

# Growing up in "the flowers" by alice walker



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In the coming-of-age story "The Flowers," Alice Walker effectively portrays an endearing, innocent African American girl whose transition to adulthood comes suddenly and without warning. It begins with a rosy and light-hearted illustration of Myop's life and closes with a gruesome, sobering event that changes her forever: she stumbles upon the body of an African-American man who, as she shortly comes to realize, was lynched for his skin color. With superb imagery, Walker shows how this discovery transforms Myop and forces her early entry into adulthood.

In the story's first several paragraphs Walker introduces Myop and the scene as blissful and serene. "[Myop] skipped lightly...the days had never been as beautiful as these...worked out the beat of a song...she felt light and good in the warm sun." Then, in the third paragraph, Walker begins to insert very subtle hints about what is to follow. For example, "Myop watched the tiny white bubbles disrupt the thin black scale of soil and the water that silently rose and slid away down the stream" is actually an allusion to the relation between white and black people. Myop, however, is obviously unaware of any greater symbolic importance; she is simply enjoying a day outdoors, observing soil and water and picking flowers that also represent her purity and innocence.

The fifth paragraph is really the beginning of Myop's transition to adulthood. Walker indicates this 'beginning' by stating the time: 'By twelve o'clock, her arms laden with sprigs...she was a mile or more away from home'. Citing this specific time is Walker's subtle way of indicating transition - morning to evening, light to dark. Not wanting to leave, Myop 'circles back to the house, back to the peacefulness of the morning' - but it is then that she steps '

smack into his eyes', indicating that sudden transition of understanding, which comes in an instant whether or not you desire it so and changes your life forever.

This key image of the story comes at its climax when Myop, picking a pink rose for her bundle of flowers, notices the noose with which the dead man was hanged. She subsequently realizes how this grotesque and brutal death relates to her very own heritage and 'out of respect' goes on to lay down the flowers she had picked. Initially representing her childhood innocence, the flowers - upon being laid down - represent her transition from childhood to adulthood. By leaving them, Myop seems to have realized that the world is not as blissful and flowery as it seemed only moments before.

"The Flowers," though short and seemingly straightforward, is a powerful depiction of how events well beyond a child's control can confront her out of nowhere and change her utterly. Confronting not only murder but lynching, a crime Myop knew targeted "people like her," forced Myop to grow up immediately in a way that people who live without fear of racism might not. Walker's coming of age story is all the more effective - and important - because of its social and historical relevance.