255). Why might the author have Nettie echo Shug’s point of view?

### Classroom Activities

#### Close Reading

Encourage student readers to “deep dive” into *The Color Purple*. The close-reading process focuses on excerpts, or “chunks,” of text, promoting interpretation that is deep rather than wide and fostering critical thinking skills through writing and speaking. Choose a scene or short excerpt from the novel. Scenes that work well for close reading include: Shug sings a song for Celie (71-72); Sofia refuses to be a maid (84-87); Shug describes her view of God (192-96); women confront the men (198-203); and Celie designs pants (210-13). Ask students to perform three reads. If any of the reads are to be conducted out loud, remind students of class norms for handling sensitive language, including dialect. (See the “set norms” section at the beginning of this guide). After each read, one of the following questions can be discussed with a partner or group and answered in writing. After the first read, students answer a simple plot question: “What is happening in the text?” In the second read, students delve into author’s purpose: “What is this text beginning to be about?” Finally, after the third read, students focus even deeper: “Which words and phrases contribute to the text’s meaning and tone?” For all three questions, students must return to the text and cite evidence. For more information on close reading, view the following Douglas Fisher video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w9v6-zUg3Y>.

## READING THE NOVEL (CONTINUED)

### Comparison/Contrast

Ask students to analyze multiple interpretations of a scene from *The Color Purple*, evaluating how each version interprets the source text. As a class, re-read the scene where Mr. tells Celie, “You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman . . . you nothing at all” (205). Celie responds with “But I’m here” (206). Discuss diction with students, focusing on the multiple meanings of “I’m here.” Talk about the scene’s overall tone, and how it supports the culmination of one of Walker’s main themes. Next, show students this same scene from the 1986 cinematic version of the novel. Ask students, How did the set and background music add to your understanding of the scene? What acting choices brought Walker’s text to life? Finally, show students a video clip of the song “I’m Here,” from the Broadway musical version of the novel. Provide students the song lyrics and ask them to annotate as they watch and listen to the video. Afterwards, ask students: Which lyrics connected to the novel’s big ideas? How did the actress’s voice, facial expressions and costume contribute to the power of the scene? As a culminating discussion prompt, ask the class: How does analyzing multiple interpretations of the same scene clarify or extend our understanding of author’s purpose?

Movie clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4Up4nh2AD4>

Musical clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKtFfjqinmWo>

Song lyrics: <https://genius.com/The-color-purple-broadway-cast-im-here-lyrics>

### Instagram Advertisement Analysis

Walker’s novel poses the question: What is beauty and who determines what it looks like? Walker explores the theme of Black female beauty throughout the novel, including Nettie’s revelation upon arriving in Africa. Nettie writes, “I felt like I was seeing black for the first time. And Celie, there is something magical about it. Because the black is so black the eye is simply dazzled and then there is the shining that seems to come, really, from moonlight, it is so luminous, but their skin glows even in the sun” (140). Contemporary culture is starting to recognize that women of color deserve to see themselves represented in the beauty industry. This point is the focus of a 2020 Olay Beauty campaign featuring actress and singer KeKe Palmer. Ask students to read Palmer’s Instagram post, where she says, “I used to watch these kinds of commercials on television when I was a little girl and very rarely, if ever, did I see a girl in them that looked like me. I always thought there was a special kind of beauty, or hair texture or complexion that you had to have to be considered for an actual beauty ad. REPRESENTATION MATTERS. It truly does!!!” Discuss with students how this relates to Celie, who has always seen herself as ugly. Next, show students Palmer’s Olay commercial. Afterwards, ask, “What do we see in this commercial that sets it apart from those in the past and makes it “representational?” Discuss with students how for most of the novel, Celie cannot see herself as beautiful if others do not see her as beautiful first. Shug, Squeak, Nettie, and even Sofia are her representations, and they assist her along the journey to self-love. As an extension, the class can watch Viola Davis’s famous 2015 Emmy award acceptance speech, where the actress thanks those Black women who have “redefined what it means to be beautiful . . . what it means to be black.”

