

THE COLORED PURPLE

THE MUSICAL

STAGENOTES®

A digital tool kit for integrating theater arts into standards-based curriculum, featuring:

- Historical Background
- Production Notes
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#COLOR PURPLE THE MUSICAL

BOOK BY **MARSHA NORMAN** MUSIC AND LYRICS BY **BRENDA RUSSELL ALLEE WILLIS STEPEHEN BRAY**

BASED ON THE NOVEL WRITTEN BY ALICE WALKER AND THE WARNER BROS./AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT MOTION PICTURE

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DEAR EDUCATOR,

The Color Purple is an inspiring family saga that tells the unforgettable story of a woman who, through love, finds the strength to triumph over adversity and discover her unique voice in the world. This musical adaptation of Alice Walker’s Pulitzer Prize–winning novel (and the popular 1985 Steven Spielberg film) spotlights Celie, a downtrodden young woman whose personal awakening over the course of 40 years forms the arc of this epic story.

With a joyous score featuring jazz, ragtime, gospel, African music, and blues, *The Color Purple* is a story of hope, a testament to the healing power of love, and a celebration of life. With a book by Marsha Norman and music and lyrics by Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray, *The Color Purple* premiered at the Alliance Theatre Company in Atlanta, Georgia, and opened on Broadway on November 1, 2005. It was nominated for 11 2006 Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Book, and Best Original Score. The London Off–West End production opened on Broadway in 2015, winning the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. It is now on tour across America to be enjoyed by audiences of all ages.

This special edition of StageNotes has been curated for teachers to help amplify the rich history and social circumstances depicted in the story of *The Color Purple*. Our goal is to provide an innovative way to engage students in the exploration of the show’s themes and issues—which continue to be relevant to their own lives.

In addition, we introduce students to the creative team behind the show to provide insight into the process of translating a beloved work of fiction into a timeless musical-theater production.

Whether your students read the novel, listen to the cast recording, or see the musical live on stage, *The Color Purple* will enlighten and entertain.

The Editor
StageNotes®



For more information about the National Tour, please visit www.colorpurple.com.

THE PAGE

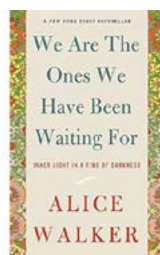
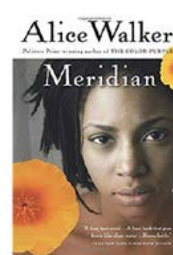
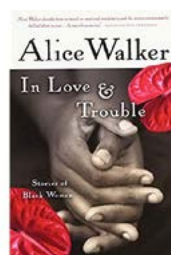
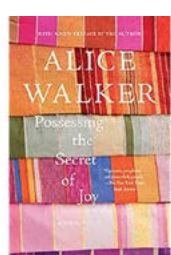
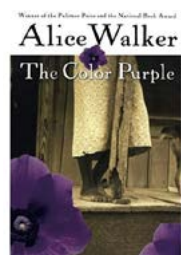
Meet Alice Walker, Novelist



Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, the eighth and youngest child of sharecroppers Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker. When Ms. Walker was 8 years old, one of her older brothers accidentally shot her in the eye with a BB gun. Her father and brother tried to flag down a passing car to take Ms. Walker to the hospital, but the driver, a white man, would not stop. Ms. Walker's family treated her injury as best they could, but she ultimately lost her sight in her right eye. When they were able to take her to a doctor, he brusquely dismissed her case as untreatable, offering only a bottle of eyedrops. Her experience with the doctor was an example of the pervasive racism present in the South at the time.

Scar tissue formed over Ms. Walker's damaged eye, causing her to be shy and self-conscious. When Ms. Walker was 14, her brother Bill, who had moved north, was able to raise enough money for her to have an eye operation in Boston. In contrast to her experience in Georgia, the surgeon who removed Ms. Walker's cataract treated her with respect and care.

Although she was still self-conscious about her appearance, Ms. Walker was popular in high school. She was valedictorian of her class, and earned a scholarship to Spelman College, a school for black women in Atlanta, Georgia.



After spending two years at Spelman, Ms. Walker transferred to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and during her junior year traveled to Africa as an exchange student. She received her bachelor of arts degree from Sarah Lawrence College in 1966.

Ms. Walker's writing career began to take off: In 1967, her story "To Hell With Dying" was published in *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers*. Her collection of poems, *Once*, was published in 1968. In 1970, she published her first novel, *The Third Life of Copeland Grange*.

She received the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for *The Color Purple*, her third novel. She has received many awards and honors, including the Lillian Smith Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rosenthal Award from the National Institute of Arts & Letters, a nomination for the National Book Award, a Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, a Merrill Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Ms. Walker was active in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and continues to work as an activist. She has spoken for the women's movement, the antiapartheid movement, the antinuclear movement, and against female genital mutilation. She currently resides in Northern California.

To learn more about Alice Walker and her life as an author, visit [biography.com/video/alice-walker-the-mysterious-wonder-of-life-11988547513](https://www.biography.com/video/alice-walker-the-mysterious-wonder-of-life-11988547513)

A Conversation With Alice Walker, Author of *The Color Purple*, the Novel

STAGENOTES: What were your experiences in high school?

ALICE WALKER: I have really good memories of my high school experience. I was voted "Most Popular" in my senior year. I was prom queen, and I was valedictorian. So I had a really wonderful time. And why I was writing very sad and miserable poetry at the same time, I don't know. High school was good. It was a time when I connected very well with other students and teachers. I especially liked typing and learning to sew. I actually made my own prom dress out of chartreuse taffeta.

STAGENOTES: How do you manage being both a teacher and a writer?

ALICE WALKER: I have taught at many schools: Tupelo in Mississippi, Jackson State, Yale, the University of California at Berkeley, Wellesley, the University of Massachusetts. I enjoy it very much. But what happens to me as a writer when I'm teaching is that I get very involved with students. And when I'm involved with them, it's very difficult to have the quality time that I need to write, so I haven't taught in a while. But when I go out on the road, that's when I teach.

Part of having a creative life is understanding as early as possible how difficult it is to have all the responsibilities that you can have in life, and be a creative person. So part of what I do in my teaching is to say that to people. I have friends who married in high school, in the 11th grade. They started having children at 19 and 18. If you do that so early, it's not likely that you're going to be able to do what you discover later on that you'd like to do. So really think, think about it. When you're 16, when you're 17, when you're 18. Don't be in such a rush to get married. By the time you're 25, if you're already married, you will have many a second thought, I promise you. Don't be in such a rush to have children. Actually, the planet has more children than we're able to properly serve, so really consider that.

STAGENOTES: What did you think of the idea of *The Color Purple* as a musical?

ALICE WALKER: Well, at first I was not enthusiastic. I didn't really have any problem thinking of it as a play. I always thought it would be a play with a lot of music; there's music all through it. It's all in there — if you have a juke joint, you have music.

STAGENOTES: Did you have advice for the writers who were adapting *The Color Purple* into a musical?

ALICE WALKER: We have a feeling of mutual respect. I knew they were about to embark on something huge, and it would take them to some crevices and corners of the human psyche that maybe they were not thinking of going to. And I wanted to offer what support I could. So, when we met, I remember it as a time of us sitting around, and many questions arising. I remember

encouraging them to have faith in the characters themselves, that they all have a reason for their behavior. For instance, Mister didn't just bloom as a mean person for no reason. He has a history. He has a long past — his father, his grandfather, the plantation system. Enslavement. Reenacting the behavior that he sees around him, that his father saw around him, and then that their father, who was the plantation owner, who was the person that they were imitating. One of the things I like about *The Color Purple* is that it's like a mirror that reflects the whole period of enslavement for black people. So you get to see what people learned about behavior, and you get to say, "Don't keep doing this. This is why you were so sad and so depressed and so miserable, because you're continuing to enslave yourself."

"I wanted to be a scientist, and then I wanted to be a pianist, and then I wanted to be a painter, and all of those things were very expensive, and we didn't have any money. I became a writer, in a way, because, you know, I'm an artist at heart, and I had to do something."
—Alice Walker

STAGENOTES: What did you think when you first heard the music by the composers of the show?

ALICE WALKER: Scott Sanders, the producer, had earlier sent me music by some very well known people, extremely famous people. I, of course, didn't know them. And I was very open to trying to hear them. But in the music that he sent, I couldn't hear the heart and soul that they really have got to have to do this play. And then he finally sent this recording, and he said, "You know, I have these friends, and I really like this. See what you think." He said they were just tapping out some things with spoons around Allee [Willis]'s kitchen table. And I put it in [the player], and I knew right away that they had it. They had heart. So I was excited. Finally!

STAGENOTES: It's been 30 years since *The Color Purple* was published. Does it seem that long?

ALICE WALKER: No, because time is always current, in some ways — there are people who are just discovering the novel today. And they write to me with the same fervor as someone else wrote 30 years ago. So the story is alive in that way and, even though I myself have written many books since then and rarely think about it in the same way that a fresh reader is thinking, it has its presence.

THE STAGE

Meet John Doyle, Director of *The Color Purple*

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Published December 8, 2015

MINIMALISM BRINGS DOWN BARRIERS IN ‘THE COLOR PURPLE’

by Pia Catton

In the current revival of “The Color Purple,” rural Georgia meets spare minimalism.

The action takes place on a plain wooden stage. Props are few: a cluster of well-worn chairs, woven baskets, some fabric, a Bible.

