

# STUDY GUIDE

# The Color Purple



Based upon the novel written by Alice Walker  
and the Warner Bros./Amblin Entertainment Motion Picture

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Book by **Marsha Norman** Music and Lyrics by  
**Brenda Allee Russell** **Stephen Willis Bray**

A co-production with the Citadel Theatre  
Directed by Kimberley Rampersad

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# THE COLOR PURPLE

## STUDY GUIDE

*Contributors: The Citadel Theatre and Ksenia Broda-Milian*

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## ALICE WALKER

Author of *The Color Purple*

Content from The Citadel Theatre's *The Color Purple* Enrichment Guide



Born in Eatonton, Georgia, on February 9, 1944, Alice Walker partly spent her life working as a teacher, lecturer and social worker but is primarily known as a writer today. Daughter of a maid and sister to 7 siblings, Walker spent her childhood with little money. She suffered a serious eye injury at the age of 8 by being shot by a BB pellet while playing with her brothers. A white scar around her right eye made her really self-conscious and led her to isolate herself from much of the world. However, she engaged herself in reading and writing poetry that soon became her source of enjoyment.

Walker studied in a segregated institution and became the valedictorian of her batch. She then went to Spelman College in Atlanta having received a scholarship. Later, she transferred to New York where she studied at the Sarah Lawrence College. One of her years was spent in Africa as part of an exchange programme. 1965 marked an important year in her life as she graduated from college and also published her first short story.

Post-graduation, Walker worked as a teacher, lecturer and social worker. She fought for equal rights being given to African Americans and used the Civil Rights Movement as a medium to achieve this goal. In 1968, her first collection of poetry, *Once*, got published.

However, today she is primarily known for writing novels and her first work by the name of *Third Life of Grange Copeland* got published in 1970. She experimented with different types of writing ranging from short stories including *In Love and Trouble* to children's books including *Langston Hughes: American Poet*. She also played a pivotal role in the Black Feminist Movement going on at the time. In 1983, she coined the term *womanism* to mean Black feminism.

She got married in 1967 to Melvyn Leventhal who was a lawyer and an activist. They had one daughter, Rebecca (born 1969). However, the couple got divorced in 1976.

She rose to fame in 1982 with her third novel, *The Color Purple*, which highlighted the struggles of an African American woman. The novel gained much praise from the critics and Walker was awarded the *Pulitzer Prize for Fiction* and the *National Book Award for Fiction* in 1983. There

have also been a film and a musical based on the novel. *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), are two of her other early works which gained much recognition.

In recent years, Walker has continued to establish herself as a versatile writer. In the period from 2004 to 2006, a lot of her work got worldwide recognition. In 2004, her novel, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, was published followed by a collection of essays in 2006 including *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Light in a Time of Darkness* and *There Is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me*.

In 2010, she re-established herself as a political activist through her written work. In *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine/Israel*, the writer highlighted her engagement with the group Women for Women International.

Alice Walker's most recent work includes the 2013 book called *The Cushion in the Road*. Another is a collection of poems known as *The World Will Follow Joy Turning Madness into Flowers*. Currently aged 71, Walker continues to impress the world with her marvelous writing skills and is renowned as one of the finest African American writers of all time.

<https://www.famousafricanamericans.org/alice-walker>

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

By Kimberley Rampersad



KIMBERLEY RAMPERSAD

Having the opportunity to connect with you, our audience, allows me to reflect upon what I thought this play may be, and what it has grown into. We navigate an empty field with Celie. We stoop with her as she weeds out poverty, patriarchy and normalized violence and watch as she attempts to plant seeds of agency, acceptance and forgiveness. Celie gathers these blossoms from the richest soils fertilized by the Ancestors, tilled by Nettie, Sophia and Shug, and watered by her own tears. She creates a bouquet of Self, of the Divine, manifested as Nature. The Color Purple is as the creation of theatre – the sum of the parts. I offer my gratitude to Ms. Alice Walker for writing the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the gardeners who tend this play both on and off the stage, and particularly to the actors – the most splendid bouquet to behold.

## CHARACTERS

***Celie***—a woman from Georgia, Celie is 14 at the beginning of the story

***Nettie***—Celie’s younger sister

***Pa***—Celie and Nettie’s father

***Mister***—local farmer and Celie’s husband

***Harpo***—Mister’s son from a previous marriage

***Sofia***—Harpo’s wife

***Shug Avery***—Mister’s long-time lover, a singer from Memphis

***Church Ladies***—Jarene, Doris, Darlene

***Squeak***— Waitress at the juke joint

***Grady***— Shug’s husband

***Ol’ Mister***— Mister’s father

***Celie’s children***— Adam and Olivia

***Buster***— Sofia’s boyfriend



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple* | Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

## SYNOPSIS

*Content from The Citadel Theatre's The Color Purple Enrichment Guide*

"Celie is the kind of hero we all have a chance to be whatever happens to us in this life. She bears her own suffering with grace, and reaches out to others to provide for their needs and spare them harm. Our love for Celie grows as she makes her way through a perilous journey, as she prays without ceasing for some assurance that God sees her." — Marsha Norman



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple*  
Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

## ACT ONE

As the story begins, it is Sunday morning in rural Georgia, 1909. "Po chile' Celie, 14 years old and pregnant for the second time, is playing a clapping game with her beloved sister, Nettie. When she comes to church with her sister and their Pa, Celie goes into labour before the service ends. Later, Pa takes Celie's baby from her arms saying he is going to get rid of it, "same as the last one," and that she better not tell anybody except God what happened. Celie asks God for a sign, something that will let her know what is happening to her.

A few years later, when a local farmer, Mister, needs a wife to take care of his children, Pa says Nettie is too young, but offers him Celie instead, and throws a cow into the bargain. Although the girls vow never to be parted, Celie goes with Mister to save Nettie's dreams of becoming a teacher. As the local Church Ladies cluck their disapproval, Mister's field-hands introduce Celie to her life of hard work at Mister's.

Nettie arrives one day, fleeing from Pa's lecherous attentions, and asks if she can stay. Mister agrees, but then attacks Nettie on her way to school. When she fights back, he throws her off his property, swearing that the girls will never see each other again. Nettie has promised to write, so Celie tries to check the mailbox, but years go by, and Mister won't even let her open it. Mister's son, Harpo, grows up and brings home Sofia, a strong-willed woman whom he loves and marries. But eventually, Harpo can't take being bossed around by Sofia. Mister tells him he has to beat Sofia if he wants her to mind. Even Celie agrees this is the only way to make a woman "jump when he says to." But Sofia gives as good as she gets. Not long after that, Sofia's sisters arrive to take her away. Sofia tries to convince Celie to come with her, but she can't. Left alone, Harpo turns their house into a juke joint, and hires a new waitress, Squeak, to work there. Squeak soon moves in with Harpo.

The whole town prepares for the arrival of Shug Avery, a sexy singer who is Mister's long time lover. But when Shug arrives, she is in such bad shape that in spite of local disapproval, Mister brings her home where Celie nurses her back to health. As Celie takes care of Shug, she begins to experience feelings of affection and tenderness for the first time, as Shug befriends her.

When Shug sings at Harpo's Juke Joint Sofia returns with her new boyfriend and gets into a fight with Squeak. In Mister's house, Shug and Celie explore their newfound love for each other. Shug gives Celie a letter she has found from "someone in Africa, goin' by the stamps." Celie recognises Nettie's handwriting and knows instantly that her beloved sister is alive.



