

My mother's blue  
bowl – literary  
criticism essay  
sample



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BUSTER**

In the short story, “ My Mother’s Blue Bowl” by Alice Walker, Alice’s mother is the archetypal earth mother surrounded by the materialistic external world. The mother, Mama Walker, shows her unconditional love for her children despite their challenging socio-economic state. She considers her possessions to be worth nothing to her as she lets go so “ easily, without emphasis or regret” (Walker 253). One example of this is after moving to the projects after her children finished college, Mama Walker adjusted even though she had longed for a nice house earlier in life. Despite poverty and ever present racism, the family endures with dignity. “ My Mother’s Blue Bowl” shows the power of nature over a materialistic world. Mama Walker has little value for materialistic possessions as shown through her recycling and eliminating them.

The symbolic colours typical of earth mother archetypes in the story represent hope and renewal. Their poor apartment is full of life despite their lack of money and social prejudice. Mama Walker accomplishes this through her love for nature by “ her flowers: everywhere, inside the house and outside. [Planting them] in anything she [manages] to get her green hands on, including old suitcases and abandoned shoes. She [recycles] everything, effortlessly” (Walker 252). Through the symbols of light versus darkness, Alice Walker describes a house her mother had found when Alice was thirteen – one with “[green-shuttering], [white-walls]. Breezy. With a lawn and a hedge and giant pecan trees.” (Walker 252), suggesting that they had found hope and a sense of renewal in their lives through nature. Mama Walker is not moved by the changes in her life after Alice had left. She knows

that materialistic possessions are not important as she brings beauty into anything she touches.

Despite the Jim Crow Laws they lived in and the family's lack of money, Mama Walker remains faithful to her simple natural way of life. To her, freeing her from material possessions is “ a step in the direction of divestiture, lightening her load, permitting her worldly possessions to dwindle in significance...” (Walker 252). It does not matter to her to have so little because those possessions have no value to her. Instead, she favours the natural environment around her house by planting flowers in old suitcases and discarded shoes, and having paintings of flowers and fruits. In this way, Mama Walker transforms material possessions and makes them beautiful. She brings beauty and warmth into the home and these qualities make her glow in the eyes of Alice Walker.

The blue bowl that Mama Walker gives to Alice may not mean anything to the mother but to Alice “ she had given [her] a symbol of what [her mother] herself [represents] in [her] life” (Walker 253). Through the blue bowl in the story, this symbol makes Alice Walker realize that her mother's love of nature and ability to bring warmth and light in other people's lives makes her an archetypal earth mother.