Instagram post and commercial: <https://www.essence.com/beauty/keke-palmers-olay-commercial/>

Emmy award acceptance speech: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSpQfvd\\_zkE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSpQfvd_zkE)

## READING THE NOVEL

(CONTINUED)

**SOAPSTone Analysis**

Both Celie and Tashi are denied an education by male family members. Discuss with students that Walker's choice to highlight this issue on both continents in her novel can be seen as a form of advocacy for the universal right of women to be educated. Many students will be aware of female education activist Malala Yousafzai, whose work proves that gender inequity in education is still present today. If females are legally allowed to attend school, discuss with the class whether that means they are encouraged or expected to. Michelle Obama addressed this issue directly in her 2015 address at the BET Black Girls Rock! event. In her speech, Mrs. Obama asserts, "The secret to everything in life—every aspiration, every opportunity—is education. . . . That's the reason I am able to stand here tonight. . . . And I want every single one of our black girls to do the same . . . learn as much as you can. That is how you'll go from being black girls who rock to being black women who rock. That is how you will unleash the genius and the power and the passion required to rock your communities, to rock our country, to rock this world."

Ask students to analyze the First Lady's speech using the SOAPStone protocol. On a double column chart, students write the acronym "SOAPStone" vertically in the left column. On the right side, students record text evidence that supports their analysis of the situation, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, and tone of Obama's speech. The purpose of the SOAPStone analysis is to determine speaker purpose and to analyze the intentional rhetorical decisions that support that purpose. After partners discuss their analysis, ask students: in what ways does Michelle Obama's Girls Rock speech connect to Walker's novel? How is Mrs. Obama's speech a form of advocacy? Discuss how Nettie and Olivia, in bringing their learning back to Celie and Tashi, are advocates. Challenge students to consider how they can advocate for education in order to, in Obama's words, "rock" their communities, country and world.

Speech transcript: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/28/remarks-first-lady-bets-black-girls-rock-event>

**Podcast Analysis**

Blues music is an integral part of the setting and plot in *The Color Purple*. One artist mentioned specifically is legendary singer Bessie Smith, most likely the inspiration for Walker's character Shug Avery. Openly bisexual and unapologetically feminist, Smith used her groundbreaking music to advocate for racial equity, personal freedom and gender equality. Ask students to listen to the NPR podcast "How Bessie Smith Influenced a Century of Popular Music" <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/05/747738120/how-bessie-smith-influenced-a-century-of-popular-music>. The podcast introduces the listener to Smith's music, and the accompanying article details her life and impact on the arts and society. Students can learn and hear more by viewing NPR's documentary "Riseup Songs from the Womens' Movement" <https://vimeo.com/437697773>. As an extension, share the lyrics to Smith's song, "Preachin the Blues," which echoes the secular view of religion espoused by Alice Walker's Shug Avery <https://genius.com/Bessie-smith-preachin-the-blues-lyrics>. After researching Smith and her music, discuss: What connections can be drawn between Smith and Shug in *The Color Purple*? How did Smith's music serve as a form of advocacy? How did Shug's lifestyle and philosophy impact Celie's growth journey? What is the role of music to characters Harpo and Squeak?

## SYNTHESIZING THE NOVEL

**Significant Quotations**

The following lines of text can be used to prompt writing responses or discussion about the novel's major themes.

1. You better not never tell nobody but God (1).
2. I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive (17).
3. He don't want a wife, he want a dog (63).
4. I was seeing black for the first time. And Celie, there is something magical about it" (140).
5. A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something (154).
6. The world is changing. . . . It is no longer a world just for boys and men (160).
7. I believe God is everything . . . Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it (194).
8. Everything want to be loved (195).
9. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (198).
10. I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here.

**Political Analysis**

Show students the ABC news video segment about Kamala Harris's election to the office of Vice-President of the United States. Ask students to make note of words and phrases from the reporter and the crowd of supporters that align with themes in *The Color Purple*. Students might note "the weight of history now resting on her shoulders;" "Her elevation to Vice-President serves as an inspiration to young girls and women of color looking to see themselves represented on the world stage;" and "This is a historic moment for black women in particular, for people of color, but also for any voice that has been unheard." Next, provide students with the text of Harris's victory speech. In the speech, ask students to annotate any language referencing women of color. What does she mean when she says Joe Biden had the "audacity" to select a woman as his running mate? What female characters in Walker's novel are "audacious" and why? At the end of her speech, Harris affirms *Women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty and justice for all, including the Black women, who are often, too often overlooked, but . . . are the backbone of our democracy*. Ask students: in what ways are Black women in the novel the "backbone" of their families and society?

Video segment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixopMuNA4Is>.

Speech: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/07/kamala-harris-victory-speech-transcript/>.