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple*  
Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

## **ACT TWO**

Celie finds the rest of the letters Mister had hidden over the years, and learns that Nettie went to Africa with the missionary family who adopted Celie's babies and they are all now in Africa in a refugee camp. In Georgia, Sofia has been beaten and thrown in jail for punching the mayor. (His wife had invited her to be their maid, and wouldn't take no for an answer.) Celie goes to the jail to comfort her, and learns that Sofia will have to serve out her sentence in the custody of the Mayor's wife, as her maid.

Twelve years later, Sofia and Shug both return home for Easter. Shug discovers the extent of Celie's anger toward God and invites her to come live with her and her new husband in Memphis. After Easter dinner Celie tells Mister she is leaving. He protests and she finally confronts him about the way he treated her. Squeak is off to Memphis too, saying she wants to sing. Harpo defends her choice to his father. Then after they leave, he invites Sofia to come back and live at the Juke Joint.

Mister soon feels the effect of Celie's curse. He's drunk all the time and is shunned by everyone. Harpo challenges him to make things right with Celie, and Mister tries to understand what that would mean. At Shug's house in Memphis, Celie discovers she has a gift for making pants. When she inherits the house she grew up in, she goes home and starts a business selling her unique designs. Mister tries to help Sofia's sickly youngest child Henrietta, and even Celie has to admit that Mister is trying to change.

Harpo and Sofia are spending a pleasant night at home when Mister comes to tell them that he has found Nettie, but she is having some trouble getting home from Africa. Shug tells Celie she has fallen in love with a young flute player, and asks Celle to let her have a fling with this boy. Walking home, Celie realises she isn't destroyed by this, and feels a deep love for herself, for the first time.

1949. As the whole community is gathered for a Fourth of July picnic at Celie's house, Celie hears a car door slam, then a familiar song from her childhood. Nettie runs up to the house, with Celie's grown children behind her. Mister and Shug have made this reunion possible, and Celle thanks them, and God, for the safe return of her family.



## SONGS FROM THE COLOR PURPLE

Book by Marsha Norman | Music and Lyrics by Brenda Russell, Allee Willis and Stephen Bray



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple*  
Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

### ACT 1

1. "Overture" – Orchestra
2. "Huckleberry Pie" / "Mysterious Ways" – Young Celie and Young Nettie / Celie, Nettie and Ensemble
3. "Somebody Gonna Love You" – Celie
4. "Our Prayer" – Nettie, Celie, Mister, Doris, Darlene, Jarene and Pa
5. "That Fine Mister" – Doris, Darlene and Jarene
6. "Big Dog" – Mister, Celie, Young Harpo, Mister's Daughters and Male Ensemble
7. "Lily of the Field" – Celie, Nettie and Mister
8. "Dear God - Sofia" – Celie
9. "A Tree Named Sofia" – Doris, Darlene and Jarene
10. "Hell No!" - Sofia, Celie, & Sofia's Sisters
11. "Brown Betty" – Harpo, Squeak, Celie and Male Ensemble
12. "Shug Avery Comin' to Town" – Mister, Celie and Ensemble
13. "All We've Got to Say" – Doris, Darlene and Jarene
14. "Dear God - Shug" – Celie and Shug
15. "Too Beautiful for Words" – Shug
16. "Push Da Button" – Shug, Harpo and Ensemble
17. "Uh-Oh!" – Sofia, Squeak, Celie, Buster and Female Ensemble
18. "What About Love?" – Celie and Shug
19. "Act I Finale" – Orchestra, Shug, Celie and Nettie

## ACT 2

20. "African Homeland" – Nettie, Celie, Young Adam, Young Olivia and Ensemble
21. "The Color Purple" – Shug and Celie
22. "Church Ladies' Easter"† – Doris, Darlene and Jarene
23. "I Curse You Mister"† – Celie and Mister
24. "Mister's Song - Celie's Curse" – Mister
25. "Miss Celie's Pants" – Celie, Shug, Sofia and Female Ensemble
26. "Any Little Thing" – Harpo and Sofia
27. "What About Love? (Reprise)" – Celie and Shug
28. "I'm Here" – Celie
29. "The Color Purple (Reprise)" – Celie



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple* | Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

## Q & A WITH MUSIC DIRECTOR, FLOYDD RICKETTS



**Tell us about the music in *The Color Purple*, and your role in this production.**

Well, the music in this show is quite eclectic. It's a cornucopia of different afro-diasporic music such as gospel, blues, spirituals, R&B, soul, jazz and musical theatre. It really runs the full gamut. It's a very exciting piece of Black art. The creative threesome on this score really pushed the envelope to ensure that audiences coming to see the show receive a master class on Black American music. I have the distinct pleasure of acting as Music Director on this production, and it has been a complete thrill to collaborate with the actors, the creative team, the pit musicians, and all of those involved behind the scenes who make this theatrical piece come to life, especially Director Kimberley Rampersad who, and I don't say this lightly, is a both a virtuoso and genius.

**How are you preparing for *The Color Purple*?**

I actually spent the whole summer working on getting this score under my fingers. Trying to find all the tasty bits that I could, all the nuances, all the surprises, all the humour, all the tragedy, the grotesqueness. It was certainly a labour of love, made even more complex because I have not played many of these styles of music before. Presently, I am studying early choral music (baroque, renaissance, classical, etc.) so though I've grown up listening to all these genres of music, I've rarely played them. However, the score is written so well, SO well, that if you lean into it, it's truly a workshop in style. I'm sure I'll take many of the musical lessons that this score has taught me to future projects.

**What role does the music play in the production?**

*The Color Purple* is about 80% music. Those of us who watched the 1985 film version of the story will remember the wonderful score written and produced by the inimitable Quincy Jones. One of the cool things about this musical is that although Quincy Jones signed on as a producer for the musical, they used absolutely none of his film music (despite him giving them the greenlight to do so). So, this is a completely new musical landscape, true to the quintessential mode of writing musicals. Stephen Bray, Brenda Russell and Allee Willis collaboratively wrote these compelling and soul-stirring tunes, for example the particularly moving 11 o'clock number "I'm Here", which has become an empowerment anthem for those who have found, or are still searching for, their inner strength, beauty and self-worth. What the music does well is to highlight the effects of the dialogue and the emotional journeys of the characters in a way that some-times dialogue alone fails to do.

## CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

By Ksenia Broda-Milian

### African-American Life in Georgia

*The Color Purple* is set in rural Georgia near Eatonton, where Alice Walker was born. The novel takes place from 1911-43. In 1865, the end of the American Civil War led to Congress passing the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Known as the Emancipation, this act prohibited slavery.

Slavery, the forced servitude of one person by another, was brutal and inhumane. Besides having to perform incredibly difficult labour, enslaved people were subject to horrific physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Enslaved people were viewed as property instead of humans, and there was no regard for any family ties from capture to being sold to different plantations. Husbands and wives were separated, and children taken from their parents. Amy and Andrew Billingsley note "Slave women were exploited by white owners...for pleasure and profit. A role for the Black man as husband and father was systematically denied...In a word, the [B]lack family had no physical, psychological, social, or economic protection." While the eras of slavery occurred before the time of *The Color Purple* we can see the repercussions in regards to racial power dynamics, family relations, and treatment of women ripple through the community in the play.