Even less would be effective, said director John Doyle, who designed the set himself, as long the audience is willing to pitch in and activate their imagination.

“We have Easter dinner at a table that doesn’t exist,” he said. “We put a circle of chairs together, and it makes a prison. But it only makes a prison if the audience is prepared to invest in the image.”

Minimalism might seem an odd pairing with Alice Walker’s vivid, heartbreaking 1982 novel about racism, abuse and redemption in the American south. And this revival is a major contrast to the 2005 original Broadway production, which had detailed costumes and makeup that aged the characters over a half century.

But Mr. Doyle, a seasoned director with four prior Broadway shows to his credit..., wanted to eliminate any barriers between the audience and the emotional lives of the characters.

Even deeper was an urge to plug the audience into the



interactions onstage, just as a reader would absorb Ms. Walker’s voice via the printed page, he said.

And if that requires viewers to do more than show up, that’s the plan.

“I not only like it, I insist upon it,” he said gently. “If theater is going to continue to survive and grow, it has to do stuff that other art forms can’t do.”

Producer Scott Sanders agrees: “In many cases, we spoon-feed audiences so much.”

Mr. Doyle has developed a reputation for the style... and sees more of a connection between his most recent Broadway production, “The Visit” (2015), which was set in a rundown town, and “The Color Purple,” with its jagged, crumbling backdrop.

“They both happen in broken worlds. I think we live in a broken world,” he said. “So that’s probably my way of asking the world to look at itself.”

To learn more about John Doyle, visit broadwayworld.com/people/John-Doyle/.

Catton, Pia. “Minimalism Brings Down Barriers in ‘The Color Purple.’” *Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2015.

Who’s Who on the Creative Team



ALICE WALKER (*Original Author*) won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for her third novel, *The Color Purple*, which was made into an internationally popular film by Steven Spielberg. Her other best-selling novels, which have been translated into more than two dozen languages, include *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, and *The Temple of My Familiar*. Her most recent novel, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, was published in 2004. Ms. Walker is also the author of several collections of short stories, essays and poems as well as children’s books. Her work has appeared in numerous national and international journals and magazines. An activist and social visionary, Ms. Walker’s advocacy on behalf of the dispossessed has, in the words of her biographer, Evelyn C. White, “spanned the globe.”



MARSHA NORMAN (*Book Writer*) won a Pulitzer for her play *’night, Mother*, a Tony for *The Secret Garden* on Broadway, and a Tony nomination for her book for *The Color Purple*. Ms. Norman is cochair of Playwriting at Juilliard and serves on the Steering Committee of the Dramatists Guild. She has numerous film and TV credits, as well as a Peabody for her work in TV. She has won numerous awards including the Inge Lifetime Achievement in Playwriting. She is also President of the Lilly Awards Foundation, a non-profit honoring women in theatre and working for gender parity nationwide.



BRENDA RUSSELL (*Composer/Lyricist*). Brooklyn-born singer/songwriter and author of “Piano in the Dark,” “If Only for One Night” and “Get Here.” Brenda has collaborated with superstars such as Sting; Mary J. Blige; Stevie Wonder; Chaka Khan; Tina Turner; Donna Summer; Michael McDonald; Ray Charles; Earth, Wind & Fire; Luther Vandross; Diana Ross; and Patti LaBelle, among many others. She was nominated for three Grammys for 1988’s “Piano in the Dark.” Since 1979 she has recorded eight solo albums, releasing *Between the Sun and the Moon* in 2004. Her work has also been featured in *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* and *Liberty Heights*. www.brendarusell.com



ALLEE WILLIS (*Composer/Lyricist*) is thrilled to be back at Kellerman’s! Point Park has sold more than 50 million records, including “September,” “Boogie Wonderland,” “Neutron Dance” and “What Have I Done to Deserve This?” She has a Grammy for the Beverly Hills Cop soundtrack and an Emmy nomination for the “Friends” theme song. She’s an award-winning artist, performer, multimediaist, writer and director. Willis prototyped a social network in 1992 and addressed Congress on cyberspace in 1997. She’s currently working on a massive project for Detroit, including a song performed by 7,000 people and the feature documentary, *Allee Willis Loves Detroit*. She is also on the hit TV series, “Storage Wars.” www.alleewillis.com



STEPHEN BRAY (*Composer/Lyricist*) made his Broadway debut with *The Color Purple* in 2005. After training at Berklee College of Music, Bray wrote and produced many top-ten recordings for Madonna including “Into the Groove,” “Papa Don’t Preach,” “True Blue” and “Express Yourself.” Performing with Breakfast Club, he earned a Grammy nomination for Best New Artist. He has written and produced for multiplatinum artists including Gladys Knight and Kylie Minogue. Stephen’s latest venture, Masterphonic, provides storytellers with original music and reimagined classics. He would like to thank Mom and Dad for blasting Broadway cast albums and insisting on those piano lessons.



JOHN DOYLE (*Direction/Set Design/Musical Staging*). Broadway: *Sweeney Todd* (Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Director of a Musical), *Company* (Tony Award for Best Musical Revival), *A Catered Affair* (Drama League Award for Best Musical Production), *The Visit* (Tony nomination for Best Musical), *The Color Purple* (Tony Award for Best Musical Revival, Drama Desk Award for Best Director of a Musical). Off-Broadway: *Wings* (Second Stage Theatre), *Road Show* (The Public Theater), *Where’s Charley?*, *Irma La Douce* (City Center Encores!). Regional: *Kiss me, Kate* (Stratford Festival), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (A.C.T.), *Merrily We Roll Along*, *The Three Sisters* (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park), *Ten Cents a Dance* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), *The Exorcist* (L.A.). In the U.K., John has been artistic director of four regional theatres. Numerous credits include *The Gondoliers*, *Mack and Mabel* (West End), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Regent’s Park), *Oklahoma!* (Chichester), *Amadeus* (Wilton’s Musical Hall). Opera includes *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Sydney Opera House), *Peter Grimes* (Metropolitan Opera), *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany* (L.A. Opera). John is Artistic Director of CSC in New York City, where productions include *Passion*, *Allegro*, *Peer Gynt*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Pacific Overtures* and *As You Like It*.



ANN HOULD-WARD (*Costume Designer*). Select Broadway: *The Color Purple*, *The Visit*, *The People in the Picture*, *A Free Man of Color* (Drama Desk Nomination), *A Catered Affair* (Drama Desk Nomination), *Beauty and the Beast* (Tony Award), *Into the Woods* (Tony and Drama Desk Nominations), *Falsettos*, *Sunday in the Park With George* (Tony and Drama Desk Nominations); *Saint Joan*; *Little Me*. Off-Broadway: *Pacific Overtures*, Classic Stage Company; *Dead Poets Society*, Classic Stage Company; *Notes from the Field*, Second Stage; *Passion*, Classic Stage Company; *Russian Transport*; *The Blue Flower*, *Road Show*; *Lobster Alice*; *Cymbeline*. Ms. Hould-Ward’s work can be seen in over 35 International companies of *Beauty and the Beast*, and her other designs are featured in shows all over the world. More than 100 regional theatre credits. Recipient of the Fashion Institute of Technology’s Patricia Zipprodt Award.



Adrianna Hicks (Celie, left) and N’Jameh Camara (Nettie) and the North American tour cast of *The Color Purple*.

SYNOPSIS

The Color Purple

Act I

On a Sunday morning in 1909, 14-year-old Celie — who has had one child by her father, Alphonso, and is now pregnant with her second — plays a clapping game with her younger sister Nettie. While attending services with the other members of their rural Georgia community, Celie goes into labor and is dragged out of the church as the congregation quietly looks on (“Huckleberry Pie”/“Mysterious Ways”). After Celie gives birth to a son, her father takes the child away and bluntly tells her he is going to get rid of it like he did the last one. Celie quietly says goodbye to her newborn and asks God for a sign (“Somebody Gonna Love You”).

Four years later, local farmer and widower Albert “Mister” Johnson approaches Alphonso and asks permission to marry one of his daughters. Alphonso agrees, offering him Celie instead of Nettie, and throws a cow into the bargain. Although the girls promise never to be separated, Celie goes with Mister to save Nettie’s dreams of becoming a teacher (“Our Prayer”). The local church ladies cluck their approval while Mister’s field hands introduce Celie to a life of hard work (“Big Dog”).

One day, Nettie arrives, explaining that she is tired of Alphonso’s lecherous attentions and asking if she can stay. Mister agrees, but later attacks Nettie while she is walking to school. She fights back, prompting Mister to kick her out. Celie protests, but Mister swears they will never see each other again. As she leaves Mister’s property, Nettie promises to write to Celie. But when Celie goes to the mailbox the next day, Mister slams the mailbox shut, threatening to kill her if he ever sees her touch it.

In 1920, Mister’s son Harpo brings home Sofia, a strong-willed woman whom he later marries. When Harpo complains that he is tired of Sofia bossing him around, Mister and Celie tell him the only way to get her to listen is to beat her. Harpo attempts to do so but ends up being beaten by Sofia. After confronting Celie, Sofia learns the extent of Mister’s cruelty and tells Celie to stand up for herself before leaving home to spend time with her sisters (“Hell No!”).

Harpo decides to turn his house into a juke joint and engages in an affair with a waitress named Squeak, who moves in with him (“Brown Betty”). Sometime later, the community prepares for the arrival of jazz singer Shug Avery, who is revealed to be Mister’s longtime lover (“Shug Avery Comin’ to Town”). But when Shug arrives with her band, she is in such bad shape that Celie nurses her back to health in spite of local disapproval.

