

Alice walker and her novel the color purple



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Alice Walker is an African American author, novelist, essayist, and poet who writes about freedom (biography. com). She is most known for her novel, *The Color Purple*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1983 (Williams). In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, the main themes expressed throughout the novel are sexism and violence; however, there is also symbolism throughout.

On February 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, Alice Walker was born into a family of sharecroppers. In this rural town, she was the youngest daughter of eight siblings (biography. com). At the age of eight years old, Alice was playing with 2 of her brothers when one accidentally shot her in the right eye with a B. B. gun. She was blinded in her right eye and grew very self conscious, so she stopped going out and doing much. Shortly after this incident, she began to put her thoughts into writing poetry (Napierkowski).

Alice and her family lived in the south of Georgia, which was very racially divided, but she was a very intelligent child. She went to the only high school near her that allowed blacks. There she was the valediction of her high school and received a scholarship to attend Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1961. A couple years later in 1963, Alice transferred to Sarah Lawrence College located in New York. During her time at Sarah Lawrence, she traveled to Africa for a study abroad program (biography. com). In 1965, she graduated with her bachelor's degree and shortly after published her first poetry book. Many of the poems in this book were written during her study abroad program in Africa (Kort).

After college, she worked as a teacher and lecturer, and she also was majorly involved with the civil rights movement in Mississippi. While in

Mississippi, she met Melvyn Leventhal. Melvyn was born in New York City, and he worked as a Jewish lawyer (biography. com). Alice and Melvyn got married in 1967 and were the first couple to be to be interracially married in Jackson, Mississippi (Napierkowski). During their nine years of marriage, they had a daughter together named Rebecca Walker. After her parents divorce in 1976, Rebecca would spend 2 years at a time with each parent. Rebecca doesn't talk to her mother, Alice, much because she thinks her mother neglected her as a child (Kort).

Alice Walker began writing novels in 1968, and her first ever novel was published in 1970 (Napierkowski). Her third novel, *The Color Purple*, was published in 1982 and became the work she is still well known for today. In 1983, she won the Pulitzer Prize for this novel, which is about a black woman who overcomes sexual abuse by bonding with other women (Williams). Aside from winning the Pulitzer Prize, she also won the National Book Award, the O. Henry Award and the Mahmoud Darwish Literary Prize. In 2006, Alice was entered into the California Hall of Fame and received the LennonOno Peace Award in 2010. Besides being known for being an African American author, she is also known for her work as an activist in the Civil Rights Movement movement (biography. com). *The Color Purple* got lots of praise, but also received much criticism. Black women admired her for how powerful the novel was (Napierkowski).

Today, Alice Walker is seventy four years old. She has a home in Mexico that she lives in during the summer. Her main home is located in California where she has a publishing house. She is still a proud women's activist today. Alice is one of America's greatest heroes (Kort).

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The time period of this novel, *The Color Purple*, was in the 1930s. Many people during this time in Georgia were sharecroppers. The land that the sharecroppers used was owned by their former slave owners. During this time, many things were segregated including the schools and churches. The black and white kids could not even use the same water fountains or eat at the same lunch table. They used different bathrooms, and many of them even went to separate schools. At this time, segregation was legal. Black and whites even had different movie places to attend, and they also lived in different neighborhoods. During this period of segregation, black men and women had an origin in white society. Men take dominance in a white society, meaning they are the controllers of the family. These rules from the white society began to play a role in the black society. This made the black males want dominance which angered some black women (Napierkowski).

The 1930s was a total different time than we experience today. Back in the 1930s, the men took dominance over the house. They brought in all the money and controlled the family; meanwhile, the women would stay at home to cook and to do housework. If they had children, the women would take care of them also. Today, men and women split what needs to be done in the house. Most married couples both go to work each day to support their families and either the husband or wife comes home to cook for their spouse and children. They work together to get all the household things done. Next, in the 1930s, there was tons of racism and segregation laws all throughout the country. Today, any type of discrimination in a place of work is illegal. If someone were to discriminate against someone else at work, they could not only lose their job, but also they could be arrested. The people of today do

not put up with discrimination because it is wrong. People should not be discriminated against because of their skin color. Also in the 1930s, many African Americans belonged to Baptist churches. Today, many of the African Americans have turned to Muslim religion and completely left Christianity. Lastly, in the 1930s, there was violence against women but the police totally ignored it. Today, any violence against women is completely illegal and is not something to joke around with (Napierkowski).

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, the main themes expressed throughout the novel are sexism and violence; however, there is also symbolism throughout. Sexism plays a major role throughout the novel. During the time of this novel, sexism was a common thing that occurred. This sexism transformed Celie, the main character, from an immature little girl to an independent young woman. Celie is told not to tell anyone but God what is going on, so she decided to write letters about the abuse she is receiving. This taught her how to speak up for herself and to be her own person. Without being faced with sexism, Celie might not have ever learned the lessons she did. She has not only become an independent young woman, but she doesn't have to hide in the shadows anymore (Napierkowski). She can now be open about her life and what she is going through instead of only being able to write letters to God. Napierkowski said, the major view during this time was that white males could do whatever they pleased with women. This shows the sexism that Celie faced.

Along with the theme of sexism, violence played a major role also. Albert, Celie's step father, was very violent with her. He would abuse her and he even went so far as to rape her. He treated her like she was nothing and he

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didn't even care. He would abuse her physically and mentally. Her husband would also beat her for many years. This violence she experienced was life changing. It was common for their culture to be full of violence, mainly why her step father and husband believed in it. While experiencing this violence, Celie tried to be positive and think about positive thoughts. She would think of things she could look forward to instead of thinking of what was happening. She would cope with the violence she'd experience by writing to God. This is where she let it all out.

One of the main symbols in the novel is the color purple. Purple can mean many things, but in this particular story, it is used to show hope. It stands for all the good things life has to offer instead of focusing on the bad. She may have been drained mentally and emotionally, but in reality she was a survivor. Purple is also a sign of happiness. The hope and happiness that purple represents helps Celie get through this hard time in her life. This word could have the smallest meaning but the symbolism it has means way more than that. This word took Celie a long way. Another symbol used is God. God represents salvation throughout the novel. God is how Celie can keep her sanity (Napierkowski). Celie sees God as a white man with a beard. Later in the story she realizes God has no gender and no race(Walker).

Lastly, the finale symbol used is pants. These pants represent Celie transforming from an immature little girl to an independent young woman. She went her whole life not wearing pants because she believe they were strictly for men. She finally decides to wear pants and then made a successful business making them. She stopped seeing them as for a certain gender and began to see that they could be worn by anyone.

Alice Walker supports many themes and symbols throughout her novel. She is not only a author, but an inspiration for many who read her award winning novel, *The Color Purple*. She is also an essayist, novelist and poet, as well as an activist. She is well known for writing about freedom and what that entails.