There had been 400 000 enslaved people in Georgia, and for decades afterward, the state was in upheaval. Many plantation owners wanted former enslaved people to stay powerless and tensions were high. The reorganization of the South after the war was called **Reconstruction**. Some former enslaved people of Georgia were granted parcels of land, but only landowners with decrees from the court could keep their land after harvest. Not everyone could prove their claim and sharecropping became the new form of labour. In this system, wealthy whites - former enslavers - owned farmland, and Black farmers (and some poor whites) were permitted to lease some land by paying a portion of their profit from their crops. All supplies were given to them by the owner who also took that cost out of the farmers' profits. Some landowners would determine every year that the farmers were a few dollars short of what they owed, and debt would accumulate until it was so great there was no hope of it ever being repaid - keeping sharecroppers tied to the land and forcing them to work it in a variation on slavery. Many sharecropping contracts were unfair and Black people were intimidated into signing them by "Black Codes" drafted by southern legislatures. Despite the fact that enslaved people had technically been freed, they were still incredibly oppressed. Under such codes freedmen were only supposed to work as field hands and if unemployed they could be punished; children could

also be separated from families and forced to work. Black farmers saw that the only way to prosper was to own land outright and many worked towards this goal. By 1910, Black farmers owned almost one-fourth of the farms that were worked by Blacks (the rest being sharecroppers). In *The Color Purple*, Mister owns his land, passed down to him by Ol' Mister who worked the same plot when he was enslaved. Celie's stepfather Pa runs a store that eventually allows him to build a house on an acreage which Celie inherits.

However, Georgia was not a particularly wealthy state and any Black economic success made whites determined to cling to any power possible. In the play, Celie's father "real Pa" (who originally ran the store) was seen as an economic threat to white businesses, and he was lynched. Politically, a philosophy of "separate by equal" was adopted - as long as facilities existed for both white and Black citizens, they were "equal" and one could not serve the other population. This meant that institutions separated by race included schools, restaurants, parks, rail cars and other transportation, barbershops, cemeteries, baseball teams, mental hospitals, and prisons. The fact that two schools existed, for example, did not mean that both had the same access to resources and funding, though, and were not necessarily the same quality of experience. There are many examples of southern law, called Jim Crow laws, that legally disenfranchised Black citizens. These included depriving Black people of the right to vote with a tax - and then a literacy test, as more people became able to pay the tax - and forbidding interracial marriage. Consequences for not playing along with racial etiquette rules took the form of vigilante justice as well as legal repercussions, as seen in *The Color Purple* when Sofia is beaten by a mob and then imprisoned for talking back to the white Mayor's wife.

By 1920, there were very strong anti-Black feelings in the south; membership in the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan grew to high numbers. In the 1930s, the Great Depression struck rural Georgia particularly hard, while cities were less impacted because of industry. Federal government programs for unemployed people were available but the Georgia Governor did not allow Black people to participate until President Franklin Roosevelt threatened to withhold all aid money from the state. In the 1940s, when the script ends, Georgia's economy began to recover.

## **Gender Roles**

In the south, most of the population lived in rural areas, and extended families had to work together to keep the household going. There were defined gender roles in patriarchal family structures, in which men were the "head of the house" doing most of the physical farm work and dealing with finances. In this play, Mister and his family were relatively prosperous in their community; he could hire men to work for him, and Harpo would have done fine as owner of

the juke joint. Options were less varied for women who were expected to care for children, make meals, and do physical chores such as cleaning house, chopping wood, and carrying water. Because of high mortality rates large families were valued. Bearing children, often each year, could leave a woman weak and vulnerable to illness. Families were separated by slavery and while some were able to reunite after Emancipation, the strain of living under slavery “took its toll on both men and women: men had to reassert their expected place as head of the family, while women were forced to give up their say in family matters. This was not true of all families, but it was a common situation among those trying to adjust to a new way of living” (StageNotes). This only served to add conflict to families in already difficult situations. When *The Color Purple* starts the Civil War has been over for barely two generations, so men and women still had clearly defined family roles. A wife was expected to be subservient to her husband. As violence was being used in power dynamics between rich and poor and white and Black, it was also commonly used to enforce gender roles as it was seen as a man’s right to physically discipline his wife or children. Some women did work outside the home at this point. Most were cooks or maids (as Sofia had to become) and about half of white southern families employed at least one Black servant. Sofia is a surprise to all as she rails against prevailing gender stereotypes, and Celie breaks free of them by eventually leaving Mister. She also sets up an independent living for herself as an entrepreneur. Shug defies these domestic expectations too, but we see her being judged by the rest of the community for that. It was less common at this point for an African-American woman to work as a teacher, as Nettie planned. Even in Nettie’s missionary work, she finds that the Olinka also have strong ideas about men and women.

## **The Church**

As a result of deep racial divisions, many Black citizens established all-Black communities, usually organized around the church. During the time of slavery a large number of African-Americans converted to evangelical religions, including the Methodist or Baptist churches. Enslaved people used signals and messages to mix African rhythms and singing with evangelical Christianity, and so the predominantly white worship services of the time hold similarities to what would later become Gospel music. With the abolition of slavery, independent African-American churches were established. The church was a place where one could feel safety and community, and to express hope for a better life. Music was an important part of this. Howe and Began say “Gospel music focuses on eternal hope and triumph in the midst of the most difficult circumstances. There are no “style” restrictions to gospel music, only common themes and spirit in order to reach the widest audience possible.”

## Music

Throughout the African diaspora, music is an incredibly important point of connection. The tradition of a **work song** was brought to America by enslaved Africans. Labourers would sing rhythmic songs that coordinated their movements (swinging tools, picking fruit, and so on). Work songs were also known as work calls, field hollers, or arhoolies. They were also a form of communication to workers farther down the field. A sung or shouted line would get an answer back; this “call and response” structure where a lead singer has a line and the rest of the group responds was brought into gospel music as well. During the post-Reconstruction Era, the systemic inequity meant the majority of African-Americans were unable to read. The call and response method let everyone participate in religious worship without reading. It is also present in the rock & roll/rhythm & blues music that draws on gospel for inspiration (such as the music of Ray Charles). Work songs and field hollers gave rise to spirituals and the blues.

**Spirituals** expressed deep grief and pain felt by enslaved people. These often incorporated Biblical phrases and imagery - particularly those of the Israelites, enslaved in Egypt. These were songs of anguish and hope for a free future. Civil rights activist Dr. W.E.B DuBois described spirituals as “sorrow songs” for those who were “weary at heart.”

Feelings are also expressed in music in the **Blues** genre - these songs are non-narrative and less concerned with story. Also coming from the work song background, but sung by one person instead of a group, this genre carries on the traditions of West African storytellers. You’ll often hear techniques like melisma (one syllable sung across several pitches) or “bending” or flattening notes, and rhythmic syncopation. These can give a wailing or crying-like quality to the song. The blues was based on a simple pattern, usually using 12 four-count bars (measure of music). The 12-bar blues uses the three most common chords in a scale, known as the I, IV, and V chords. The blues singer is able to improvise over this basic chord pattern. Georgia was one of the major centres of the birth of blues (Britannica gives Blind Willie McTell and Blind Boy Fuller as examples of the Georgia style). In the 1920s, the first blues recordings were made by Black women, including Mamie Smith, Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, and Bessie Smith; in *The Color Purple* these women are represented by Shug Avery.

Jazz, swing, and rock & roll evolved from the blues; the I-IV-V chord progression being used in many early rock songs. From 1900 on, jazz grew, and reached its peak in the 1920s (the “Jazz Age”). It incorporates European harmonic structures and African-American rhythms. **Jazz** arose as musicians explored more complicated harmonies than blues’ simple chords, while keeping the flattened “blue notes” on the 3rd and 7th notes of the scales. Jazz players were also often improvisational. There was overlap between the genres - trumpeter Louis Armstrong, one of

the musicians developing this new style, recorded several songs with “Blues” in the title - but through the 1930s music began to get more specific. Jazz dance bands grew in size and parts were written in particular arrangements, with special sections for improvising in solos. A tighter musical style was known as **swing**, for the way that musicians played with a “bounce” slightly behind the beat. This musical style was popular through the 1930s and 40s.

