Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for…

The Color Purple

by Alice Walker

written by Peter Boysen
To The Teacher

In order to allow the teacher maximum flexibility in his or her approach, we have grouped the prompts by sections. The teacher may, therefore, assign specific prompts or allow the students to select one or more prompts from each section.

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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection--that is, stopping to think about what you are reading--that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.
The Color Purple

Response Sheet

Name__________________  Section_____  Date_______

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Response Journal for *The Color Purple*

Background/Pre-Reading

1. Alice Walker, the author of *The Color Purple*, was the youngest of eight children in her family. One might imagine that Walker, the child of poor sharecroppers, would spend her childhood in hand-me-down clothes and in a constant competition with her older siblings for attention, special treats, extra helpings of food, and enough room to sleep in a crowded bed.

Psychologists have conducted many studies on the various ways in which birth order affects the development of children. These ways include the formation of personality, the relative assertiveness of children, and the ways that children form relationships in their adult lives.

In your own family, where do you fall in the birth order? How many siblings do you have? Write a journal entry of at least two paragraphs in which you state your place in the birth order of your family, and describe at least one personal experience in which you feel that your birth order has affected you.

2. Share-cropping in the American South was an incredibly exploitative agricultural system. It arose during the Reconstruction era, when southern planters needed to keep their labor costs near where they had been during the time of slavery. However, since slavery no longer existed, planters had to find a way to compensate their laborers and still keep costs low.

The share-cropping system involved planters loaning plots of land to workers, and at the end of each growing season, collecting one-third of the harvest from each of them. Furthermore, the share-cropper had to use credit to buy things such as fertilizer, tools, and crop seed as well as his own food and clothing at the plantation store. At the end of the season, the share-cropper had to pay his store bill in addition to a share of the crop. Since the planter could set a fixed price for the crops, and the planter was the sole accountant, there was plenty of room for fraud. The planter could keep the share-croppers poor and dependent on him.
Imagine that you are a young journalist for a New York City newspaper, traveling around the South in the 1940s, looking for stories to write. You interview an elderly African-American who, like his father, has been a sharecropper for thirty years. Use the experience you think the sharecropper would have, and write an article of several paragraphs that explains your opinion of the share-cropping system in the South. As a reporter, make sure you mention who, what, where, when, and how.

3. When Alice Walker was eight years old, one of her brothers accidentally shot her. This blinded her in one eye and left her with visible scarring. Walker felt ashamed by what had happened to her and spent a great deal of her childhood indoors, away from other children, reading and writing instead of playing.

Think of a time when you have seen someone with a visible disfigurement. This could be facial scarring or another deformity. If you cannot think of a visual disfigurement, think of a time when you have heard someone speaking with an obvious speech impediment.

Write a journal entry of several paragraphs in which you describe the situation. How did it make you feel, and how did you react?

4. When Alice Walker returned from her student exchange year in Uganda before her senior year of college, she was surprised to discover that she was pregnant. This was in the early 1960s, when birth control options were much more limited than they are now, and unplanned pregnancies were, depending on the circumstances, much more of a source of shame and scandal. Because of this, Walker contemplated suicide.

Think about a time when someone you know had something shameful happen to him or her. How did that person handle the situation?

Then, write a letter to Alice Walker when she was so embarrassed with the news of her pregnancy, she considered ending her own life. What advice would you offer her?
Letters 1-10

5. As you read, note the extensive use of dialect—language that is written as it sounds, and reflects how the characters actually talk instead of using conventional English. Dialect is used is to make first-person narration seem more realistic and poignant.

Consider how your conversations with your friends, whether in person, over the phone, in text messages, or instant messaging differ from standard English in the ways that grammar is used and how spelling of words are changed or shortened to make popular abbreviations in those conversational contexts.

Using one of the methods listed above, write a dialogue that you and a friend might have about something important that happened to you. The dialogue should be approximately a page long and sound authentic, using your own unique way of speaking.

6. Despite the traumatic events she has witnessed in her young life, Nettie finds a boyfriend who is her father's age and who seems to have many of the same impulses as her father when it comes to choosing a mate.

Think about how Nettie must have felt watching her sister get raped by their father. Look at the situation from Nettie's perspective: what motivation would she have to marry the first man she could find, no matter what his age or circumstances?

Now, imagine how Nettie would feel after coming home from her first meeting with this man. Write a diary entry as Nettie, explaining your feelings for him and; about your situation in general.

7. In Nettie's community, girls are expected to engage in sexual activities we would consider abusive. These girls are too young, however, to know anything about physical intimacy and the impact sexual behavior has on their future lives. There is even a naïveté about what actually has to happen for a woman to (get big.)
Consider the education you have received about health and sexuality. This could include health classes you have had at school, conversations you have had with your parents/guardians, and instruction you have received from religious institutions. It could also include information you have learned through conversations with your friends.

Reflect on the differences in education about health and the human body between the time Celie was growing up and our own time. Write a letter addressed to the editor of a newspaper that would have been published when this story was told. Give your opinion about the way health education was handled when Celie was growing up compared to how it is handled now. You should use specific evidence from the text to support your opinion.

8. When Celie first sees a picture of Shug Avery, she is overcome by the differences in appearance between Shug Avery and other women. Celie says, “Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier then me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like somethin tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motocar. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some.”

At night, Shug Avery fills Celie’s dreams because of how unique she is and how much more beautiful she is than everyone else in Celie’s life.

