

Alice walker life and work research paper examples

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Alice Walker is an award winning American writer and activist. She has written material on racial and gender issues. Her works include poetry and fictional essays, which addressed issues, which faced African Americans at the time. Her most prolific work is *The Color Purple*, which won her a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award (Baker 18). Robinson characterizes Walker, “as a womanist, a black feminist, and comments on how Walker became an author partially to cope with the isolation caused by a childhood injury (294).”

Walker is a native of Georgia from an area known as Eatonton (Baker 18). She is the youngest child of Willie Lee Walker and his wife Minnie Lou Tallulah Grant who had eight children. Her father was a farmer who earned a measly \$ 300 from dairy farming and sharecropping (Gillespie 23). Mrs. Walker supplemented her husband’s income by working as a housemaid. This cumulative hard work enabled them to take Alice through college. Her parents also resisted attempts by white landlords to force their children to work in the farms (Gillespie 24).

Alice grew up listening to stories narrated by her grandfather. This oral tradition planted in her seed of storytelling. As a young girl, Alice wrote privately because she could not freely write in her family. In 1952, her brother accidentally shot her in the eye. The wound was treated too late leaving her blinded in that eye. This left her introverted and self-conscious. She turned to writing and poetry for solace. At 14, the scar that formed on the injured eye was removed. This helped her to gain back her confidence. Walker was voted the most popular girl in in senior school (Robinson 295).

She won a full scholarship to Spelman College, which is in Atlanta in 1961 (Jago50). She later changed to Sarah Lawrence a college near New York where she graduated in 1965. While at Spelman College, one of her lecturers influenced her into joining the civil rights movement, which was gaining active at the time (Jago 510. Her activism agenda informed her decision to relocate to the south to register African-American voters in Georgia and Mississippi. She is still actively involved in activism. In 2003, she was part of the Women for Peace movement and Code Pink, which was a group of women against America's war in Iraq.

In her personal life, Walker was married in 1965 and amicably divorced in 1976. Her husband Melvyn Leventhal was a civil rights lawyer. Together, they moved to Mississippi where they were threatened by the racist whites including the feared Ku Klux Klan. Alice gave birth to their daughter Rebecca in 1969. Rebecca later became estranged from her mother. In her memoir, she expressed how she felt more like a political symbol than a cherished daughter did. This conflict has gone to the extent that Alice has excluded her daughter from her will. In mid 90s, Alice Walker was romantically involved with Tracy Chapman a singer and songwriter.

Writing Career

Alice Walker wrote her first poetry book while still studying at Sarah Lawrence. She took a short break in writing while attending to her activism activities in Mississippi. When she resumed her writing, she joined Ms. Magazine where she worked as an editor. Her article on Zora Neale Hurston awakened interest in the diseased writer, which led to the discovery of her

unmarked grave. Walker together with another scholar of Hurston's works bought a headstone to mark the gravesite.

Walker published her first novel in 1970. The book "The Third Life of Grange Copeland" highlighted the plight of activists during the civil rights movement in the South (Gillespie 30). She published her best work in 1982. *The Color Purple* chronicled the life of a young African American woman trying to fight her way against white racism and black chauvinism. This book became a great commercial success. It was developed for the big screen in 1985. The movie was critically acclaimed. The book was also adopted for Broadway in 2005.

In addition to her award-winning novel, Walker has also written other novels, which address the struggles of black people, especially women. She tackles pertinent issues such as racism, sexism, and violence within society. She also highlights the cultural role of all women of color in history. Her titles include "The Temple of My Familiar." One of her books "Possessing the Secret of Joy" includes characters and their offspring who featured in the 'The color Purple' (Smith).

Everyday Use

One of her earliest works, *Everyday Use* is a short story, which addresses education and the effect it has on young African Americans (Walker 23). In this book, Alice examines feminism, racism, and emancipation from the eyes of three women from one family. She portrays the life of a hardworking mother together with her two daughters. Mama Johnson's elder daughter

Dee is beautiful and educated compared to her younger daughter who is introverted and disadvantaged. Maggie the younger daughter bears ugly scars from a fire accident that razed the family's old house. She is also not as smart as her sister is. Her mother therefore agrees that Dee would be better adopted in an urban setting since she is smart, educated, and beautiful (Walker 25).

Alice Walker shows the strength of Mama in her ability to fend for her two daughters single handedly.

“ She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole

lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice.”(Walker 30)

Alice Walker does not mention any father figure for the daughters or a husband for mama. Dee is an ambitious young woman desperate to upgrade herself to the better life that education and the city presented. Mama gives her daughter a chance to achieve this dream by raising funds through the church to allow Dee to pursue her education in Augusta. Maggie stays home with her mother with whom they have a closer relationship. Her physical appearance, poor sight, and lower education make her timid and afraid of her elder sister (Walker 26).

Mama and Maggie prepare for Dee's visit from the city as though she was an important guest as opposed to being family. Dee arrives dressed in glamorous and pompous clothes and jewelry. She is accompanied by a male friend whose name indicates is Muslim. Dee has also changed her name to

an exotic African name, which she believes represents her awareness of her African roots. The intention of her visit is to take a prized family quilt, which belongs to her sister Maggie, and use it alongside other family items as souvenirs in her own city house. The title of the book "Everyday Use" comes from Dee's mockery of her sister's typical use of the quilts for functional purposes (Walker 26). Dee believes that displaying these valuable pieces in her home would be a better than the everyday use her younger sister was putting them to. Mama gets angered and agitated by Dee's attitude of disrespect. She prevents Maggie from giving up her quilt. Dee leaves abruptly ending the visit. Mama is left with a new sense of appreciation for her younger daughter's good heart.

The book represents the dynamics of the lives of young African Americans who are torn between their cultures and the influences of education. At a young age, they are eager to become like their white counterparts. As they get older, they desire their roots, heritage, and end up creating their own interpretations of what being black means. Dee finds herself in this dilemma. Her ambition takes her to the city where she meets people who awaken her desire to be closer to her roots. The problem is that she still lacks respect for her family. In her attempt to become more conscious, she ends up alienating herself from her closest family. Ironically, this is the opposite of what she seeks. The story presents identity crisis and the confusion of culture for young African Americans clearly.

Conclusion

In 2007, Alice donated boxes of her manuscripts to Emory University. The 122 boxes contained rough drafts of most of her works including the draft copies of *The Color Purple*. Other materials include poems that she never published including a scrapbook containing poetry she wrote when she was 15 years old. There are also correspondents between her, family, and colleagues. This archive will help future scholars who will be interested in her life and work. Alice Walker is a passionate woman who goes to great lengths to defend what she stands for. Her works are targeted at a higher level of consciousness for African Americans. She delves into the intricacies of a people making gains against racism while trying to catch up with their oppressors. The issues that arise in between are the stock of her trade. She tells the stories of the struggles and achievements of her people in the pages of her works. Her personal life has also been marked by conflict. She is estranged from her daughter because of conflict of ideology. Despite of these challenges, Alice is undoubtedly a strong woman with a clear mission in life.

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