As music evolved, so did places to hear it. Using music for worship in church remained important, but to hear blues and later jazz, you often needed to go to a juke joint. West African languages Wolof and Bambara have the word “dzug” which roughly means “unsavory.” From this evolved the words joog, jook, and juke in the Gullah dialect (a creole language developed in Georgia and South Carolina as a mix of English and West African languages.) These early nightclubs were a place for the Black community to gather safe from Jim Crow laws, but from this etymology it’s evident that these juke joints were definitely secular places to gather, very different than a church environment! Also known as barrelhouses, you could go to a juke to hear music, socialize, dance, and have a drink. They appeared through the southern states during the Reconstruction Era. Juke joints were typically out-of-the-way and surrounded by secrecy, relying on word of mouth for customers - in *The Color Purple* Harpo says that a juke joint is supposed to be in the woods. Most historic juke joints no longer exist, some due to economic reasons and competition, but the “back-door secrecy” inspired more mainstream commercial venues, like House of Blues, and the musical styles that the jukes incubated are their legacy.

## **Dialect**

In the foreword to the 2009 edition of the script, novel author Alice Walker wrote about the way her characters spoke. As a tool of both historical accuracy and characterization, folk dialect is a device that was kept in this version of the published script. Walker calls this Black Folk English; in academia, it may be referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), African American English (AAE), African American Language (AAL), Black English (BE), and Black English Vernacular (BEV). While the patterns and phrases might seem “wrong” to audience members hearing a dialect that may be unfamiliar to them, all speakers of English have unique dialects based upon factors such as age, heritage, region, and economic class. AAVE has its own grammatical rules that differ from British English, which created a linguistic stigma related to socioeconomic class, race, and prestige. Alice Walker’s introduction follows:

“The characters in *The Color Purple* who speak with what I term Black Folk English do so because this was the speech of Southern country people for many generations. It has mostly to do with structure: What you think bout that? How far you all go? What cause that drop in the



economy? Etcetera. Words may be left out of a sentence, yet the sentence makes perfect, understandable sense. This is where Black Folk English connects with folk languages around the world... The intent in the novel, the movie and the musical is to affirm the dignity of folk expression. That these (Black Folk English speaking) characters, the way they sound, is based on my memories of how my own parents and grandparents spoke, is a constant source of delight. In writing their voices, I have kept these ancestors with us.

“The temptation when presenting Black voices on the stage, especially Black voices from the South and from a by-gone era, is to exaggerate what one assumes all poor Black people sounded like. In *The Color Purple* this would be a mistake. There are many levels of education presented in the story, and many nuances in the way people say things. There is no minstrel quality to the speech of any of the characters, all of whom are serious, full blown human beings, and not caricatures. Care should be taken to protect this hard-won representation of dignity.”



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple* | Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

## THEMES

*Base content from The Citadel Theatre's The Color Purple Enrichment Guide  
Edited & Expanded by Ksenia Broda - Milian*

### **The Power of Strong Female Relationships**

Throughout *The Color Purple*, female relationships are a means for women to summon the courage to tell stories. In turn, these stories allow women to resist oppression and dominance. Relationships among women form a refuge, providing reciprocal love in a world filled with male violence. Female ties take many forms: some are motherly or sisterly, some are in the form of mentor and pupil, some are sexual, and some are friendships. Sofia claims that her ability to fight comes from her strong relationships with her sisters, and they sing about being each other's rock and tree "to hold on to in your time of need." Nettie's relationship with Celie anchors her through living in the unfamiliar culture of Africa. Most important, Celie's ties to Shug bring about Celie's gradual redemption and her attainment of a sense of self.

### **God and Religion**

As the narrative perspective shifts and develops, so too does Celie's view of God. As teenagers, we see Celie and Nettie together in church, and praying in the store saying "whatever come to us is in God's hands...I will say my prayer that God love me so deep he will promise our souls to keep forever, together." After Mister sends Nettie away from his house violently, Celie begins to question God's plan and whether God even cares about her ("what kind of God are you?"). She keeps sending messages to God, more out of habit than a sense of prayer. Celie sings about her new friend Sofia and "talk[s] to my Old Maker" when times are hard because though "this life'll soon be over. Heaven lasts always." Nettie thanks God when they reach the coast of Africa, and tells Celie that she has faith that God will bring the sisters back together. She entreats Celie to have faith too, but when Celie can't reach Nettie at the refugee camp with letters, she tells Shug that she's finished with prayer and not being listened to on earth or by God in Heaven. She thinks that "God just another man, far as I'm concerned... triflin'... lowdown..." but Shug is in earnest that God is not a man at all; Shug sees God in nature all around her. Shug's talk with Celie helps give her the courage to leave Mister. Seeing God all around gives Celie the ability to find power within herself and that whatever people may think about God, whether the Bible says it or not, Celie learns to find her own meaning in God. Celie's faith is fully reaffirmed when Nettie, Adam, and Olivia return to Georgia at the end of the play - and when she learns how many of the people in her life worked together to bring them back. Celie sees that "God is inside [her] and everyone else" and they express God's work through actions of love.

Religion builds a sense of community in the play, though it may be followed to various degrees by different characters. Biblical references are present throughout, when the girls attend church services but also when the ladies comment on the action.

### **Self-Discovery and Self Actualization**

Ultimately, this story is one of self-discovery for Celie, and for other characters. Celie begins the novel as a passive, quiet young girl, perplexed by her own pregnancy, by her rape at the hands of Pa, and her ill-treatment by Mister. Slowly, after meeting Shug and seeing her sister run away, Celie develops practical skills: she is a hard worker in the fields, she learns how to manage a house and raise children, and she meets other inspiring women, including Sofia, who has always had to fight the men in her life. Further, she discovers her own sexuality and capacity to love through her developing romance with Shug - and the subsequent heartbreak is the catalyst she needs to realize that she has inside of her all that she needs “to live a bountiful life.” Celie can finally love who she really is and is grateful for that, understanding “I’m beautiful, and I’m here.”

Other characters have arcs of self-discovery. Nettie received more years of schooling than Celie, and has seen the world, working as a missionary in Africa. But Nettie also realizes that she can balance her independence, and her desire to work, with a life that also includes two stepchildren—Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. Mister and Harpo make some realizations about themselves and their treatment of women, and work to make amends for that. Shug learns that though she is not capable of performing a certain role in Celie’s life, she can still work to express her love. Indeed, it is the arrival of this extended family on Celie's land at the end of the novel that signals the last stage in the journey of self-discovery of many characters.

### **Race and Racism**

Both rural Georgia and a remote African village are suffused with problems of race and racism. Celie believes herself to be ugly in part because of her very dark skin. Sofia, after fighting back against the genteel racism of the mayor and his wife, ends up serving as maid to that family. In general, very few career paths are open to the African Americans in the script: for the men, farming is the main occupation, although Harpo manages to open a bar. For women, it seems only possible to serve as a mother, work for a wealthier family as a servant, or to perform for a living, to sing as Squeak and Shug Avery do. Nettie describes meeting the Olinka “like Black seeing Black for the first time.... looking real fine” and Celie realizes that “what we’re taught to be don’t resemble the kings and queens who for thousands of years ruled magnificent cities washed away by tears” as she comes to terms with the fact that not only did slavery decimate African cities, but that the way enslaved people were treated led to her whole race thinking of themselves through the lens of their captors rather than as human beings. As soldiers drive the

Olinka from their homes, Nettie feels connected to “my people” and swears that they will find a place to live where their spirits will rise. At the end of the play when Nettie, Adam, and Olivia have returned from Africa, their entire family, including their chosen family, is able to come together for a picnic—something that would be considered completely normal for the white families of that time period, whose lives had not been ripped apart by the legacy of slavery and poverty.