While tailoring a dress for Shug’s debut, Celie experiences feelings of warmth and tenderness for the first time. Shug, meanwhile, learns more about Celie’s relationship with Mister



Matthew Murphy

Adrianna Hicks (Celie, left) and N’Jameh Camara (Nettie) and the North American tour cast of *The Color Purple*.

and encourages her to find her inner strength (“Too Beautiful for Words”).

That night, at Harpo’s Juke Joint, Shug brings down the house with a raucous blues number (“Push Da Button”). Sofia arrives with her new boyfriend Buster and dances with Harpo, prompting Squeak to pick a fight with her (“Uh Oh!”). The fight eventually escalates into a bar brawl, prompting Shug and Celie to escape.

After returning to Mister’s house, Shug and Celie explore their newfound relationship (“What About Love?”). Shug uncovers several letters for Celie that have come from Africa. Celie recognizes Nettie’s handwriting and realizes that her sister is alive.

Act II

While reading the letters that Mister has hidden from her, Celie learns that Nettie is in Africa and is living with the missionary family that adopted her children (“African Homeland”). In Georgia, Sofia is arrested for assaulting the mayor after refusing to work for his wife. When Celie goes to visit her, she learns Sofia will serve out her sentence in the mayor’s custody.

In 1932, Shug brings her lover Grady over for Easter. After learning the extent of Celie’s anger toward God, Shug invites her to come back to Memphis with her so they can enjoy the simple joys of life (“The Color Purple”). After sitting down to dinner, Celie tells Mister that she is leaving and Squeak announces she is leaving as well.

When Mister refuses and tries to beat her, Celie stands firm and curses him. Harpo then invites Sofia to come back and live at the Juke Joint, reconciling with her in the process. Eventually, Mister begins to feel the effect of Celie’s curse. Harpo challenges his father to make things right after a bunch of terrible things happen to Mister, which force Mister to try to understand the meaning

of Celie’s curse and the meaning of life other than his tough childhood (“Celie’s Curse”).

At Shug’s Memphis home, Celie starts writing back to Nettie and discovers that she has a natural gift for making pants. After inheriting her childhood home, Celie starts a business and begins selling her designs (“Miss Celie’s Pants”). Meanwhile, Harpo and Sofia learn that Mister is having difficulty getting Nettie and the children to come to the United States. The three resolve to make a plan (“Any Little Thing”).

Shug tells Celie that she has fallen in love with a 19-year-old musician in her band and asks her permission to have one last fling with him. Meanwhile, Mister has reconciled his life. While walking home, Celie realizes that she isn’t destroyed by this and, for the first time, feels a deep love for herself (“I’m Here”).

Several years later, while hosting a Fourth of July picnic for the community, Celie hears a car horn and a familiar voice from her childhood. It is Nettie singing the clapping song they sang years before. They both run to each other and hug with Celie’s children right behind them all grown-up. After learning that Mister and Shug have made the reunion possible, Celie thanks them and God for reuniting her with her sister (“The Color Purple (Reprise)”).

Musical Numbers

ACT ONE

“Huckleberry Pie” Celie and Nettie
“Mysterious Ways” The Company
“Somebody Gonna Love You” Celie
“Our Prayer” Nettie, Celie, Mister
“Big Dog” Mister and Men
“Hell No!” Sofia and Women
“Brown Betty” Harpo, Squeak, and Men
“Shug Avery Comin’ to Town” Mister, Celie, and Company
“Too Beautiful for Words” Shug
“Push da Button” Shug and Company
“Uh Oh!” The Company
“What About Love?” Celie and Shug

ACT TWO

“African Homeland” Nettie, Celie, and Company
“The Color Purple” Shug
“Celie’s Curse” Mister
“Miss Celie’s Pants” Celie and Women
“Any Little Thing” Harpo and Sofia
“I’m Here” Celie
“The Color Purple” (Reprise) Celie and Company



Matthew Murphy

Carla R. Stewart (Shug, left) and Adrianna Hicks (Celie) and the North American tour cast of *The Color Purple*.

CELIE'S HOME

A brief overview of African American life in rural Georgia

The Color Purple takes place in a rural Georgia community near the town of Eatonton, where Alice Walker, the author of the novel, was born.

In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, Congress passed the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which prohibited slavery, freeing the slaves throughout the South. This was known as Emancipation.

In Georgia, there were more than 400,000 slaves. It took until the end of 1865 for Northern troops to spread the news of Emancipation to every corner of the state. Some Georgia freedmen (the term for the newly emancipated slaves) immediately went to the major cities, Atlanta and Savannah, looking for a new way of life. Others traveled throughout the South, seeking to reunite with family members from whom they had been separated. Others opened schools or established churches. And some took their freedom in small steps, finding out what it was like to be able to take a few hours off from work during the day, or to enjoy a stroll wearing one's best clothes in the town streets.

As former slaves adjusted to freedom, Georgia society was in chaos. Northern officials assumed that whites and blacks would transition easily from the master-slave relationship to an employer-employee relationship. This was not the case; plantation owners wanted blacks to stay in their same powerless positions, accepting the same conditions that they lived under during slavery. The freedmen, however, refused to work the same long hours for little or no pay. Tensions were high as each side tried to become used to a new relationship with the other.

As part of Reconstruction, the political and societal reorganization of the South after the war, freedmen were promised land. In Georgia, former slaves were granted 40-acre parcels, mostly near the coast. Only about 80,000 acres of land were distributed in this way, and some of it was taken away after crops were harvested. Only those new landowners who had court decrees supporting their claims were able to keep their land.

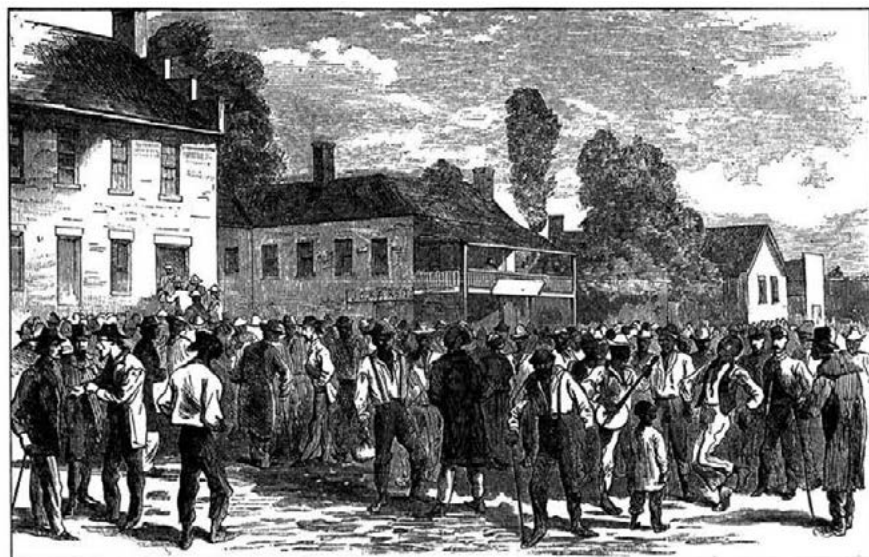
For those who did not have property of their own, the white landowners created a system that was a new form of slavery: sharecropping. Black



farmers (and some poor whites) would be granted the right to lease a portion of white-owned farmland, working the land in exchange for a share of the profit when the crop was sold. They were supplied by the landowner with all the seeds, food, and equipment they needed; the cost would be taken out of their profit at harvest time. When the black farmer brought in his crop (usually cotton), the landowner would determine that he was a few dollars short of repaying what he owed. The next season, the farmer would begin by owing that money, and would come up short again, until the amount owed to the landowner was so great that it could never be repaid.

Seeing that owning property was the only road to prosperity, black farmers did everything possible to gain ownership of their land. By 1910, black farmers owned almost one-fourth of the farms that were worked by blacks (the rest being sharecroppers). In *The Color Purple*, Mister is among this fortunate class of farmers who owned his land.

Georgia was not an extremely wealthy state; seeing blacks gaining economic power made many whites determined to hang on to what power they still had by any means possible. The Supreme Court, in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision, held that it was not inherently unconstitutional for black citizens to be excluded from accommodations designated “white only.” In



the wake of this landmark case, which upheld a Louisiana law forbidding blacks from riding in the same train cars as whites, the doctrine of “separate but equal” came into practice: The races could be separated as long as the facilities were equal in quality. In fact, what was provided for African Americans was almost without exception inferior. Blacks could not eat in white restaurants, swim in the same pools as whites, or use the same restrooms. Not only could blacks not ride in the same train cars, they could not even be in the same waiting areas in the train stations.

Whites also sought to disenfranchise blacks to deprive them of their voting rights. A poll tax was instituted; many blacks

were too poor to pay to vote. When blacks were able to pay a poll tax, a literacy test was added. Primaries were “white only.” By 1920, a very strong anti-black feeling existed all across the South. Membership in the Ku Klux Klan (a white supremacist organization) began to grow throughout the region.



In such a deeply divided society, some black citizens found it easier to establish all-black communities, usually organizing

around the church. In cities such as Auburn and Atlanta, black communities grew, as more and more rural farm workers migrated to the city in search of other jobs.

When the Great Depression struck in the 1930s, rural Georgia was hit hard. The cities did not fare as badly because of the developing industries, like paper milling. President Franklin Roosevelt instituted programs for the unemployed such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC. Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge would not hire blacks for the CCC program, until Roosevelt forced him to by threatening to withhold all aid money from Georgia.

