

The color purple



ESSAY WRITING- THE COLOR PURPLE Discuss the thematic concerns of the novel *The Color Purple*, a feminist and historical fictional novel written by Alice Walker focuses on the thematic concerns of the early 20th century. The thematic concerns that Walker discusses are racial tensions, the African experience, feminism and religion. These themes are portrayed through the main characters Celie and Nettie within an epistolary (letter) format.

The thematic concern of racial tension is adequately shown through Celie's perception to convey white supremacy over the African-American community of the southern states. The racial tension is intertwined throughout the novel as Celie's father was lynched for being a successful African-American, the informalities with the language and the differing treatment to show segregation when Celie is shopping and meets Corrine. The most powerful scene that explores white supremacy is examined through Celie's first person narration.

The character Sofia whom is dominant and a symbol of feminism within the African-American community, stands up for her rights when she is patronised by Miss Millie. This is evident in "All your children so clean, she say, would you like to work for me, be my maid?". The direct and demanding comment by Miss Millie, who represents the hierarchy of the white race, shows the expectations of African-American women as being that of a lower class citizen and a domestic servant. The racial tension between the two races as conveyed through "they dragged her to the ground" and Celie's blunt language and graphic description "when I see Sofia I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs". This event

highlights the intensity of racial prejudice and tension between the two races that has been deeply ingrained in the Southern States of America for generations.

Walker discusses the theme of racial tension throughout the novel, to reinforce the point of view that racism was wide spread throughout the early 20th century. The thematic concern of the African experience is adequately shown throughout the novel in Nettie's letters to Celie from Africa whilst on her missionary journey with Corrine, Samuel, Adam and Olivia. Nettie's experiences as a missionary take place among the Olinka tribe. The missionary group approach the African coast in a state of considerable excitement. This is evident through Nettie's perception 'something stuck in me, in my soul, she say, like a large bell vibrated', later in the novel it turns into disillusionment of various forms.

A primary interest in Africa for the Americans is the connection with their slave ancestors and the discovery of their roots. This, however, turns out to be the first confusing element; the Africans themselves don't want to know about slavery or its effects, and therefore, acknowledge no responsibility for it, and actually see the Americans as alien. This is seen in 'you Christians come here, try to change us, get sick and go back to England, or wherever you come from'. Nettie, Corrine and Samuel have a certain novelty value because they are black, but the fact that they are from another culture is much stronger than any thought of racial unity. Nettie also disapproves of the African customs of female circumcision and the scarification of young people's faces. The strongest element in the descriptions of Africa is not the impact of the missionaries on non-Christians,

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which for the most part is entirely superficial, but the sense of a society in a state of economic turmoil. There is a sense in which both black Americans and Africans are the victims of white oppression, but very little indication that they can be of much assistance to one another.

Walker focuses on the African experience heavily in the second half of the novel to highlight how Americans attempted to avilise the word and show the treatment if blacks on another continent. The thematic concern of feminism is portrayed throughout the book, mainly in Celie??™s letters. This is highlighted in her letter that Albert discovers, stating how Celie has been spending her time since leaving him and states ??? mens spose to wear the pants???.

This shows the male attitudes of the time. In Celie??™s first letter, it contains an account of Alphonso??™s rape of Celie. Also, when Mary Agnes (Squeak) helps Sofia get out of prison, she gets raped by her own uncle, this shows male dominance. The freedom of Celie and Shug is the main emotional issue in the novel; as many of the women are weak; united, their force is more than equal to the dominating men. The feministic quality that Walker shows is Celie??™s changing character when she becomes an independent woman and opens her own business. This can be seen in ??? I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, I got friends and time.

???. The novel??™s message is that women must stand up against this, and that they must help one another. It is impossible to dominate Sofia because from and early age she learned to fight as it is evident in ??? A girl child ain??™t safe in a family of men???. This statement is delivered powerfully by

Sofia declaring that women must take a stand for their rights and defy male dominance. The thematic concern of religion is shown in various forms throughout the novel, Celie's changing attitudes to religion are an important part of her emancipation, as she rejects the conventional institutions of the Church and does something much liberating. The Church is an important part of the social community in which Celie is brought up. It is a general meeting place as well as an influence on morals.

Celie looks to the Church and its idea of God for support, although in practice she gets little help from the church community. Celie hopes to manage her problems with God help. As Celie's perception of the world changes, she realises that the view of God and the Bible which she has grown up with, far from being a help, is actually irrelevant to her needs. Celie imagines Angels all in white, white hair, white eyes, look like albinos. On the other hand, the repetition of white and simile like albinos highlights that her understanding of religion is heavily influenced upon the white perception, revealing her historical and social context. Through Nettie's letters she realises that she has been misled by a false image created by illustrations white people have added to accompany the text in the Bible. The freedom of Celie comes out when she accepts Shug's view and the process involves a complete change of attitude. Celie's own religion seems to eventually embrace almost all experience.

The last letter begins with Dear God, Dear Stars, Dear trees, Dear sky, Dear peoples, Dear Everything, Dear God. It is a simple view, and an optimistic one. Religion doesn't depend on an organised church, but on

shared love, producing delight in living of which the richness of the colour purple is made.

Overall, Alice Walker has focused on many of the thematic concerns of the 20th century in her feministic and historical fictional novel ??? the color purple???, through an epistolary format. These themes are racial tension, the African experience, feminism and religion, as Walker, shows the issues of the period unfamiliar to many today.