

The color purple:
literary techniques
employed by alice
walker to develop
celie's...



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"It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how I know trees fear man," (23) uttered the protagonist of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Such words of meekness were characteristic of Celie's speech that is, in the beginning of the novel. As the novel progressed, however, Celie's acquiescent behavior transformed into one of resilience and dignity. By incorporating the literary techniques of tone, symbolism, and juxtaposition into her novel, Alice Walker was able to develop Celie's character, emphasizing her progression from subservience to independence.

Tone serves as an important device in personifying a novel's character. Such is the case in *The Color Purple*. In her subservient state, Celie responded little, if at all, to the abuse she was exposed to. For instance, Celie stated in a despondent tone that whenever she had been forced to enter into sexual intercourse, she would apathetically yield, allowing either her Pa or Mr.

_____ to "git up there and enjoy himself just the same. No matter what I'm thinking. No matter what I feel. It just him. Heartfeeling don't even seem to enter into it." (69) Celie's continual surrender was marked by hopelessness. She believed that resistance would only do to her what she thought it had done to her sister Nettie: "I think bout Nettie, dead. She fight, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive." (22)

Apparently, Celie believed that hoping for a passionate life of affection would only lead to her own demise. Thus, she hopelessly chose to live an indifferent life of agony. "I can't even remember the last time I felt mad... terrible feeling. Then I felt nothing at all," (44) Celie recalled, speaking of how she entered into apathy. This apathy, however, disintegrated towards

the end of the novel upon her reception of Nettie's letters. For the first time in her life, she experienced the feeling of resentment. This emotion was expressed brazenly when Celie responded to Mr. _____, " You a lowdown dog is what's wrong... It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need." (207) Her tone in articulating this statement was clearly not timid. On the contrary, it was exceptionally vindictive. A spiteful tone was again emitted by Celie when, in response to Mr. _____'s verbal abuse, she uttered, " I curse you. Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble... everything you even dream about will fail. Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice. The jail you plan for me is the one in which you will rot..." (213) The fact that Celie opposed Mr. _____'s abuse instead of merely accepting it substantiated Celie's entry into independence. Often, authors employ the language device of symbolism to develop certain concepts within their characters. Pants, for instance, illustrate a direct application of symbolism. Trousers usually denote masculinity; thus, Celie's incorporation of them into her wardrobe symbolizes her attainment of masculinity and because the majority of the novel's men are portrayed as having this dominance. Yet, the pants not only enabled Celie to become self-confident, but also to become self-sufficient. It was through her pants factory that Celie was able to acquire independence from financial assistance from Shug and Mr. _____, despite the discouragements of Mr. _____: " You not getting a penny of my money... not one thin dime. Nothing up North for nobody like you... All you fit to do in Memphis is be Shug's maid... you nothing at all." (208, 212-213) In order to progress out of subservience, it was necessary for Celie to gain a sense of self-esteem. Celie was able to obtain this through Shug's religious notions. Shug was able to <https://assignbuster.com/the-color-purple-literary-techniques-employed-by-alice-walker-to-develop-celies-character/>

instill in Celie the concept that God is an inward force that gives meaning to everything that exists in nature, including the unobtrusive color purple. Because the color purple is often unnoticed and neglected in fields, it symbolizes Celie in her submissive state. After adopting Shug's religious ideals, Celie was able to fully appreciate nature. Moreover, Celie was so convinced that she possessed a bond with the earth that she believed she was able to "curse" Mr. _____ through the power of nature's "trees, "air," and "dirt." (213-214) Accompanying Celie's newfound appreciation for nature was Celie's appreciation for the color purple and, therefore, her own existence. This fondness was evident in Celie's account of her room: "Everything in my room purple and red cept the floor, that painted bright yellow." (291) Symbolism also resonates in the way particular characters in *The Color Purple* are identified. Celie's male counterparts, Alphonso and Albert, both established their position as the "king" of the household, having the women and children as their inferiors. Instead of the designation of "King," the titles of "Pa" and "Mr. _____" were borne, respectively. Being called by their first names by their "inferiors" would be regarded as an act of disobedience. Thus, the fact that Celie called Mr. _____ "Albert" and acknowledged Pa as "Alphonso" signifies the eradication of their supremacy over her. Juxtaposition functions as an effective tool in emphasizing the similarities, or lack thereof, between two or more individuals. In *The Color Purple*, Walker employed this literary element to compare and contrast Celie's persona with those of other characters. One individual who parallels the subordinate Celie is Mr. _____'s son Harpo. Although "Harpo nearly big as his daddy, [he] weak in will." (29) Like Celie, Harpo was an object of Mr. _____'s abuse emotional and physical. He was forced to work in the field

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throughout the entire day, “[sweating], chopping, and plowing.” (29) Celie even acknowledged their similarity when she said “ Harpo no better at fighting his daddy back than me,” (29) admitting to the passivity of both Harpo and herself. Harpo’s wife Sofia, however, completely contrasted Celie’s character. Celie admitted to this when she wrote, “ I like Sofia, but she don’t act like me at all.” (38) While Celie struggled under the battering of Mr. _____ and Pa, Sofia chose “ to fight [her] daddy... [her] brothers... [and her] cousins and uncles.” (42) It was she, not the male Harpo, who maintained the upper hand in her marriage. Because she, indeed, had the authority in the relationship between Harpo and herself, she represented the woman Celie longed to be a woman who “ can’t be beat.” (66) Like Sofia, Shug was a direct contrast of Celie’s character. She possessed talent, beauty, and, most importantly, authority over Mr. _____. As the novel progressed, the similarity between Celie and Harpo lessened, while the contrast between Celie and Shug and Sofia became less distinct. With the encouragement of Shug and Sofia, Celie was able to shun the submissive lifestyle that she and Harpo once lived. “ You ought to bash Mr. _____ head open,” (44) Sofia urged, willing Celie to break out of her passivity. At the same time, Shug inspired Celie to view love, life, and God with a new perspective a perspective that impelled her to be “ at peace with the world.” (255) She also granted Celie the money she needed to establish her own pants factory. The assimilation of the influences brought on by Shug and Sofia, thus, enabled Celie to become the individual she deserved to be an independent, confident, and resilient woman.” I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook... but I’m here,” (214) Celie declared assertively towards the end of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. Such words of audacity were not <https://assignbuster.com/the-color-purple-literary-techniques-employed-by-alice-walker-to-develop-celies-character/>

always characteristic of the protagonist's speech. In the early chapters of the novel, Celie clearly demonstrated a submissive temperament. Towards the end of the novel, however, Celie achieved a sense of self-respect. Alice Walker was able to effectively detail this achievement of independence by incorporating the language techniques of tone, symbolism, and juxtaposition.