## SYNTHESIZING THE NOVEL (CONTINUED)

### Socratic Seminar

Hold a Paideia Seminar on *The Color Purple*. Prior to the seminar, discuss with students what an ideal seminar looks and sounds like, including participation, active listening, and respect of multiple viewpoints. Ask students to set a class goal, such as: "I will contribute to the discussion at least one time," as well as a personal goal, such as: "I will mention a classmate's name and extend on or disagree with his or her thinking." Students should record their goals on paper or sticky-notes which are visible during the seminar. During the discussion, take a facilitator's role. Ask a low-risk opening question to encourage total class participation in a round robin response, such as: "What might be an alternative title for the novel?" This question might be provided the night before. Its purpose is to identify main ideas in Walker's text. Then move to a core question for the purpose of analyzing text details, such as: "How does Walker's narrative structure support her intent?" End the discussion with a closing question that promotes personalization and application, such as: "How might this novel's themes and ideas apply to a current social issue?" Ask students to evaluate their own and their classmates' speaking, thinking, and listening. Did they meet their class and personal goals? What should the class do differently in the next seminar discussion? How did the seminar deepen their understanding of the novel?

### Multimedia Product

Challenge students to produce an in-depth multimedia response to one of the essential questions from earlier. For example, students might choose *How are racism and sexism systemic issues in our society? How do individuals and groups confront these issues in a way that facilitates change?* Show them one artist's response as a model. Jesse Williams's **2016 BET Humanitarian Award acceptance speech** calls out America's continued oppression against people of color, calling it "a system built to divide and impoverish and destroy us (which) cannot stand if we do." As they watch the video speech, students should write down one word, phrase or line from Williams's speech that is significant and connects to the big ideas in *The Color Purple*. Students might select "Black women have spent their lifetimes dedicated to nurturing everyone before themselves," or "Freedom is always coming in the hereafter. But, freedom is a hustle. We want it now." After viewing the speech, direct the class to share out with the "**Save the Last Word for Me**" strategy. Students take their word, phrase, or line and meet in groups of four around the room. Students take turns sharing their choice, but wait for their classmates' thoughts before explaining why they chose it. In this way, students build listening skills and allow their classmates' thinking to inform their own. As a class, discuss the issues raised in both Williams's speech and Walker's novel, then discuss whether treatment, expectations, and depictions of African Americans have stayed the same or changed since the era of *The Color Purple*. Students then create their own multimedia response to the essential question. The responses should include thinking and evidence students gathered while engaging in text dependent questions, collaborative activities, theme trackers, and dialectical journals. Students might also choose to research additional resources online that bridge the novel with history, culture, and politics both past and present. Responses should reflect individual student choice and interests, and might include:

## SYNTHESIZING THE NOVEL (CONTINUED)

- A podcast using free audio recording and editing software such as Audacity <https://www.audacityteam.org/>.
- A “Ted Talk” type video speech complete with scripted narration aided by cue cards. Students can use cell phones or tablets to record their talks.
- A digital story using iMovie or Windows Movie Maker. Digital stories combine narration and still images and are easily created on student laptops. This might take the form of a letter, similar to the epistolary style of Walker’s novel.
- An interactive webpage that combines multiple digital features to tell a story. With Adobe Spark <https://spark.adobe.com/>, students can combine text, social graphics, video, and audio.

### Research on Global Activism

In an interview called “Survival Training,” *The Color Purple* author Alice Walker characterizes her novel as a chance “to rescue some of our ancestors” in both America and South Africa. Walker explains that “when Celie . . . reaches a state of independence from the shackles of her cruel husband . . . it is symbolic of freeing anyone who is oppressed.” Read the article as a class and discuss how this philosophy underscores Walker’s writing as a form of global advocacy. Expand student awareness of the many forms advocacy takes, especially with young people. Ask students to read Unicef’s *Teen. Girl. Activist.* photostory, which highlights teenage girls in Africa and across the globe speaking out against sexual violence, racism, gender inequality, and more. Small groups might each choose a different activist’s story to read and share out. As a large group, discuss or research other teen activists such as Greta Thunberg and her global environmental advocacy. Ask students: What other local and global issues need our attention? “How can students your age be activists in your own communities, nation, and across the globe?”

“Survival Training” interview: <https://www.mcall.com/news/mc-xpm-1986-11-13-2551117-story.html>.

Unicef photostory: [https://features.unicef.org/teen-girl-activist/?utm\\_campaign=&utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=organic-#group-Oumou-in-Senegal-SHIKvR2XQA](https://features.unicef.org/teen-girl-activist/?utm_campaign=&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=organic-#group-Oumou-in-Senegal-SHIKvR2XQA).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

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