By the 1940s, the end of the time period covered by *The Color Purple*, the Georgia economy began to recover, along with the rest of the country, as production geared up for the beginning of World War II. In the story, Mister and his family would have been considered fairly prosperous in the African American community. Mister has enough property to afford having men work for him. His son Harpo, as the owner of the local juke joint, would also have made a relatively good living. Women's



options were fewer: Most worked in domestic service as cooks or maids (as Sofia is ultimately forced to do). Almost half of the white families in the South employed a black woman in their household. Only a very few African Americans worked as ministers, doctors, or teachers, as Nettie plans to do.

For additional information, lesson plans, and classroom materials on African life in America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, visit the following educational resources.

- Smithsonian Education — African American Heritage Teaching smithsonianeducation.org/educators/resource_library/african
- Blackpast.org: An Online Reference Guide to African American History blackpast.org/aah/research-guides-websites
- Teachers Network: Modern US Education History, 1865 to 1920 teachersnetwork.org

Summary of Standards for HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

1. Understanding and analyzing chronological relationships and patterns:
 - Analyze influence of specific beliefs on these times. How would events be different in the absence of these beliefs?
 - Analyze the effects specific decisions had on history. How would things have been different in the absence of these specific decisions?
2. Understanding the historical perspective:
 - Understand that the consequences of human intentions are influenced by the means of carrying them out.
 - Understand how the past affects our private lives and society in general.
 - Perceive past events with historical empathy.
 - Evaluate credibility and authenticity of historical sources.
 - Evaluate the validity and credibility of different historical interpretations.

SOCIAL STUDIES

NETTIE'S JOURNEY

African American missionaries in West Africa

In the late 1800s, many European countries wanted to make use of Africa's plentiful natural resources. To avoid confusion and confrontation, Otto von Bismarck, the chancellor of Germany, invited the major European powers together to negotiate control of Africa.

This gathering, the Berlin Conference of 1885, was attended by representatives of Germany, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Russia, the United States, Portugal, Denmark, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, and Turkey. Over the next 20 years, the countries of Africa were conquered and divided up as colonies among the European powers. The largest African empires were controlled by Britain and France; Germany, Belgium, and Portugal had colonies as well.



In *The Color Purple*, the Olinka, the fictional tribe that Nettie visits as a missionary, were located in West Africa. Because the West African climate was uncomfortable for most Europeans, they used tribes who were native to the area as a source of labor. Rubber trees, which produce a sap that is processed into rubber, were a major crop throughout West Africa. In the story, the Olinka lands were destroyed to make way for rubber tree plantations.

There is a misconception that African tribes lived in isolation from one another; in fact, West Africa had long been a bustling trade center. At the edge of the Sahara Desert, caravans took West African wares to the countries of North Africa. There was contact and interaction among many tribes throughout the continent.

The slave trade reduced the African population: 12 million Africans were taken into slavery over 400 years, from roughly 1400 to 1880 (6 million in the 1800s as the desire for slaves in the South grew). This may have slowed Africa's economic growth, since the workers who might have contributed to the

further development of Africa were laboring in captivity in the Americas and elsewhere. Ironically, once the slave trade was outlawed, some Africans then used slaves for labor to produce goods to trade with Europe and America.

African American Missionaries

From its very beginning, Christianity has had a strong tradition of missionary work, seeking to spread the religion by converting people of other cultures. Besides establishing new churches, missionaries also provided health care, ran schools and orphanages, and helped promote economic development by sharing their knowledge of craftsmanship and farming.

In the 19th century, African Americans who were active in the Christian church began to travel to Africa in increasing numbers as missionaries. All the major Protestant denominations of Christianity had established centers in Africa and Asia; white missionaries tended to prefer Asia, while African American missionaries were directed toward Africa, sometimes under the belief that they could withstand the rigors of the African climate more easily, and have a better chance of surviving disease. This turned out not to be true, and as many African American missionaries succumbed to disease in Africa as did white missionaries.

Many African American missionaries chose to go to Africa out of a sense of curiosity, wanting to visit the lands of their ancestors. Some believed that the “civilizing influence” of Christianity would help native Africans to better govern themselves and their countries.

Once European colonies had been established in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, and the numbers of white Europeans in Africa began to increase, African-American missionaries were regarded with increasing suspicion. The Europeans reasoned that, having been emancipated in the United States, the missionaries might encourage Africans to revolt against colonial governments. Still, African-American congregations continued to sponsor missionaries in Africa, sending them to establish churches, schools, and medical facilities throughout the continent. The numbers of African American missionaries peaked in 1910, when their work was reaching greater and greater numbers of Africans. This was about the time that Nettie would have gone to Africa with Reverend Samuels.

By 1920, however, colonial governments throughout Africa were actively hampering the activities of missionaries, regarding them as “undesirable aliens.” Portugal required that



missionaries in its colonies be fluent speakers of Portuguese, and only permitted missionaries who were registered and assigned by the government. Other governments refused to issue visas; the United States would often refuse to grant passports to missionaries, or else would make it difficult for missionaries to return to America. Missionaries who ventured to Africa usually did so in groups, or at least in pairs — often married couples would travel together. In 1919, the Reverend Henry Curtis McDowell, (former pastor of a church in Chattanooga, Tennessee) and his wife, Bessie Fonville McDowell, journeyed to Angola with their child to establish a mission. After some time spent studying the language, the McDowells, along with two other missionary couples, established the Galangue mission. All were college graduates, which was a rare accomplishment for African Americans at the time. The McDowells and their colleagues worked with the local tribe, the Ovimbundu, providing education, medical services, and religious instruction.

Reverend McDowell often wrote to congregations back in America, hoping to dispel myths about Africa among his fellow African Americans. Many thought that African people were the same across the entire continent, and that Africa was a mysterious, exotic place. McDowell tried to address these stereotypes in his letters home, writing travel essays that described Angola and the Ovimbundu in detail.

We are accustomed to think of Africa as the Sahara Desert and jungles of coconut trees and monkeys. I saw about a half dozen coconut trees at the coast and not one since. I haven't seen nor heard of the African monkey yet. Lobita reminds one of Florida and our station is very much like Talladega with its iron mountains and red soil. As to the natives they are like American Negroes in that they have shades of color. They only need a few more clothes to make them look the same.

History/Social Studies Exercises

Discuss

Alice Walker describes *The Color Purple* as “dealing with ancestral voices.” What does this mean to you? Who do you imagine your ancestral voices to be? Why do you think Alice Walker chose to create a fictional tribe, the Olinka, in *The Color Purple*, rather than write about an existing African society?

Write

Imagine that you have decided to leave your home and family to become a teacher in a far-off country. (Choose a country you are interested in, and read about it in the library or on the internet.) Your family is worried because they don't know anything about where you're going. Write a letter to a member of your family describing a typical day where you are. Use as many details as possible to make your description vivid and exciting.

Explore

What was life like where you live during the years that *The Color Purple* takes place? Choose a year between 1909 and 1949, and research what was happening in your town that year. You might begin looking for information on the internet; you might also look in the library for old copies of local newspapers from those years. Choose five interesting things, and report to the class what you've discovered.

Today, Christian missions of all denominations continue to work in Africa, providing relief services in addition to their religious work. In addition, numerous secular organizations (such as the Peace Corps, founded by President John F. Kennedy) have undertaken the work of bringing education, health care, and economic aid to the people of Africa.

For more information on the missionary movement in the late 19th and early 20th century, visit these educational institutions:

- Center for Research Libraries, Global Resource Network — Century Christian Missionary Work crl.edu/focus/article/6696
- Teacher Serve from the National Humanities Center.org — The Foreign Missionary Movement in the 19th and Early 20th Century nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/fmmovement.htm
- Goodman Theatre Education — 19th Century Missionaries education.goodmantheatre.org/resources/study-guide-archive/the-convert/19th-century-missionaries/

LANGUAGE ARTS

An interview with Marsha Norman, the book writer of *The Color Purple*, the musical

Marsha Norman grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. She earned her B.A. from Agnes Scott College in Georgia and received her M.A. from the University of Louisville; upon graduating she worked writing reviews for *The Louisville Times*. Her first play, *Getting Out*, was produced in 1977 by the Actor's Theater of Louisville; it was voted the best new play produced by a regional theater by the American Theatre Critics Association. Her play 'night, Mother won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Hull Warriner and Drama Desk Awards, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1983, the same year that Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. In 1991, she wrote the book and lyrics for the musical *The Secret Garden*. She won the Tony Award and the Drama Desk Award for her work. In 2005 she penned the libretto for the Broadway musical version of *The Color Purple*, which received a Tony Award nomination for Best Book of a Musical. In 2008 Norman and composer Jason Robert Brown created a symphonic adaptation of the children's novel *The Trumpet of the Swan*, which premiered at the Kennedy Center, and in 2013 she wrote the libretto for the musical adaptation of the film *The Bridges of Madison County*, with a score by Brown.

STAGENOTES: What was your experience in high school? Were you writing?

