

# The color purple and gender roles



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Color Purple is an African American staple piece of literature. The film released in 1985 directed by none other than Steven Spielberg won a Gold Globe for Best Actress: Whoopi Goldberg, Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing, NAACP Image Award for outstanding Motion Picture and earning \$142 million box office sales. The author of the book The Color Purple Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983.

Walker included topics of symbolism and realism in her work such as loyalty, strength, racism, marriage, happiness, love, sex, and rape just to name a few. These same topics of realism happening all over the world highlighted in Walker's writing were the same reasons for it being banned numerous times from its release in 1982 until present day.

A topic that was depicted in both the book, the movie, and stage play of The Color Purple was gender roles. The idea of black woman in society and how men, black men in this case, dominated and oppressed women of color throughout their daily lives. The topic of rape, incest, arranged marriage; all were at the forefront of this literature. The topic of violence against women is heavily described as well as women's strength and authority to leave their abusive husband. This is seen in Sophia and Harpo's relationship, where she has the moral authority to leave her husband who abuses her and takes her children to live with her sister. This book also challenges the topic of religion and God. Through the book there is a shift in the main characters view of God as a white man to God being more of a universal being. Celie's emotions towards femininity and masculinity open up her emotions and attraction of women over men. Celie is afraid of men, they scare her and instill fear in her, so she avoids looking at them and doesn't feel attracted to them. Where

as women are more friendly and able to reproduce the love and affection our main character Celie desires. So here we see topics of sexuality and non-heteronormativity.

Before we can analyze why this book suffered its trials and tribulations of being accepted into American society. We must look at what was going on in this country up until this point. Ronald Reagan was elected two years prior and the Iraq War was in its early stages. Segregation was abolished a little over twenty years prior to *The Color Purple's* release, although there was still inequality. Marginalized people across the country protested for equal rights along with the protest of the Vietnam War were the tone of the 70s and 80's. At the release of this book and the many controversies that revolved around its content. I almost wonder if the real problem lies within America not wanting to recognize a powerful African American piece of literature.

This book has been challenged and banned from libraries and school reading list since its release up until 2014 for its subject matter. What troubles me the most is why we feel the need to restrict audiences from literature that touches on the truth in society. The book addresses the life of a woman in Georgia dealing with the day-to-day oppression of a man and her inner desires of love. This same woman uneducated, beaten, raped by someone who supposedly loved her but she doesn't share the same emotional connection with in her forced arrangement of a marriage. I feel that the challenges made against this book were solely unjust. In what ways can we be aware of past occurrences if they aren't made available to us to analyze.

During the most recent challenge of *The Color Purple* in 2014 the book was challenged due to complaints of obscenity, language, and sexuality when assigned to an Advanced Placement eleventh grade class. My question isn't that the sole purpose of being apart of an Advanced Placement course? To be able to analyze complex literature you may not have access to in regular courses. It seems to me that these children are being punished for their intelligence. The argument was that the pieces of the book that described, sex, violence and rape don't serve any literary value to the AP students. My question is who is to determine whether these real world experiences are of literary value? If these topics weren't of some issue Alice Walker wouldn't have took the time to document the many adversities black women and women in general face. Although it is often the parents who are eager to censor their child's learning experiences from reality this parent was defeated and the color Purple remained in Brunswick County, North Carolina.