### **Men, Women and Gender Roles**

In the beginning of the play, Celie is expected to serve her abusive father, and, later, her husband Mister and Nettie, not wanting to do either, runs away. Celie, meanwhile, has two children, whom Nettie then raises in Africa, coincidentally—Celie only leaves behind the drudgery of housework when Shug comes to live with her and Mister and begins to teach Celie about her body and about other ways of living, outside the control of men. Celie and Squeak, Harpo's second wife, end up living with Shug in Memphis, and Celie is able to start her pants-making company. Nettie encounters similar feelings among the Olinka, who don't want girls to read and who tell Nettie she “best be knowin' your station.”

The men in the novel, however, experience a different trajectory. It is expected that Black men of this time, especially in the South, work in the fields, and that women obey them absolutely. But after Shug, and then Celie, leave him behind, Mister realizes just how much he took for granted and how much he, and his son Harpo, have relied on the work of women throughout their lives.

The end of the play, then, celebrates both the continuity of family, populated by empowered female characters and repentant male ones, and the fact that “families,” and the roles within them, are fluid, often overlapping, and part of a long arc toward equality and greater understanding, even if that arc is dotted with tragedy, abuse, and neglect.



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of The Color Purple Photo  
Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

## GLOSSARY

Compiled by Ksenia Broda-Milian

**Braces** - suspenders; pieces of cloth that attach to the front of trousers, loop up over the shoulders, and reattach at the back to keep them pulled up.

**Button** - a euphemism for clitoris

**Candy Cane** - slang for cocaine

**Chariot** - a light wheeled cart. The line “they need a chariot today to swing low and carry them away” references the African-American spiritual *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*. The chariot in this song alludes to the Bible story of the prophet Elijah being taken to heaven by a chariot as well as the Underground Railroad, the freedom movement that helped enslaved people escape from the southern states to the north and Canada.

**Doggin’** - following someone closely, tracking them like a dog; hounding.

**Drawers** - underwear

**Heebies and jeebies** - jitters or anxiety

**Juke joint** - a small inexpensive establishment for eating, drinking, or dancing to the music of a jukebox or a live band

**Liniment oil** - when applied, soothes pain in joints or muscles

**Lily of the field** - from the Bible verse Matthew 6:28, in which Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount. Often interpreted as a caution not to worry about worldly anxieties, but to remember that God provides for life down to the lilies, even though they do not work. Celie questions if she really is a lily of the field, if God really does provide or care about her at all, then God will have to grant her prayer.

**Moonshine** - slang term for high-proof liquor, especially distilled corn whiskey. Usually referencing something brewed illegally (under the cover of night, hence the name)

**Mojo** - a magic spell, hex, or charm

**Reefer** - slang for marijuana

**Spit on your shoes** - a “spit shine” achieves very high gloss on a boot or shoe especially when partially obtained by the application of saliva

**Strumpet** - a female prostitute; by extension, a slur against a woman who has had many sexual encounters or relationships

**Pillar of salt** - reference to Lot's Wife in the Bible. Visiting angels came to the sinful city of Sodom and were offered lodging by Lot, who refused to give them up to raging townspeople. In the morning, the angels told Lot's family they would be spared from the destruction of the city but only if they didn't look back. Lot's wife did look back at her worldly life being consumed by flames and so turned into a pillar of salt. The church ladies could be saying that Shug is bringing so much sin to the town that it will be destroyed like Sodom and that Shug will refuse to turn her back on it.

**Thimble** - a pitted cap or cover worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing

**Ravage** - to wreak havoc on or affect destructively

**Missionary** - a person sent on a religious mission, especially one sent to promote Christianity in a foreign country.

**Slop-jar** - a chamber pot

**Lynch** ("real Pa got lynched") - to put to death (as by hanging) by mob action without legal approval or permission. In this context, there was likely a racial component to Celie's Pa being lynched. Throughout the late 19th century, racial tension grew throughout the United States. More of this tension was noticeable in the Southern parts of the United States. After the Civil War, many people felt that the formerly enslaved people were getting away with too much and felt they needed to be controlled. Lynchings were becoming a popular way of resolving some of the anger that whites had in relation to the free Blacks. (NAACP)

**Gabardine** - a tough, durable, tightly-woven, fabric twilled with diagonal ribs on the right side

**Velveteen** - a cotton clothing fabric with pile in imitation of velvet

**Britches** - slang for breeches, short pants covering the hips and thighs and fitting snugly at the lower edges at or just below the knee

## **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

*Compiled by Ksenia Broda-Milian*

Attending Royal MTC's production of *The Colour Purple* and discussing it, or participating in some of the suggested or similar activities, could fit into Manitoba Senior Year curricula in Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Arts, English Language Arts, Social Studies/History, and Human Ecology.

### **Dance (Senior Years)**

Responding: The learner uses critical reflection to inform dance learning and to develop agency and identity.

- DA-R1: The learner generates initial reactions to dance experiences.
- DA-R2: The learner critically observes and describes dance experiences.
- DA-R3: The learner analyzes and interprets dance experiences.

### **Music (Senior Years)**

Making: The learner develops language and practices for making music.

- M-M1: The learner develops competencies for using elements of music in a variety of contexts.

Creating: The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating music.

- M-CR1: The learner generates ideas from a variety of sources for creating music.
- M-CR2: The learner experiments with, develops, and uses ideas for creating music.

Connecting: The learner develops understandings about the significance of music by making connections to various times, places, social groups, and cultures.

- M-C1: The learner develops understandings about people and practices in music.
- M-C2: The learner develops understandings about the influence and impact of music.
- M-C3: The learner develops understandings about the roles, purposes, and meanings of music.

Responding: The learner uses critical reflection to inform music learning and to develop agency and identity.

- M-R1: The learner generates initial reactions to music experiences.
- M-R2: The learner critically listens to, observes and describes music experiences.
- M-R3: The learner analyzes and interprets music experiences.
- M-R4: The learner applies new understandings about music to construct identity and to act in transformative ways

### **Visual Arts (Senior Years)**

Creating: The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating visual art.

- VA–CR1: The learner generates and uses ideas from a variety of sources for creating visual art.
- VA–CR2: The learner develops original artworks, integrating ideas and art elements, principles, and media.

### **Drama/Theatre (Senior Years)**

Making: The learner develops language and practices for making drama/theatre.

- DR-M1: The learner develops competencies for using the tools and techniques of body, mind, and voice in a variety of contexts.

Creating: The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating drama/theatre.

- DR-CR1: The learner generates ideas from a variety of sources for creating drama/theatre.
- DR-CR2: The learner experiments with, develops, and uses ideas for creating drama/theatre.

Connecting: The learner develops understandings about the significance of the dramatic arts by making connections to various times, places, social groups, and cultures.

- DR-C1: The learner develops understandings about people and practices in the dramatic arts.
- DR-C2: The learner develops understanding about the influence and impact of the dramatic arts.

Responding: The learner uses critical reflection to inform drama/theatre learning and to develop agency and identity.