MARSHA NORMAN: I wasn't writing for the theater then, but I was certainly writing. I wrote all through high school, and not for any reason other than I really liked it, and kept being told by people that I was really good at it. But then when I got to college, I studied philosophy and astronomy, and didn't do any writing. I did accompany the dance group on piano as my scholarship work. It was fantastic training for the musical theater. I'd grown up at the piano, and I came to college on a music scholarship, actually, and at the point when I was finally able to stop work and take a year off and write, the first thing I sat down to write was a musical. Then I understood pretty quickly that I couldn't write musicals living in Kentucky by myself. So then I proceeded to write plays and developed a reputation. For a long time, that got in the way of my being able to do musicals, because people thought of me as grim and sad and just interested in tragedy. And this isn't who I am at all. I always wanted to do musicals, and finally I got to write *The Secret Garden*. Heidi Landesman [the producer and set designer] had done the set for 'night, Mother, and we wanted to work together again, and she had the idea to do this musical. We got together and talked, and agreed that we would go full speed ahead. Musicals are so difficult. And that's what makes it wonderful to work on them, because they're nearly impossible. So, after *The Secret Garden* I did *The Red Shoes*, which was a disaster, but was really one of those good learning experiences where you work with some famous people, but you



work with them for the wrong reason. They lost sight of what the goal was. The goal can never be a faithful reproduction of a film, or a book, and I think that applies here.

STAGENOTES: What are the challenges involved in adapting a book into a musical?

MARSHA NORMAN: You have to think about, what kind of a theater piece would this story make? It's that old theatrical axiom, "You can't cut up a sofa to make a chair." We had to figure out how to tell the story in another way, and yet give people the sense that they have re-experienced the material and it's just as thrilling as it was the first time. What people remember is the hard part of *The Color Purple*, and I think that's our challenge here. We want to remind them that, yes, there was this hard part, but ultimately it was a story of triumph. These are the questions that I have to ask myself: What is it that makes this story tick? You cannot disguise the lack of a beating heart in musical. Once you have that, then you can pour on the songs and pour on the dancing and pour on everything else. But the beating heart of this story is taking Celie through to her triumph of soul and spirit. If you look at all of Celie's lyrics, they really trace Celie's relationship to God, but in a kind of greater view, it's Celie addressing the beyond: "How do I understand my life?" And in the beginning she understands it very simply, very much the way she's been taught. Then she proceeds, through the course of the story, to understand her life in different ways. And finally she arrives at this final understanding, where she says, I thank God for all the days I've lived, not just the good days, the bad days too.

Summary of Standards for LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing

- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process, prewriting drafting, revising, editing, and publishing
- Demonstrates competence in the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
- Uses grammatical and mechanical convention in written compositions
- Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Reading

- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process
- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process
- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts

Listening and Speaking

- Demonstrates competence in using speech and listening as learning tools



Adrianna Hicks (Celie, on chair) and the North American tour cast of *The Color Purple*.

Matthew Murphy

STAGENOTES: What is your working process with the composers?

MARSHA NORMAN: When I came into the process, they had written a lot of songs already. But I started over, and then pulled their songs in where I thought they could be used for storytelling, and then they wrote a lot of new songs. Probably three-fourths of the songs that are there now are songs that were written since I got here. So I was able to say to them, "We need a song to do this specific thing." One of the problems in writing a musical is that you need the songs to sound like they're sung by the same people who are speaking. I always think with musicals that the songs and the spoken text are the sort of inside and the outside of the person. The songs are this secret hidden part, the part you can't say, so you sing that part. And the part that you can say is the dialogue, that's the outside part. But it does need to match. And the composers have been really great about understanding that, and understanding that songs for the theater have to be very specific. This song can only be sung by this person at this time in this story at this point in this story. Theater songs need to start when a person's contemplating what to do, and at the end of the song, they figure it out. Songs in the theater have a journey aspect to them. So I map out where the scene goes and what the song needs to do, and the composers go and write the song. They call me, we talk.

To learn more about the life and work of Marsha Norman visit:

- marshanorman.com/
- louisville.edu/artsandsciences/about/hallofhonor/inductees/norman.html
- ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/marsha-norman-7556

Novel Storytelling

The story of *The Color Purple* is told as an oral history. This tradition of storytelling is a way of passing on traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, through the generations by word of mouth. Alice Walker used the art of storytelling in her epistolary novel. This style of novel is written as a series of documents which can include letters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, recordings, and, more recently, emails and other electronic documents. In addition to *The Color Purple*, there are many other modern epistolary novels that provide readers with insight into the lives of complex characters in circumstances that illuminate the power of the human spirit. Here are just a few:

Monster by Walter Dean Meyers
So Long a Letter by Mariama Ba
Imagine This by Sade Adeniran
Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter by J. Nozipo Maraire

To learn more storytelling and folklore in African American culture, visit:

- americanfolklore.net/folklore/africanamerican-folklore
- nabsinc.org
- teachers.yale.edu/curriculum/viewer/initiative_06.03.09_u
- worldoftales.com/folktales

The Color Purple — An Epistolary Novel

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel. The term *epistolary*, drawn from the word *epistle* ("letter"), means that the novel is made up of letters and diary entries. We read letters written to Celie by her sister Nettie in Africa, and letters written by Celie directly to God.

One of the advantages of writing a novel using this form is that the reader experiences the voices of the characters directly, reading their thoughts in their own words. This style can also give a sense of mystery to the story, since events may not be related fully (since we are seeing only one character's point of view and only learning what that character knows), and may not be presented in chronological order.

The epistolary style has a long history, reaching all the way back to the Bible: The letters written by the apostle Paul are a major part of the New Testament. The first epistolary novel is generally agreed to be *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson, published in 1740. By the turn of the 19th century, the epistolary style was becoming less popular. Jane Austen originally wrote *Pride and Prejudice* using the epistolary form, but then changed her mind. She rewrote the story using a different device — the third-person omniscient narrator: The reader is told the story by a narrator who is not a character in the action, and who has access to the inner thoughts of all the characters (*omniscient* means "knowing all").

By the 1700s, the level of literacy in the general public was increasing. Letter writing was popular, and many manuals were published instructing writers in the proper form and etiquette of letter writing. (These kinds of manuals are still published today, giving correct forms of address, and even suggestions for the content of a wide variety of business and personal letters.)

The letter form was also used in writing for a broader audience, such as travel essays, which were popular with a public curious about the wider world.

Samuel Richardson got the idea to use letters as the basis for his novel *Pamela* while he was writing a letter manual. This style became popular because letters were an easily recognizable form of communication: Reading a character's letters made that character seem like a real person.

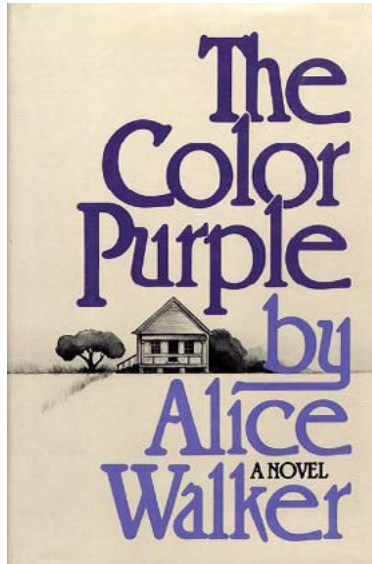
The form was used by authors throughout the 18th century, in novels such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos. Laclos began to play with the "mystery" aspects of the form, giving the account of the story's events bit by bit, presented out of order. This made the reader naturally curious, reading further to put all the pieces of the story together.

The epistolary style is still used today: Some modern examples include Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *P.S. I Love You* by Cecelia Ahern. Other epistolary novels use emails in place of letters: *P.S. He's Mine*, by Rosie Rushton and Nina Schindler, and the companion works *Blue Company* by Rob Wittig and *Kind of Blue* by Scott Rettberg.

Adapting a novel into a play or musical presents certain

challenges: The playwright usually cannot use narration or description. He or she has to primarily use dialogue—what the characters say to one another. In a musical, songs can also reveal the characters' inner thoughts. Because the epistolary novel is made up entirely of the characters' own words and thoughts, it is related more closely to theater than other types of fiction.

The fact that the novel *The Color Purple* is made up of letters is important also because the letters themselves are a crucial part of the story. When Celie finds the letters Mister has hidden, she not only discovers that Nettie is alive and still cares about her, but she also begins to break free of Mister's domination.



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Language Arts Exercises

Discuss

Have you seen movies or plays that have been based on books? Did you like one version of the story more than the other? Why?

Write

Try writing your own epistolary story using email and instant messages. Imagine your story being told through instant messages or email sent back and forth between two characters.

Explore

Choose a favorite book and create your own stage adaptation of one section or chapter. Remember, you aren't limited to only the dialogue that exists in the book; feel free to imagine what other things the characters might say, or what other things they might see or do. Then produce your own reading of your play: Make as many copies as there are parts, and distribute them to classmates you've cast in the roles. Have your cast sit in chairs set in a semicircle, and read the parts out loud. Listen to see if any ideas occur to you for rewrites or changes.

LIFE SKILLS

"I got my start by giving myself a start."

Madame C.J. Walker, Entrepreneur

In *The Color Purple*, Celie eventually goes into business for herself, creating one-size-fits-all pants. A business owner who owns and operates her own company is called an "entrepreneur" — especially if that company offers something innovative or unique.

Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker, better known as Madame C.J. Walker, became one of the most successful African American entrepreneurs of the 20th century, by revolutionizing the hair-care industry for African American women.

Ms. Walker was born in rural Louisiana on December 23, 1867, to Owen and Minerva Breedlove, former slaves who worked as sharecroppers. Ms. Walker was orphaned at age 7, and went to work in the cotton fields with her sister. At age 14, she ran away from her sister's home and married Moses McWilliams. Two years later Moses was killed by a lynch mob. Ms. Walker headed for St. Louis, taking her young daughter A'Leia with her.

