
The Color Purple By Alice Walker: Difficult And Trifling Aspects Of The Life Of African American Woman

The Color Purple, by the American novelist Alice Walker, is not only intense and insightful, but a very thought-provoking book to read. By intense and thought-provoking, I am speaking about how the book touches and analyzes incredibly difficult and trifling aspects of the life of a poverty-ridden, African American woman under oppression in the early twentieth century. The book is so highly thought of that Walker received the National Book Award for hard fiction and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Walker received awards like these because she does things such as social criticism in her novel. Her social criticism mainly focuses on criticizing the way African American women were treated during the time period the book is set in. Walker uses the life experiences of the character Celie to illustrate her social criticism in a way that really reaches out and grabs the reader. The way Walker puts these hard topics and situations into her writing stems from what she was born into in 1944 where oppression was very real for the African American population, especially the women.

In The Color Purple, Walker so unconventionally chose to tell the story through letters, giving the novel a style not many had read before. The novel tells the story of oppressed African American women, the letters hold the utmost importance. Letters have been the way women have expressed themselves for years and at one point in history, letters were one of the few ways women could express what they were feeling or thinking. Alice Walker's bold choice presenting what she wanted to say in this novel through letters had a series of consequences some would say others would say that it was a risky move but showed her story and what she wanted to tell better. It is all up to the reader's interpretation as they go through the book. The novel is told from different points of view as the letters throughout are written by different people. For instance, the writers of the letters set the tone for each section. As one of the writers is Celie an African American girl who left school at a young age and cannot write that well, or rather formulate as well as her sister, Nettie. Nettie is the other letter writer we see in the book. Nettie is more educated, and the letters read from her are perfectly formulated in standard English as most people know.

In the book, there are only four openings we ever get to read, which are: 'Dear God,' 'Dear Nettie,' 'Dear Celie,' and the long opening of the last letter, which is a variation of 'Dear God.' These novel openings will be spoken on and analyzed further later, as they hold meaning. Before that, I would like to talk about the two sentences we see outside the letters. They appear at the beginning of the book in italics: 'You better not never tell anybody but God. It'd kill your mammy.' These are strong words or regulations to speak given by a powerful man (the father) to a weak-minded child. From this sentence, we see why Celie understands that she must not communicate her desires, fears, or horrors to a single person. She starts writing or addressing letters to God because He is the only thing, she considers herself to have left. The letters will not be read by anyone or are for anyone else. These letters are only a means of self-analysis and soul searching for Celie. God is obviously not present as Celie requests signals from him constantly and never receives them. In this first period of her life, we see she is marked by what seems to be unending loneliness. There is no use of the word we or speak of someone she can truly confide in, it is basically just her talking to herself. The only bond Celie manages to form is with her sister, Nettie. When Nettie leaves, Celie is back where she started, completely and

utterly alone. She feels she is buried alive, trapped in her lonesome life. The most important character around her is her oppressor and he does not know his name. Mr. is only a role the oppressor has in this novel.

Celie attempts to communicate through certain things, and you could say she succeeds without realizing her success. For instance, she embroiders the name of her child in her clothing, Olivia. The clothes help the child to keep her name which, is the only form of identity she has under the oppression she experiences, to be herself. This type of communication is not linguistic, it is not outspoken or through words. No, this type of communication has to do with the activities that were allowed for a woman at this time. Celie turns these activities into a means of expression. Celie is so immersed in the oppression she is going through that she accepts the point of view and thinking of her oppressor, Mr. She even goes so far as to advise Harpo to beat Sofia. Showing that she has the mindset of agreeance with her oppressor that women should only work, obey, and keep quiet. After this moment of deep humiliation, Celie has the first serious conversation or realization we see in the book. Sofia comes to see her, enraged and rightfully so, and Celie for once must express and explain her attitude and what went through her head that she could approve of such actions. She discovers she is jealous and intrigued by Sofia's capacity to fight the oppression she is under. This conversation is an eye-opener for Celie. Both women find a moment of community or gathering, they do something together and go through something together. From then on the pronoun 'us' is finally used in this novel: 'I laugh. She laughs. Then we both laugh so hard we flop down on the step.'

When Shug comes to Celie's life (she has seen this singer before in a photograph and has turned her into another God to observe and admire from afar), Celie is more than prepared. Shug

does not help her, as Sofia did. Celie has to conquer her with the only tools she knows to use, the feminine activities she has always done. She cooks for her, helps her to take a bath, combs her. Celie performs many actions for her, no words are spoken, Celie cannot face language communication but even in silence, she communicates as we have seen her do many times previously. She gives life, and through this Shug does something that men have never done for Celie and thanks to her. She dedicates her new song to Celie shows her that she is important and has worth. In the second part of Celie's life, she changes radically. She goes from supporting the oppression to encouraging women to fight the oppression they are experiencing. Celie begins to speak up she advises Squeak to make Harpo call her by her actual name, Mary Agnes, to keep her identity. She even develops when it comes to Mr. Celie starts to communicate and really express herself, even if at this point, she can only do so with women. She is yet to break her silence about her father and her children, but she is beginning to communicate with words as we see in this quote from the novel, 'Me and Shug cook, talk, clean the house, talk, fix up the tree, talk, wake up in the morning, talk'.

The last period of Celie's education starts when she discovers Nettie had not abandoned her. She finds out the first small 'we' she had with her sister was a reality, it wasn't a mirage or an illusion it was real. At the beginning of the novel, when Sofia told her she should be angered beyond belief, Celie could not feel rage. Now, with Nettie's letters in her hands, she is so angry and driven with this infuriated passion that only sewing pants restrain her from killing Mr. This rage is healthy for her, it wakes her up she stops writing to a God who doesn't answer, and she begins to answer herself. We finally see real change in her here as we see so vividly in this quote, 'I don't write to God anymore, I write to you,' she says. 'You' is a real person, who will

answer her. The God she was writing to before was a man, and a white man, she realizes suddenly. He was the oppressor: 'The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other men I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown'.

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