

Essay and discussion questions

1. Many readers and critics have criticised Walker's representation of African-American men. Why do you think this is? How might you defend Walker's treatment of masculinity in *The Color Purple*?
2. Read Nettie's Letters. How does Walker dramatise life in Africa? How does Celie's education differ from Nettie's? Are there any similarities between the experiences of the Africans and the African-Americans? What does Celie learn from Nettie's letters?
3. Read Celie's first and last letters and compare her tone, syntax and use of language. How does her voice change as the novel progresses?
4. Many readers identify Sofia's narrative as the most compelling challenge to racism in the novel. Why is this?
5. After her confrontation with Celie, Sofia suggests that they 'make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains' (*The Color Purple*, The Women's Press, 1983, 39). Alice Walker has revealed that she worked on a quilt while writing *The Color Purple*. How does quilting function as a motif in the novel?
6. Many readers feel that *The Color Purple* is, above all else, a celebration of community. What roles do Shug, Sofia and Nettie play in Celie's development?
7. 'Not much funny to me. That funny. I laugh. She laugh. Then us both laugh so hard us flop down on the step' (*The Color Purple* - 39). What role does laughter play in *The Color Purple*?
8. Many critics have taken exception to the utopian ending of the novel, arguing that romance triumphs over reality. Make cases for and against this argument.
9. Alice Walker defines *The Color Purple* as 'an historical novel.' To what extent does the novel fit this model? How easy is it to place the novel in context?
10. Shug tells Celie that 'God love everything you love - and a mess of stuff you don't' (*The Color Purple* 167). What role does religion play in the novel? What forms does spirituality take? How does Celie's relationship with God change?
11. Identify and compare the different kinds of family represented in the novel. What do they suggest about traditional notions of 'home' and 'family'?
12. Watch Steven Spielberg's cinematic adaptation of Walker's novel. What impact does his incarnation of *The Color Purple* have on your reading of the novel? What does he change and why? How might different social groups respond to the film?