In St. Louis, Ms. Walker worked as a cook, laundress, and house cleaner while living with her brothers, who worked as barbers. She was afflicted with a scalp condition that caused her hair to fall out. She tried many products that promised to help, but none were effective. She then had a dream in which a man appeared and told her which ingredients to use to make a hair restorer. The formula soon had her hair regrowing.

Sarah moved to Denver, where she met and married newspaperman Charles Joseph "C.J." Walker. Sarah became known as "Madame" C.J. Walker. She and her new husband began selling "Madam Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower." Mr. Walker contributed many marketing ideas to his wife's business; at his urging, she set out on a long door-to-door sales trip through the South. Her products were very popular. Madame



Summary of Standards for LIFE SKILLS

Thinking and Reasoning

- Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning
- Effectively uses mental processes that are based in identifying similarities and differences (compares, contrasts, classifies)
- Understands and applies basic principles of hypothesis testing and scientific inquiry
- Applies basic troubleshooting and problem-solving techniques
- Applies decision-making techniques

Working With Others

- Contributes to the overall effort of a group
- Uses conflict-resolution techniques
- Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations
- Displays effective interpersonal communication skills
- Demonstrates leadership skills

Life Skills Exercises

Discuss

What qualities does it take to start a business and become a successful entrepreneur? Imagine Celie's obstacles to starting a business. Why did she start so late in life? What obstacles do others face in starting their own businesses?

Write

Dream up an idea for a new product, an invention that will change the lives of anyone who buys it. Write a sales pitch that describes all the things you promise that your product does. Be as convincing as you can. Perform your sales pitch for the class, and see how many are persuaded to buy your invention.

Explore

Almost every major invention has an interesting story behind it. Choose something that was invented in the last 20 years, and research the story of the inventor. How did he or she come up with the invention? What obstacles did he or she face? Share what you've found with the class.

Walker began planning the expansion of the "Walker System," which included several "Walker Schools" of cosmetology, and a network of "Walker Agents" who were licensed to sell her cosmetics. Her company grew to the point where she employed more than 3,000 people. She was the first African-American woman to become a self-made millionaire, a fortune she built in just fifteen years. She died of a heart attack at age 52.

Madame Walker's entrepreneurial spirit lived on, however, when one of her employees, Marjorie Joyner, patented a device for putting a permanent-wave curl in hair in 1928. It became very popular among women both black and white.

At a speech given at the National Negro Business League Convention in July 1912, Madame C.J. Walker was frank about the work that it took to achieve her success:

"I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. From there I was promoted to the washtub. From there I was promoted to the cook kitchen. And from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. I have built my own factory on my own ground."

When people asked her what the secret of her success might be, she replied:

"There is no royal flower-strewn path to success. And if there is, I have not found it for if I have accomplished anything in life it is because I have been willing to work hard."

To learn more about Madame C.J. Walker's life and accomplishments, visit the official biography site, madamcjwalker.com.

PERFORMING ARTS

Meet Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray, composer/lyricists of *The Color Purple*

STAGENOTES: A question for each of you — what were your experiences when you were just starting out? Were you interested in music in high school?

STEPHEN BRAY: I was busy getting kicked out of the musical department in my high school because I wasn't inspired by the high school where I went. This was in Detroit. I played the drums. I knew the rhythms, I could hear what was going on but I just sort of made up my own drum parts. It got to be a problem when we were playing classical music. I eventually had my own rock band playing R&B and rock. And I sang in a church choir from third grade on up. That was scary and wonderful because by the time I got to be a teenager there were only three guys left in the choir. I always had to sing out loud and make sure I was heard. It was a good experience.

ALLEE WILLIS: Well, I just was a music fanatic. I grew up in Detroit when Motown was just starting. I went to the University of Wisconsin and I majored in journalism. I wanted to be in advertising. I think trying to write ad copy that was snappy and short was great preparation for lyric writing. When I graduated from college, a friend told me they have advertising departments in record companies. I went to New York into Columbia Records. I flunked the typing test eleven times, but got the job because they needed someone so quick and no one else applied. I met Janis Joplin the first day, days before she died. I built my way up over the course of that summer from a secretary to a junior copywriter, and wrote the ads that would go into Rolling Stone and Billboard, and copy for the backs of albums and radio commercials. I was writing for all the girls, and all the black groups who were of course lumped together in the “minority catalogue.” But it was great. I ended up writing for a lot of people that I eventually wrote songs for. I really did love school, but I'm a very unschooled creative person. To this day I don't read, write, or play music, but yet I can compose the music. That's my vice and my virtue.

BRENDA RUSSELL: I started writing music when I was in the Toronto cast of *Hair*. It was when I first learned how to play piano, they had a piano in the lobby, so I would play that. And the theater owner had the piano locked because he heard some cast members playing the piano. So the musical director of the show bought me a piano for my birthday. I was nineteen at the time and had just written my first song.

STAGENOTES: How did you approach writing the songs in *The Color Purple*?

BRENDA RUSSELL: We looked at the script that they had, and we took the two hardest scenes. We thought, well everybody's go-



Brenda Russell, Stephen Bray, and Allee Willis

ing to be trying to write a blues song or gospel. That's way easier than having a song with characters coming and going, with the mood changes. That's what we went for.

ALLEE WILLIS: We tried to pick what we thought was the most complex thing from the script. And we wanted to choose a multicharacter song. Characters have themes, and they have certain instruments associated with them. We thought if we put that concept toward this, we're going to come up with something unusual which we did in “Shug Avery Is Coming to Town.”

STAGENOTES: Can you describe your working process? How do you write together?

BRENDA RUSSELL: Usually I'd sit down and try to generate some music at the piano, and then we'd all fall in. Everybody contributes musically and lyrically. It's magic, I think. It's extremely fluid. There's a great balance.

STEPHEN BRAY: We're all completely intuitive. We're really working by ear. With melody and with lyrics, it just keeps going around. We constantly refine and refine and refine, until we're all happy. Which is often the case but not always the case. If two people are sufficiently happy, they can overrule the third. And the balance of power kind of shifts all the time. It changes enough that it's very healthy, I think.

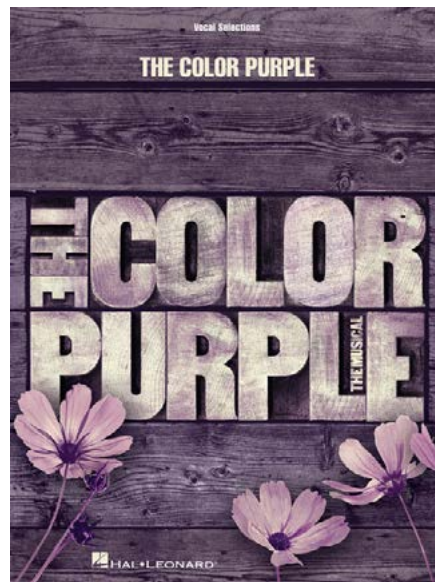
STEPHEN BRAY: Well, on the meaningfulness of the phrase. That's where I get overruled a lot. I usually want it to be com-

pletely logical, and be really crystal clear. Whereas they're more trusting in the essence of a line communicating what it needs to communicate. If two people are sufficiently happy, the third person will have to learn to live with it.

BRENDA RUSSELL: It's just a magical collaboration. When we write together, it's going to be good, because it's a tough room. You've got to fight for your stuff. The thing about collaborating is, you have to put your ego aside. You have to feel free enough to say, no, this is not working, and not feel you're going to offend your cowriter. They have to be willing to say, okay let's look at that, and not take it personally. You can't just fold your arms and take your ball and go home.

ALLEE WILLIS: We have a lot of similar areas, and then we have places where we're hugely different. Brenda's the best player, so Brenda is the one usually who will be at the keyboard. I'm primarily, I'd say, melody and lyrics. Although everyone does everything. Stephen's a drummer, so there's his sense of time and precision. But what's really interesting is when you get someone who is totally precise and someone who's totally loose who have to work together, you get this middle ground that is something neither one of you could have achieved on your own. I think we've all learned how to be a trillion times better writers than we were.

STAGENOTES: What kind of musical inspiration did you have for this score?



spirituals. We have an a cappella spiritual. And then when we get to the twenties, we have more jazzy blues. And we get into some swinging. At the end of the show we're in the forties. We don't quite get into the early underpinnings of bop, but we do get jazzy. The score covers a lot of bases. Even when we're doing our blues, our straight-up blues, it's not really a straight-up blues. Because we felt that, if they'd really wanted

STEPHEN BRAY: Some of our original ideas have changed—In 1910, we wanted it to be somebody on a porch just stomping their foot, and then playing guitar, and that's pretty much all it was. It moved from what we call “back porch,” front porch, whatever porch you're on, with somebody stomping for rhythm, with gutbucket—like a tub with a single string for the bass thumping along. Then it went to gospel music. And then,

Performing Arts Exercises

Discuss

Who are your favorite songwriters? Bring in an example of one of your favorite songs. Find out who wrote the music and lyrics, if you don't know. Play some of the song for the group, and describe why the song means something to you.

Write

Try writing your own blues songs. Notice how the examples given follow a pattern: The first and second lines are the same, followed by a different third line. Choose something that makes you “blue” and write a song about it.

Explore

The composers of *The Color Purple* describe their working process as a “fluid collaboration.” Try writing a story in collaboration with two classmates.

