

# Kindred character analysis: alice greenwood



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Octavia E. Butler's novel *Kindred* details the harrowing journey of 26-year-old Dana Franklin. A modern black woman from 1970s Los Angeles, Dana is continuously jerked back through time to the land of her ancestors: early 1800s Maryland. Her task? Save her white ancestor, Rufus Weylin, from death. The risk? If she does not, she may never be born. As an educated black woman in this time of slavery, she must watch everything she says and does just to survive, and she learns to rely upon the tight-knit slave community to help her through. One figure in particular, however, stands out to Dana as who she could have been, had she been born in this time period. That figure is Alice Greenwood, born free but forced into slavery through Rufus's cruelty. Throughout this narrative, Alice's example is a grim reminder of what people will do just to survive, and a caution to Dana to be wary of becoming complacent. Alice exhibits multiple qualities as the novel progresses, starting with strength, moving forward to resolve, and ultimately ending in despair as she is pushed past her breaking point.

First, Alice does exhibit great strength throughout the narrative. The first encounter Dana has with Alice occurs when Alice is a small child. Alice and her mother are free black women, according to Rufus (28), but Alice's father is a slave, who sneaks out at night to visit his family (35). Dana sees patrollers rip him out of the house and strip him and his wife naked before whipping him. Alice witnesses this occur, and does "weep noisily against her mother's leg" (36), but when the patrollers are gone, she quietly goes to her mother's side and does not show fear when Dana calls to her. To see such horrible experiences and still be able to trust others shows me that Alice has

a great deal of inner strength, which she definitely requires being a black woman in a slave state.

However, it may be easier for children to show strength as life has not yet broken them. As Alice grows older, her strength does threaten to break. She works through it the best way she can by showing resolve, defined as the determination to stick to a plan. Her life circumstances become miserable when she is stripped of her dignity and freedom to serve Rufus Weylin's aggressive appetites. Although she often snaps at Dana, calling her a traitor and a "mammy" figure, and has mood swings, she is willing to do whatever it takes to survive. Dana often thinks to herself that she and Alice could have been the same person if Dana were born in a different time, and knows that it's hard to criticize another person's decisions when Alice was just doing what she had to do to stay alive.

But one person can only take so much pain, and Alice's resolve eventually gives way to despair and the loss of all her hope. Her miseries started strong by being born black in the antebellum South, and the loss of her freedom at Rufus Weylin's demands also was a great shock to her (157). She also suffered much as Rufus's mistress and being forced into his bed each night, as well as being abused by him physically at least once that Dana knows of. It isn't until Rufus threatens her children that Alice breaks completely. Dana discovers on her last visit that Alice has hung herself (248). As Dana begins to investigate what led to this, she discovers that Rufus pretended to sell Alice and his children, Joseph and Hagar, to get back at Alice for attempting to runaway (251). Alice's loss of her children led to the breaking point, resulting in a tragic suicide.

In a world where she had no rights under the law and virtually zero prospects for happiness other than the love of her children, losing them meant there was nothing left to live for. Dana realizes that this choice is not selfish, and the responsibility to live life can be overwhelming for those who have been pushed this far. Dana is grateful that her life took a different path. Alice is a strong woman full of resolve; however, even strong women can be pushed to despair. In a cruel world, Alice shines as a person of self-honesty and the willingness to protect her own life and her children's lives. Her life and death serve as a strong reminder to the rest of us of the importance of kindness, independence, and the continuing need for social justice in our world.