- DR-R1: The learner generates initial reactions to drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R2: The learner critically observes and describes drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R3: The learner analyzes and interprets drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R4: The learner applies new understandings about drama/ theatre to construct identity and to act in transformative ways.

### **English Language Arts (Senior 1 through 4)**

General Learning Outcome 1: Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.

- Express ideas 1.1.1
- Consider others' ideas 1.1.2
- Experiment with language and forms 1.1.3
- Develop understanding 1.2.1
- Explain opinions 1.2.2



- Combine ideas 1.2.3

General Learning Outcome 2: Comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts.

- Prior knowledge 2.1.1
- Experience various texts 2.2.1
- Connect self, texts, and culture 2.2.2
- Appreciate the artistry of texts 2.2.3
- Forms and genres 2.3.1
- Experiment with language 2.3.4

General Learning Outcome 3: Manage ideas and information.

- Make sense of information 3.2.5

General Learning Outcome 5: Celebrate and build community.

- Cooperate with others 5.1.1
- Work in groups 5.1.2
- Share and compare responses 5.2.1
- Appreciate diversity 5.2.3

### **Human Ecology: Textile Arts and Design (Grades 9-12)**

Goal 1: Demonstrate Technical and Applied Skills

Demonstrate safe practices and procedures for facilities, processes, tools, and equipment

- 1.3: Develop literacy and numeracy skills as they apply to textile arts.
- 2.1 Develop understanding of the elements and principles of design.

Goal 2: Demonstrate understanding of the fundamentals of design.

- 2.2: Develop understanding of the evolution of fashion.
- 2.3 Develop understanding of cultural fashion.

Goal 4: Demonstrate understanding of relationships and influences.

- 4.1: Develop understanding of influences on apparel choices.

### **Social Studies**

All Grades - Social Studies Skills

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Communication

Grade 7 Cluster 4: Human Impact in Europe or the Americas

- 7.4.4 Historical influences

Grade 8 Cluster 5: Shaping the Modern World

- 8.5.1 World Overview

- 8.5.2 Global Exploration  
Grade 9 Cluster 1: Diversity and Pluralism in Canada
- 9.1.2 Human Rights
- 9.1.3 Living Together in Canada
- 9.1.4 Integration and Pluralism

Grade 10 American History Units 1-4

Grade 11 History of Canada

While the content of *The Color Purple* is different than that studied in the Grade 11 curriculum, attending, discussing, and/or doing an activity about the play could correlate with Key Concepts of Historical Thinking:

- establish historical significance
- use primary source evidence
- identify continuity and change
- analyze cause and consequence
- take historical perspectives
- understand ethical dimensions of history

Grade 12 Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability

While the content of *The Color Purple* is different than that studied in the curriculum, attending, discussing, and/or doing an activity about the play could correlate with Pillars of Learning and Enduring Understandings:

Learning to Know

- Seek knowledge from diverse sources and perspectives.
- Use creative, critical, and systems thinking to address complex questions.

Learning to Do

- Cultivate and share personal skills, talents, and gifts.

Learning to Live Together

- Respect diversity and value equity
- Respect the inherent, inalienable, and universal nature of human rights.

Understanding: Political systems distribute power, privilege, and wealth in different ways, some more justly than others.

Understanding: The media do not provide neutral reflections of reality; they affect our decisions and actions.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Content from *The Citadel Theatre's The Color Purple Enrichment Guide*

1. Have you read the novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker? How does the musical compare?
2. *The Color Purple* is one of the most banned/challenged works of all time. Why do you think that is?
3. The musical presents both Jazz and Gospel music. What is the effect of music on Celie's or other characters' lives?
4. Celie was born in the early 1900s in Georgia, and much of the book and play is set during The Great Depression. How does the time and place affect Celie's life? Would Celie be a different person if she was born 20 years earlier? 20 years later?
5. Celie's relationship with herself changes throughout the play. Which life events have the strongest impacts? Why?
6. How do the people around her affect Celie?
  - Her father 'Pa'?
  - Her sister 'Nettie'?
  - Her husband 'Mister'?
  - Her stepson 'Harpo'?
  - Her/Mister's lover 'Shug'?
  - Her daughter-in-law 'Sofia'?
7. Celie does not refer to her husband by his name. In the book his name is Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and the play has his name as "Mister". We learn from Shug that his first name is Albert. What does this imply about their relationship?
8. Celie was forced to leave school very early, at age 14. How would Celie's life have been affected if she had been allowed to continue school?
9. How does religion affect Celie?
10. How does Alice Walker's life inform her work?
  - As someone who grew up in the segregated South?
  - As a women's rights activist?
11. Shug's illness is called 'a nasty women's disease' and that she 'earned' her illness through her behaviour. What does this imply about the treatment/expectations of women during this time?
12. *The Color Purple* is very influenced by the history of the American South.
  - How do you think Americans respond to this play?
  - Have Canadians faced a similar history?
  - How do you think the play resonates with international audiences?

13. Alice Walker incorporates many of the characters found in this play into other works.

Does this play encourage you to read the other works?

- *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989)
- *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992)

## ACTIVITIES

By Ksenia Broda – Milian

For discussion or as a writing prompt:

- Musical Theatre is a unique genre. Why would the creators of *The Color Purple* be interested in producing a show of this type instead of a straight play? What do the elements of music and choreography (dance) add to your understanding of the story/at what points did you feel they were especially strong or helpful? What do these elements help portray?

The original source material for this musical is Alice Walker's novel, which is written in an epistolary style, a literary work in the form of letters. The creative team had to dramatize these letters for the stage. This point can lead to a few activities:

- Read a letter from the novel and compare it to how the same events took place in the stage version and discuss. What was kept in/left out? Why might that be? What did students find more powerful or interesting and why?
- Read a historic letter and create a scene from it. Will it be a monologue or dialogue? What action can you use to show the story as opposed to just narrating it? Various letters are available at <http://www.lettersofnote.com/p/archive.html> and there are several books of letters written by African-Americans, at the time *The Color Purple* takes place and from other eras, compiled in this article: <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/02/07/384126100/for-black-history-month-letters-to-reveal-and-inspire> or other letters could also be used.
- Write an epistolary story for the modern age. Teacher could assign the students to relay something from their lives, a fictional tale, or a modern retelling of parts of *The Color Purple*. After figuring out the events of the story, use email, texts, tweets, social media posts and comments, etc. to create your epistolary story.

Letters are also important in the play, particularly between Celie and Nettie. What letters might other characters have written based on the events that we see onstage or that take place offstage that we hear about? Who might these characters write to and what would they say? (Example: Does Sofia write to her sister when she leaves Harpo?)

There are several “on your feet” ways to explore character in the play.

- The actor playing Celie has to portray her from the age of 14 through middle age, as well as under changing circumstances. How might this physicality change throughout the show? Students can discuss physical and vocal aspects of this portrayal and try different techniques including leading with different body parts, posture, movement qualities, rhythm, and so on. (Appendix E in the Manitoba Dance curriculum explores some of these motion factors). How might they be applied to different characters at specific points in the play?
  
- Character relationships are important and fluid - how characters feel about and relate to each other changes through the play. The game “Friends and enemies” can help bring this out. Each student silently chooses a friend and an enemy. As they move around the room, they want to keep their friend between them and their enemy at all times, but they do not want to give away who their friend and enemy are. Students cannot stand still and cannot run. Facilitator can call out “switch” in which case the friend becomes the enemy and vice versa. At any point facilitator can freeze the game and ask whether students met the objective. A discussion can include discussing relationships, objectives, obstacles, and so on. Next, the students will choose a character from *The Color Purple* to embody and play the game again, but they will have to think of who their character’s friend and enemy might be. After this round the discussion would include using the events of the play to justify their choices.
  