There are two steps to this exercise:

- 1) Begin by creating a drawing collaboratively. Get one blank piece of paper, and one marker, crayon, or pencil. Without speaking, one member of the collaborative team draws a shape or a line on the paper. When that person is finished, the next person picks up the marker and continues the drawing, still without speaking. After that person, the third person takes a turn, and so on. Continue until all agree that the drawing is finished. The goal is to pay attention to the actions of your collaborators, communicating without using words.
- 2) Now try a collaboration with words. Try writing a song together. Give yourself a time limit — for example, one hour. Everyone should try contributing to the words and the music. Don't worry about using a piano — just come up with a melody that you can sing or hum. The song does not have to be long. The goal is to try working in

a completely “authentic” type of show in terms of the musical styles, they would not have hired us.

STAGENOTES: What is the rewriting process like for you?

BRENDA RUSSELL: Rewriting. It's constant. I have literally cried, “You can't cut that song.” But when you start realizing the ultimate goal is to have the whole thing work, the story needs to be told in the best way possible.

ALLEE WILLIS: You know, in pop songwriting, there's not really that much rewriting. In musical theater a song can change twenty times, thirty times. It really is about learning how to do your very, very best, and believe in yourself because if you don't this is not the medium for you.

MUSIC

The Evolution of the Blues and African American–Influenced Music



Work Songs

Africans who were enslaved and taken to America brought the tradition of the work song with them. As they worked in the fields, laborers would sing rhythmic songs that coordinated their movements (swinging hammers or farm implements, etc.). In the musical *The Color Purple*, the song “Brown Betty” is an example of a work song.

Work songs were also known as work calls, field hollers, or arhoolies. They could also serve as communication, as workers shouted down the fields to one another. A sung/shouted line would get an answer in response.

This “call and response” structure is characteristic of many work songs. A lead singer “calls out” a line, and the rest of the group responds. This pattern can be heard in marching cadences used in the military — a sergeant calling out a line, and his soldiers responding in rhythm. “Call and response” can be heard in gospel music as well, and the rock & roll/rhythm & blues music that draws on gospel for inspiration (such as the music of Ray Charles).

Work songs and field hollers gave rise to spirituals and the blues.

Spirituals

Author, philosopher, and social crusader W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, in his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*:

“They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this

book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black man spoke to men. Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and mine

....Out of them rose for morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past... The songs are indeed the siftings of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words.”

A “Sorrow Song” was the way Dr. Du Bois described a spiritual. These were songs sung to express the grief and anguish felt by the African American slaves. They often drew on phrases and images from the Bible, especially the stories of the Israelites who were kept in slavery in Egypt. In these songs, the slaves released their pain, and tried to have hope for the future when they would be freed. One of the best known of all spirituals, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” also contained a subtle message, encouraging Southern slaves to find their way to the Underground Railroad, the “chariot” that could carry them “home” to freedom in the North.

The Blues

The blues grew out of work songs and field hollers, carrying on the tradition of the West African griots or storytellers, who would sing and recite the stories of their tribe set to music.

Work songs were sung in a group, but the blues were usually sung by one person. Instead of “call and response” between a

leader and a group, the blues singer would repeat a line, answering himself or herself.

The blues was based on a simple pattern, usually 12 bars long (although it could be extended easily to 13 or 14 bars). A “bar” is a measure of music, usually four beats. The 12-bar blues uses the three most common chords in a scale, known as the I, IV, and V chords. The blues singer is able to improvise over this basic chord pattern.

“They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart.”

The other major characteristic of the blues is blue notes. These are notes that are “bent” or flattened from their pitch, giving the sound of a wail or a cry to the melody.

The blues gave birth to other kinds of music, including jazz, swing, and rock & roll. The same I-IV-V-I progression used in blues is used in many early rock & roll songs.

Jazz and Swing

Jazz music began evolving from the blues from 1900 onward, reaching its peak in the 1920s, a decade often referred to as the “Jazz Age.” Musicians began exploring more sophisticated harmony than the simple blues chords, although jazz melodies often used the blue notes — the flatted third and seventh notes of the scale. Jazz musicians still improvised most of their parts, just like blues players.

There was a lot of overlap between jazz and the blues — the first recorded jazz song was the “Livery Stable Blues,” played by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1917. Many jazz players wrote and recorded songs that were titled “Blues”: “West End Blues,” “Potato Head Blues,” “Basin Street Blues,” and “Gutbucket Blues” were some of the songs recorded by trumpeter Louis Armstrong, who was one of the musicians helping to develop the new jazz style.

In the 1930s, jazz dance bands began to get larger. With more musicians in the group, bandleaders began writing out specific musical arrangements for the players; the only improvisation was in the instrumental solos given to certain members of the band.

This tighter musical style became known as swing, which was popular through the 1930s and 1940s. Swing referred to the way the musicians played with a slight “swing” or bounce to the notes, sliding behind the beat.

For more information on these innovative and influential types of music, visit:

- negrospirituals.com/songs/index.htm
- allaboutjazz.com

W.E.B. Du Bois, Civil Rights Activist

Noted African American civil rights activist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was known as a writer, poet, sociologist, and historian. He was born February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Du Bois was a gifted student; although he wanted to attend Harvard, financial difficulties made him choose to enroll in Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. While living in the South for the first time, Du Bois experienced the intense prejudice directed at African Americans, and witnessed firsthand the poverty that many African-Americans had to endure. He finally fulfilled his dream of attending Harvard, becoming the first African-American to earn a Ph.D. there.



Du Bois was a believer in “Pan-Africanism,” the idea that all those of African descent had common goals and should work cooperatively to achieve those goals. In 1909, he became a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (the NAACP, which is still in existence), editing their publication *The Crisis* for 25 years. He ultimately left the organization in 1934.

Du Bois wrote constantly, promoting the African American civil rights movement in editorials, articles, and poems. Ultimately, he became disillusioned with conditions in the United States and moved to Ghana, renouncing his U.S. citizenship. He died August 27, 1963. In 1992, the United States honored him with a postage stamp commemorating his life and works.

W.E.B. Du Bois is referred to in the novel *The Color Purple*, when Samuel recalls “a young Harvard scholar named Edward. Du Boyce was his last name, I think.”

For more information on W.E.B. Du Bois, visit:

- WEBDuBois.com
- duboislc.org/html/DuBoisBio.html/

Shug Avery's Sisters: Trailblazing Women in Music

In *The Color Purple*, Shug Avery is a blues singer, who entertains in “juke joints.” Female blues singers had a freedom of expression that other women of their time did not; popular blues singers were able to be wild and speak the truth as they saw it in a way that other women were not.

Ma Rainey (1886-1939)



The first professional blues singer, “Ma” Rainey was known as “The Mother of the Blues.” She was singing onstage by the age of fourteen. She left home to tour with a group called “The Rabbit Foot Minstrels.” In 1902, she began performing the blues in her act. Two years later, she married the singer William Rainey. He was known as “Pa” Rainey, so Gertrude dubbed herself “Ma” Rainey. The pair continued

to tour, billing themselves as “Rainey and Rainey, Assassimators of the Blues.” Ma Rainey had an outspoken, brassy style on stage. Several of her teeth were gold, and she always appeared in extravagant sequined outfits with her trademark necklace of gold coins. Ma Rainey began recording her songs in 1923, and in the next five years recorded over 100 songs. Styles began to change, however, and by 1933 her popularity had waned. In 1939, Ma

Rainey died of a heart attack. *Listen to: Mother of the Blues: 1923-1928 EPM Musique, 1998*

Bessie Smith (1894-1937)

Bessie Smith was born in 1894 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. After getting to know blues legend Ma Rainey, twenty-year-old Bessie Smith began working as a blues singer herself. By 1920 she was well known throughout the country and began making blues recordings in 1923, touring extensively throughout the South, and traveling in her own railroad car, becoming the highest paid black entertainer in the country. Like all performing artists, her career suffered when the Great Depression struck. She still toured as much as she could throughout the 1930s, singing in clubs. She made one appearance on Broadway, in the 1929 musical Pansy. The show flopped, but Smith received good reviews. On her way to a performance in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Bessie Smith was in a car accident that nearly severed her arm and left her near death. She died of her injuries that day, September 26, 1937. *Listen To: The Essential Bessie Smith, Sony, 1997*



In the footsteps of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith: A Timeline of Blues, Jazz and Soul Singers

Ethel Waters (1896-1977) popularized the song “Stormy Weather,” the first African-American woman to be given equal billing with her white co-stars on Broadway. *Listen To: Am I Blue: 1921-1947, Jazz Legends, 2004*



Billie Holiday (1915-1959) “Lady Day” started out as a jazz and blues singer in Harlem clubs in the mid-1930s. She became popular with black and white audiences alike, becoming one of the first black singers to perform with white bands. She is best known for her songs “God Bless the Child,” and “Strange Fruit.” *Listen To: Lady Day: The Best of Billie Holiday, Sony, 2001*

Dinah Washington (1924-1963) Known as the “Queen of the Blues,” she began performing with jazz musician Lionel Hampton in the 1940s. She had her biggest hit with the Grammy Award winning “What



a Difference a Day Makes,” released in 1959. *Listen To: Back to the Blues, Blue Note Records, 1997*

Nina Simone (1933-2003) Trained as a classical pianist, she drew on jazz, soul and blues styles in her singing, with songs such as “I Want A Little Sugar in My Bowl.” Known as the “High Priestess of Soul,” she was active in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. *Listen To: Nina: The Essential Nina Simone, Metro Music, 2000*



