

# The theme of women and work with reference to alice walker 'the color purple' in ...

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The theme of women and work with reference to Alice Walker 'The Color Purple' in the prose texts from Literature and Gender. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* permits the reader to think about the theme of women and work in the background of a double repressed life in American society. Through her novel Mrs. Walker reveals her early political interests as a civil rights worker and the reader can find many of her social views and ideologies discussed in this novel. American black women are subjected to racial discrimination from white people and from their second repression black men, who forcefully impose the double standard of white community on women. The story portrays the transformation of the protagonist Celie from the status of a passive female to an independent and insightful person within the Southern rural society. The novel discusses a variety of issues such as slavery, sexual relation between men and women and racial discrimination which are linked with the theme of women and work. Women were also prevented from selecting specific jobs. The novel, thus, portrays the character of Celie, Nettie and Sophia as the representatives of the working black women who are forced to obey the restrictions of a male-dominating society. The events of the novel are developed through some letters written by Celie to God and by Nettie to Celie. Reader may feel difference in Alice Walker's treatment because the central character of the novel is a human whereas she writes letter to God. The author's way of presentation is very much related to its theme. Here, Celia is a black woman who leads a submissive life and is permitted to reveal her sufferings only to God. It reveals that black women were not allowed to mingle with others. Celie begins her journey with the status of a young, vulnerable, abused woman of

black origin. During her journey Celie questions everything she has been taught and criticizes the mannerisms of the male-dominating society. From her first letter to God, the reader can learn that she is raped by her father Alfonso. Here novelist made a conscious effort to criticize the attitude of male-dominating society towards American black women. Christopher Hubert gives support for Mrs. Walker's views by saying: "To her father, and other men of this town, women are disposable and forgettable units, only useful for providing themselves with pleasure" (Hubert 1996, p. 10). As a result of her Father's rape attempt Celie falls pregnant two times and is taken out of school. The novelist's knowledge about the social and political background of African American community after the elimination of slavery is very much evident in the novel. Black people were segregated from the mainstream of society and they were forced to lead a kind of submissive life. In case of black women, life became more horrifying in family as well as in the workplace. Alice Walker presents her female characters as suffering people who struggle with self reliance and material existence. Celie, Nettie, and Sophia fail to prove their own selves in front of the society. They are negated of the right to find a work and make money. Sophia worked as a maid in Major's hose and she tries to make her own identity. But the problem is that Sophia's new job is offered by other men. After the marriage with Mr. Albert, Celia begins the second phase of her life and this was also a painful experience for Celie. The Society strictly imposed certain rules and regulations on womenfolk and they are forced to lead a miserable life. In the case of Celie, she is forced to lead an automatic life with her husband. She has the duty to raise Albert's children, take full control of domestic duties, to

bear pleasurable intimate nights with her husband Albert, and suffer with the unnecessary beating from her husband. Through the character of Nettie, the readers get the chance to understand a different phases of female life. For Celie, Nettie becomes a great consolation and she gets a chance to share her feelings. Unfortunately Albert shows his real nature to Nettie, but she escapes from his rape attempt and join with Samuel and his wife Corrine, working as missionaries. It is significant for the reader to analyze the historical background of the lives of African Americans after the elimination of slavery. Even though there are no longer slaves in the land, black people remained the society as sharecroppers and the whites have conquered the status of land owners. In her novel, Mrs. Walker portrays the character of Celie and Sofia as the representatives of oppressed community who face physical, mental, sexual and racial repressions. In the beginning part of the story, the reader can find Celie being forced to do the domestic duties of typical black women as the society demands it. Harold Bloom comments; “Female role demands that women be domestic; she must clean her house, tend to the children and obey her husband” (Bloom 2008, p. 70). When Albert knows about his former wife Shug Avery being ill and decides to bring her to his home, Celie informs her husband to bring her and she also reveals her readiness to look after her. Here, Celie is forced to do what her husband asks her to do. In the end Celie succeeds to find her own personality and soul among the trials and tribulations of the patriarchal society. In conclusion, it is evident that Alice Walker’s *The color Purple* portrays the theme of women and work in a highly male-dominating society. The novel reveals the life journey of the central character Celie, the black women. Women characters

of the novel represent the repressed life of black women in African American community. They are forced to do any work without reluctance and this is being very well depicted in the novel. References Bloom, Harold 2008, Alice Walker's *The color purple*, Infobase Publishing. Hubert, Christopher 1996, Alice Walker's *The color purple*, Illustrated ed, Research & Education Assoc.