- Status is one way that characters relate to each other. Status is about power and control. As students move about the room, describe qualities of high and low status while they portray them physically. As students get to a physical embodiment of high status, you may have them greet each other or start a conversation. Then bring them back to neutral and try low status. Some ideas:
  - High status: Not afraid to touch or be touched. Initiates contact (eye contact, physical contact, or verbal contact). Body is physically open. Walks in straight lines/directly, as they know where they’re going. Takes time getting to their destination. Confident. Finishes a complete thought on a complete breath and in a complete sentence. Has a positive outlook. Has power. Has a large or small bubble of personal space, but is not afraid to have that bubble of space broken. Open physically.
  
  - Low status: Does not like to touch or be touched. Does not make or initiate contact of any kind (eye contact, physical contact, or verbal contact). Body is physically closed off or protected. Does not walk in a straight line. Rushes or

moves slowly to their destination. Touches their hair, clothes or face as they talk. Does not finish a complete thought on a complete breath or a complete sentence. Gives away their power or has no power. Has a small bubble of personal space because they feel like they shouldn't take up much space, OR a large bubble of personal space because they want to keep others away. Have students close their eyes and divide them into high and low status. When they open their eyes, they will interact with each other and see how those status relationships work. Have them switch statuses.

- Next, use both character and context to explore status. Depending on the class, you may want to give groups characters and have them mingle, or have the students try the exercise in pairs. For example, Celie as a child and Mister, then Mister in Act 2 with Celie.
- After a few pairings, relax and debrief. Did the status in relationships change? What were the students experiences? You may then wish to try again with new characters, or with pairs taking turns in front of the class for everyone to observe and discuss. (Status activity adapted from Theatrefolk, <http://tfolk.me/status>)

Choose a theme from the play (some are outlined in this guide). Use the text of the script - lyrics are freely available online on several sites - or the original book to collect lines and create a found poem. The poem does not necessarily have to relate the action of the play as it connects to the theme. Lines should be taken out of context, and can be rearranged and re-punctuated as the student likes.

While *The Color Purple* does not mention any historical events specifically, these characters surely would have had opinions about what was going on in the world. Research events that may have taken place in Georgia within this time period (or teacher could assign a "what-if" scenario). Students take the position of a reporter covering this story. Which characters from the play would you interview and what would they say? How might you write an article about it?

*The Color Purple* takes place roughly 1910-1940s (SparkNotes), in rural Georgia USA. Students can make a timeline of what was happening in Georgia over the course of these years, paying special attention to events that affected various cultural groups.

Music is important as a storytelling tool for this production, but also plays an important part in the plot and the history of these characters. Create a playlist for a character over the course of

their life, based on what we know about them in the play. The teacher could assign students to use era-appropriate music or modern music.

The juke joint is a place to gather to listen to swing, jazz, and the blues. In *The Color Purple*, we also hear references to spirituals and work songs. There is a long and fascinating history to the African-American musical timeline. StageNotes suggests this listening list:

- Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs and Ballads, Rounder Select, 1998
- Southern Journey, Vol. 1: Voices From The American South — Blues, Ballads, Hymns, Reels, Shouts, Chanteys And Work Songs, Rounder Select, 1997
- Say It Loud! A Celebration of Black Music in America, Rhino, 2001
- Georgia Blues 1928-33, Document Records, 1994
- As Good As It Gets: Jazz Early Days V.2, Disky, 2001
- An Anthology of Big Band Swing (1930 – 1955), Verve, 1993
- Juke Joint Jump: Boogie Woogie Celebration, Sony, 1996
- House of Blues: Essential Women in Blues, House of Blues, 1997

Students could research these music types and do a report or presentation, make a timeline of important figures in these disciplines, or create their own arrangement of a childhood song (such as Row Row Row Your Boat) with characteristics of a work, spiritual, blues, jazz, or swing song.

Alice Walker used a specific dialect in her novel and this is brought to the script as a device of characterization and historical accuracy (see context section for notes on this). All English-speakers have unique ways of talking that may be influenced by age, class, region, and heritage. The Atlantic video team has created an audio link of regional differences in pronunciation and word choice for several different common items or phrases.

- Take a look at the “This is How Canada Talks” survey from The 10 and 3.  
<http://www.the10and3.com/this-is-how-canada-talks/>
- Let students listen to the regional different terms using this Audio Map of US Dialects at <http://kottke.org/13/11/an-audio-map-of-us-dialects> (total time 4:05 minutes). This is an American version of a similar survey, but with the extra step of the words being pronounced by people from various backgrounds.
- Ask them which words are new to them and which they have heard before.
- Discuss how they might respond to someone whose use of English is distinctly different from their own.
- Brainstorm classic words or phrases that would not be used by people who live elsewhere.

(Discussion ideas are adapted from Park Square Theatre’s study guide for this musical.)

Fabric plays a role in Celie’s business, as well as in the design of a production. Thinking about “swatches” of fabric or paper that feature different colours and textures, make a collage that represents one character and their journey through the play. Materials could include fabrics, magazines and found papers, paint/colouring materials, etc.

Celie begins her own business designing pants. You will see one version of these pants in the show, by costume designer Ming Wong. For Human Ecology classes - design your own version of Celie’s pants. Teacher could give certain parameters to be met in terms of design or material. Ideas include whether they are period-appropriate or modern, any cultural influences, unisex or trending towards a certain traditional gendered style, etc. Draft a pattern or adapt an existing one, choose appropriate materials, and sew a sample.

The recent emancipation of enslaved people at the start of *The Color Purple* is an important contextual point. Though this musical takes place in America, Canada also had slavery. Canada’s History has a lesson plan about slavery and abolition in Upper Canada.

<https://www.canadashistory.ca/education/lesson-plans/slavery-and-its-gradual-abolition-in-upper-canada>



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple* | Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019



## EXPLORE MORE

### Librarian Recommended Reading List

Compiled by the Winnipeg Public Library

#### Explore More African-American Writers

*An Unkindness of Ghosts*, River Solomon. The HSS Matilda, a space vessel, is taking the last of humanity to the “Promised Land,” but not all on board are equal. The elites have deemed the dark-skinned sharecroppers to be less than, including Aster, a young woman who learns there may be a way to turn the tides of fate, but at a price. FICTION SCI SOLOMON

*Beloved*, Toni Morrison. Sethe is haunted by memories of Sweet Home, a plantation where she was enslaved for many years, and by her baby who died nameless, with only the inscription “Beloved” on her tombstone. FICTION MORRISON

*Parable of the Sower*, Octavia E. Butler. It’s 2025 and the world has descended into madness and anarchy. Lauren Olimina, who suffers from hyper-empathy, is forced into the world away from her compound where she conceives a revolutionary idea that may save humankind. FICTION SCI BUTLER

#### Explore More Pulitzer Prize Winners

*The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead. This 2017 winner follows Cora and Caesar, enslaved people on a Georgia plantation who hear about the Underground Railroad as a chance to find true freedom. Both decide to escape, but a slave catcher is on their tails and things don’t always go as planned. FICTION WHITEHEAD

*Rent*, Jonathan Larson. A rock-opera based on *La Bohème*, this 1996 Drama and Tony winner centres on young and impoverished artists living in New York. The musical explores the struggles of being an artist, dealing with addiction and living with HIV/AIDS. The library carries many iterations of the musical including the score, soundtrack, the Broadway show on Blu-ray and the film version of the musical.