Etta James (1938 -) She became best known for her songs “At Last,” “Tell Mama” and “I’d Rather Go Blind,” released by Chess Records in the 1960s. Her album Mystery Lady, a collection of songs associated with Billie Holiday, won a Grammy in 1994; she was honored with the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003. *Listen To: Etta James, Her Best: The Chess 50th Anniversary Collection, Chess, 1997*



Tina Turner (1939 -) She began her career with husband Ike Turner, with hits such as “River Deep, Mountain High” and “Proud Mary” in 1971. After leaving her abusive marriage in 1978, she began a solo career, earning three Grammy Awards in 1985 for “What’s Love Got to Do With It.” *Listen To: Proud Mary: The Best of Ike & Tina Turner, Capitol, 1991*

Aretha Franklin (1942 -) Known as the “Queen of Soul,” she was signed to a record contract by age 14. She had her first hits in the 1960s with “You Make Me Feel (Like a Natural Woman)” and “Respect.” She has won 16 Grammys, and was the first woman inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. *Listen To: Aretha Franklin: 30 Greatest Hits, Atlantic, 1990*



Patti LaBelle (1944 -) She began as the lead singer of Patti LaBelle & the Bluebells (later just “LaBelle”); their biggest hit was 1975’s “Lady Marmalade.” She went solo and had a string of hits throughout the 80s and 90s, including “New Attitude” and “On My Own.” *Listen To: Pattie LaBelle: Greatest Hits, MCA, 1996*

Chaka Khan (1953-) She first came to prominence as the singer of the funk band Rufus; she had a #1 hit single in 1978 with “I’m Every Woman.” *Listen To: Epiphany: The Best of Chaka Khan, Vol. 1, Reprise/WEA, 1996*



Macy Gray (1970-) Sometimes described as “Billie Holiday meets Tina Turner,” Macy Gray won the 2001 Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance for “I Try.” *Listen To: The Very Best of Macy Gray, Sony, 2004*

Erykah Badu (1971-) With a smooth “Neo Soul” style and a voice often compared to Billie Holiday, her best known songs include “You Got Me,” “Tyrone,” “Next Lifetime” and “On & On.” *Listen To: Baduizm, Universal, 1997*



Mary J. Blige (1971 -) Her 1992 debut album, What’s the 411? earned her the nickname “The Queen of Hip Hop Soul” for the unique way she blended the two styles. The winner of three Grammy Awards, her biggest hit has been “Family Affair”, released in 2001. *Listen To: What’s the 411? MCA, 1992*

Lauryn Hill (1975 -) She began her career with the group the Fugees; her 1998 solo album The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill was nominated for 11 Grammys, winning five including Album of the Year. In 1999 she was named one of the “100 Most Influential Black



Americans by Ebony Magazine.” *Listen To: The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill, Sony, 1998*



Alicia Keys (1981 -) Wrote her first song at age 14; her debut album Songs in A Minor earned her five 2002 Grammy Awards, including Best New Artist. Her follow up album, The Diary of Alicia Keys, won four Grammy Awards in 2004. Her albums have sold over 17 million copies. In 2005, the L.A. Times named her the second most powerful artist in the pop music industry (after R&B singer Usher.) *Listen To: Songs in A Minor, J-Records, 2001*

Rihanna (1988 -) Rihanna is one of the most powerful voices in hip hop today, with eight Grammys under her belt and multiple sales records beaten, she has been making music for over fifteen years, spanning a variety of genres and is known for high energy and passionate songs such as “Pon de Replay,” “Work,” and “We Found Love” *Listen To: Good Girl Gone Bad, Def Jam and SRP, 2007*



Beyoncé (1981 -) Often referred to by her fans as queen Bey, Beyoncé has stood at the forefront of hip hop and R and B for almost twenty years. Over her career Beyoncé has won 22 well Emmys and sold over 70 million records. Her latest album, Lemonade, and set the record for most streamed release by a female artist of all time. The album is an insightful and honest look at black womanhood in modern America, and draws many parallels with the time in which the Color Purple is set. *Listen To: Lemonade, Parkwood and Columbia, 2016*

From Spirituals to the Blues A Music Listening List

- Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs and Ballads, Rounder Select, 1998
- Southern Journey, Vol. 1: Voices From The American South — Blues, Ballads, Hymns, Reels, Shouts, Chanteys And Work Songs, Rounder Select, 1997
- Say It Loud! A Celebration of Black Music in America, Rhino, 2001
- Georgia Blues 1928-33, Document Records, 1994
- As Good As It Gets: Jazz Early Days V.2, Disky, 2001
- An Anthology of Big Band Swing (1930 – 1955,) Verve, 1993
- Juke Joint Jump: Boogie Woogie Celebration, Sony, 1996
- House of Blues: Essential Women in Blues, House of Blues, 1997

To listen to these and other music compilations, visit your local library or search a music database online.

BEHAVIORAL STUDIES

Gender Roles in *The Color Purple*

The Color Purple, both the novel and its film version, ignited many discussions among readers and viewers concerning what the story says about the relationships between men and women. Critics claimed that the characterization of Mister was an attack on African American males, while others maintained that there was a variety of male-female relationships that depicted a range of truthful human behavior.

The Color Purple raises many questions about traditional gender roles: that is, how does society expect men and women to act? What qualities are considered “masculine” and “feminine”? What limits does society place on the ways men and women can act?

Southern society in the 19th and early 20th centuries was divided in many ways: wealthy and poor, white and black, male and female. Each division had one side with power, and one that was relatively powerless. This created incredible tension at every level of society.

The South's population was primarily rural. Extended families had to stay together, since a lot of work was required to keep any household running. The family structure was patriarchal, meaning that men were considered to be the heads of the household. Men did the majority of the farm work, and took care of family finances, the building of the family home, and defending the family property, if necessary. The women were expected to care for the children, prepare family meals, wash clothes, clean house, chop wood, and carry water. Women often bore children every year, leaving them weaker and more vulnerable to illness. Women often died in childbirth; a man would frequently marry twice or three times, because a woman was needed to care for his children.

Large families were valued because the mortality rate was high. Many children did not survive to adulthood, so couples had as many children as they were able to. If family members survived to old age, they were kept as part of the extended family, helping to care for young children and assisting with running the household.

African American families in the South had additional pressures. During slavery, families were often not allowed to be together; slave owners separated husbands from wives, and parents from children. Slaves in a household would form their own family units; often these units were headed by the women of the group.

After slavery was abolished, freed slaves tried to reunite with their families. The strain of living under slavery took its toll on both men and women: Men had to reassert their expected place as head of the family, while women were forced to give up their say in family matters. This was not true of all families, but it was a common situation among those trying to adjust to a new way of living.

By the time that *The Color Purple* begins, barely two generations have

Behavioral Studies Exercises

Discuss

An actress playing the role of Celie has to portray the character from age 14 up through age 50. How would someone playing a young character speak and move differently from how they are playing an older character? What other clues do we get about someone's age when we observe them?

Write

Think about Celie's dreams, hopes, wishes, and her fears. Imagine you are playing this role in a stage adaptation. How would you prepare for this role? Write a journal entry as the character.

Explore

Some of the “animal dances” of the 1920s that were popular in juke joints were the “snake hips,” the “buzzard lope,” and the “fish tail.” Invent your own animal dance: Observe an animal, ideally in real life (at home, in the park, or at a zoo); find a television program or a video about animals if you can't find one to observe live. Watch the animal's movements, and try to re-create them with your body. Choose a few of the animal's moves and make a short dance out of it.

Find a piece of music that reminds you of the animal you've chosen; see if you can adapt your dance steps to fit the music. Teach the class how to do the steps you've invented; see if they can guess what animal you based it on.

passed since the end of the Civil War. Family patterns have not changed greatly; men and women still have clearly defined roles in the family, and in society.

The central relationship triangle is among Celie, Mister, and Shug. Shug, being a blues singer, is freed of the traditional expectations that a woman faces. Some may judge her, but no one expects her to cook the meals, wash clothes, or bring up children. For Celie, it is just the opposite: For most of her life, she is viewed only as someone who cooks, cleans, and cares for others. Mister is expected to fulfill the man's role — to be the “big dog” in charge of everyone else in the household. At the time, men were considered free to discipline their wives and children in any way they saw fit, including physical punishment.

In contrast, the relationship between Harpo and Sofia is one in which they both try to define new roles. Harpo is criticized for being unmanly when he lets Sofia have her way; even Celie advises him to beat her to make her submit to him. Sofia is not content to be subservient, and when the situation no longer suits her, she leaves rather than compromise.

Even Nettie, who has chosen the path of adventure in choosing to become a teacher and missionary in Africa, finds that she cannot escape traditional gender roles: The Olinka tribe has just as strong ideas about the relationship between men and women as Americans do. *The Color Purple* has many layers of meaning for the audience to explore. It challenges us to reconsider our ideas about the way men and women — people — should treat each other, and the roles that they are given in a family and in society.

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The Color Purple, The Musical

Official Website: colorpurple.com

Cast Recording: Produced by Broadway Records

broadwayrecords.com/cds/the-color-purple-2015-cd

Vocal Selections: Published by Hal Leonard

amazon.com/Color-Purple-Musical-Vocal-Selections/dp/1495059057

Amateur Licensing: Theatrical Rights Worldwide

theatricalrights.com/show/the-color-purple/

#COLOR PURPLE THE MUSICAL

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