#### Explore More Empowering Women

*The Handmaid’s Tale*, Margaret Atwood. Published in 1985, this novel is just as popular today. Set in a near-future dystopian society where the ruling class are men and women who are still

able to bear children are classed as handmaids. The novel follows handmaid Offred, who recalls the time before the fall and details her life with her third assignment, Fred. FICTION ATWOOD

*The House of the Spirits*, Isabel Allende. This family saga explores the Trueba family through four generations: patriarch Esteban who came from nothing and gained wealth and political influence through fear and respect, wife Clara who possesses magical abilities, daughter Blanca who is involved with a forbidden love and granddaughter Alba who joins the revolutionary movement. Fate, love and magic intertwine. FICTION ALLENDE



*There are 1.4 million books, movies, audiobooks, eBooks and more at the Winnipeg Public Library, and all you need to borrow them is your library card. There are 20 locations throughout the city and there's an online catalogue for requesting items for pick-up at your library of convenience. An e-Library has thousands of eBooks, eAudiobooks and more! All free with your library card.*

*Visit us at [Winnipeg.ca/library](http://Winnipeg.ca/library)*



Royal MTC / Citadel Production of *The Color Purple* | Photo Credit: Ian Jackson, Epic Photography © 2019

## RESOURCES

*Compiled by Ksenia Broda - Milian*

For further reading or connections:

Government of Canada - Noteworthy Historical Figures - Biographies of Black Canadians:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/black-history-month/black-canadians.html>

Historica Canada Black History in Canada Education Guide - focus on Book of Negroes; includes timeline of Black Canadian history:

<http://www.blackhistorycanada.ca/education/LearningTools.pdf>

Canada's History Black History Educational Package:

<https://www.canadashistory.ca/education/kayak-in-the-classroom/black-history/black-history-educational-package>

Jazz and music history:

<https://www.allaboutjazz.com> and  
<http://www.redhotjazz.com>

Black Women in History – PBS:

<http://www.pbs.org/black-culture/explore/black-women-in-history/>

What is AAVE? “A quick run-down of what it is, what it do, and where it be.”

<https://www.languagejones.com/blog-1/2014/6/8/what-is-aave>

BlackPast research guides and website list:

<https://www.blackpast.org/research-guides-websites/>

Library of Congress Civil Rights Research Project, including sections on (among others) Youth, Women, and Music in the Civil Rights Movement:

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/>

The Foreign Missionary Movement:

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/fmmovement.htm>

## REFERENCES

*Content from The Citadel Theatre's The Color Purple Enrichment Guide*

- <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks>
- [http://www.guidetomusicaltheatre.com/shows\\_c/colorpurple.html](http://www.guidetomusicaltheatre.com/shows_c/colorpurple.html)
- <https://www.famousafricanamericans.org/alice-walker>
- <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/purple/themes/>
- <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-color-purple/study-guide/themes>
- <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-color-purple>

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

*Compiled by Ksenia Broda - Milian*

- [https://www.citadeltheatre.com/content/file/THE\\_COLOR\\_PURPLE\\_ENRICHMENT\\_GUIDE.pdf](https://www.citadeltheatre.com/content/file/THE_COLOR_PURPLE_ENRICHMENT_GUIDE.pdf)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Color\\_Purple\\_\(musical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Color_Purple_(musical))
- <https://www.milwaukeeep.com/repglobal/docs/purple-teacher-guide.pdf>
- <https://parksquaretheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/TheColorPurple2015.pdf>
- <http://kcwebsiteprod.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/default-source/pdfs/email/tcp-tour-study-guide.pdf>
- <https://papermill.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2019-THE-COLOR-PURPLE-1.pdf>
- [http://www.speakeasystage.com/\\_pdf/CurriculumGuide\\_ColorPurple.pdf](http://www.speakeasystage.com/_pdf/CurriculumGuide_ColorPurple.pdf)
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Color-Purple>
- <https://patch.com/georgia/marietta/sharecropping-revisited>
- <https://crossref-it.info/textguide/the-color-purple/42/3306>
- <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-color-purple/study-guide/glossary-of-terms>
- <https://www.drug-rehabs.org/research/cocaine-drug-slang.htm>
- <https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/first-recording-of-swing-low-sweet-chariot-1909/>
- <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dogging>
- <https://www.josephprince.org/blog/daily-grace-inspirations/consider-the-lilies-of-the-field>
- <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/11/16/lilies-of-the-field-bible-verse-meaning-and-study/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/pillar-of-salt.html>

- <https://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/apr/26/lynchings-memorial-us-south-montgomery-alabama>
- <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-politicalscience/chapter/the-civil-rights-movement/>
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
- <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/juke>
- <https://www.britannica.com/art/jazz>
- <https://www.britannica.com/art/blues-music>

## STUDY GUIDE CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**The Citadel Theatre** is one of the largest not-for profit theatres in North America, drawing patrons from a large geographic region that includes the greater Edmonton area as well as central and northern Alberta. Citadel produces or presents up to 10 plays in our Mainstage season and another six productions in our Highwire Series. The five performance spaces of the Citadel Theatre complex are the Shoctor Theatre (proscenium stage); the Maclab Theatre (thrust stage); The Rice (a cabaret-style venue originally a black box theatre); Zeidler Hall, and the Tucker Amphitheatre. [www.citadeltheatre.com](http://www.citadeltheatre.com)

**Ksenia Broda-Milian** is a theatre artist and arts educator passionate about the power that theatre has to make a difference in the lives of young people - whether or not they grow up to make it their career. Her work as a set, costume, and lighting designer for theatre and dance has been seen on stages in Winnipeg and across Canada, including at Royal MTC as assistant designer on *Matilda*, but most recently in British Columbia. She has taught classes and workshops in creative drama, design, and musical theatre for Manitoba Theatre for Young People, Sarasvati Productions, Theatre Alberta's Artstrek program, and Royal MTC's Backstage Pass as well as working as a guest artist, teacher's assistant, and instructor at the University of Alberta and University of Winnipeg. Ksenia holds an MFA from the U of A, an Honours BA and BSc from UWinnipeg, and also trained with Creative Manitoba, the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Ghost River Theatre, and Off the Wall Stratford Artist's Alliance.



## THEATRE ETIQUETTE

**Arrive Early:** Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please ensure you arrive with enough time to find your seat before the performance starts.

**Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices:** Please **TURN OFF** your cell phones/iPods/gaming systems/cameras. We have seen an increase in texting, surfing, and gaming during performances, which is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. The use of cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.

**Talking During the Performance:** You can be heard (even when whispering!) by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait to share your thoughts and opinions with others until after the performance.

**Food/Drinks:** Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. Where there is an intermission, concessions may be open for purchase of snacks and drinks. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

**Dress:** There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats in the theatre. We also strive to be a scent-free environment, and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

**Leaving During the Performance:** If an audience member leaves the theatre during a performance, they will be readmitted at the discretion of our Front of House staff. Should they be readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in a vacant seat at the back of the auditorium.

**Being Asked to Leave:** The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave the performance if that person is being disruptive. Inappropriate and disruptive behaviour includes, but is not limited to: talking, using electronic devices, cameras, laser pointers, or other light- or sound-emitting devices, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

**Talkbacks:** All Tuesday evening performances, student matinees and final matinees at Royal MTC feature a talkback with members of the cast following the show. While watching the performance, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors. Questions can be about the story, the interpretation, life in the theatre, etc.

**Enjoy the show:** Laugh, applaud, cheer and respond to the performance appropriately. Make sure to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause during the curtain call.