Think about a model you’ve seen in a magazine advertisement or a beautiful celebrity. Write a short paragraph identifying the characteristics of the person that you find attractive and which, in your mind, may have inspired Celie to admire Shug Avery’s appearance in the novel.
9. Celie and Nettie’s father refuses to give permission for Mr. _____ to marry Nettie. However, their father indicates that he would let Mr. _____ marry Celie instead because she is older. The list of Celie’s qualities that he gives the suitor could be either compliments or insults.

Make a list of the various character traits that Celie’s father mentions to recommend Celie to Mr. _____. Next to the ones that are lies or exaggerations, write what you think the reasons are behind those lies. One possible reason, for example, could be that Celie’s father is trying to cover up signs that he abused his own daughter.

10. Miss Beasley, sees signs of intelligence in Celie and wants her to obtain as much education as possible. This is apparent in her attempts to get Celie’s father to keep her in school. Celie is smarter than she gives herself credit for.

In our time, the public school system spends a great deal of time and resources trying to keep pregnant, young women caught up with their studies so they can earn a high school diploma. However, in the time when this book was written, Miss Beasley’s well-intentioned visit appears to have been the only intervention the school system attempted.

How might Celie’s life have been different if she had still been able to go to school? Write a newspaper article commemorating an accomplishment that you think Celie could have made had she received a complete education.

**Letters 11-21**

11. When Nettie comes to live with Celie and Mr. _____, one of the things that Celie notices is how calm and unshakable Nettie appears in the midst of a highly chaotic household. She says, “Patient her middle name.”

Consider one of your brothers, sisters, or best friends. What adjective would you choose for his or her middle name? This word should summarize the person’s personality in one word.
Once you have chosen this adjective, make an acrostic poem out of it. Write the word vertically down the sheet of paper. Starting a sentence with each letter of the word, write something that this person has done in the past that demonstrates that this adjective applies to him or her. The poem does not have to rhyme, but rhyme and meter could make this poem more interesting.

12. When most stepmothers become part of their new families, they enter a difficult situation. Children often feel as though their stepmother is trying to replace their biological mother, and aside from that, children resent a new voice of authority in the household and refuse to be given orders by someone they hardly know.

This is particularly true in Celie's new home. Because Mr. _____ does not pressure his children to obey or respect Celie, she has difficulty managing the home. However, if Celie can't manage the home properly, she will be physically disciplined by her husband.

Write a letter to Mr. _____ giving your opinion about the way he and his children have been treating Celie. Use specific examples from the text to support your opinion.

13. When Nettie moves in with Celie and Mr. _____, she enters an uncomfortable situation. Nettie had been Mr. _____'s first choice for a wife, but her father had told Mr. _____ to marry Celie instead. Mr. _____ is more attracted to Nettie than to Celie, and when Nettie moves in, the tension increases in the household.

Nettie is gracious and dignified in the way that she maintains her virtue in the home. The reader gets very little insight into the way that Nettie feels about the situation.

Write the conversation you imagine would take place between Nettie and Celie concerning Nettie's feelings about their current living situation. Have the conversation take place a few days after Nettie has moved in with Celie and Mr. _____, and describe her perspective on the tension that seems to be filling the home. Write the dialogue using the dialect in which the characters speak.
14. Two of Mr. _____’s sisters, Carrie and Kate, come to visit shortly after Nettie moves out. It is clear by the way they ridicule and insult Shug Avery that they are jealous of her. Reflect on the reasons for their jealousy. It can be a very destructive force, both emotionally and physically, if the consequences go too far.

In a journal entry of at least one page, write about a time when you felt jealous of someone. Describe the situation: why were you jealous? How did you express your jealousy? Did you keep it secret? What was the outcome of the situation? Finally, did this incident have any effect on your life?

15. Harpo tells Celie about his love for a girl he saw in church. We soon learn that this girl is Sofia. The interaction between Harpo and Sofia makes it apparent that he has a crush on her. Harpo winks at Sofia, and in return, she becomes embarrassed and looks away.

One of the most memorable experiences of adolescence is the teenage crush. It has a powerful hold over an individual’s logic and reason, and it causes young people to daydream.

Who was your first crush? If you've never had a crush, who is a person you felt tremendous admiration or respect for at first sight? Write a poem to that person expressing how you felt at the time. Your poem should have at least eight lines.

16. When Shug Avery comes to town for a concert, Mr. _____ spends a lot of time getting ready to go to the show. He prims in front of the mirror, changes outfits, slicks back his hair, and even spit-polishes his shoes.

Ironically, Celie is standing at her husband’s side while he gets ready to see the woman he truly loves and who will soon be moving in with them in the future. Celie’s compliment about his looks seems to surprise him. Celie is surprised in return when he asks her if she really means it.

Given the egotistical behavior Mr. _____’s exhibits earlier in the novel, is it shocking to discover that he is insecure? Why is he surprised by Celie’s compliment? Write a list of possible reasons for his reaction and support your answer with information from the text.
17. Harpo’s courtship of Sofia does not go well. Sofia’s father takes a disliking to him because of the scandals his mother was involved in—most notably, the time when she was shot by her boyfriend. Harpo and Sofia decide that they should have a baby. Then, Harpo would have a right to marry Sofia without her father’s consent.

Once Sofia is far along in her pregnancy, Harpo brings her to meet his father. Mr. _____ accuses Sofia of getting pregnant by another boy and tricking Harpo into standing in as the father so she won’t have to face the scandal alone.

What do you think Sofia thought about these accusations? As Sofia, write a letter to an advice columnist explaining your situation and requesting suggestions on how to handle it. Then, write the columnist’s response.

18. As you read Celie’s description of Sofia’s physical appearance and personality, make note of the way Celie describes Sofia’s demeanor and her interaction with Harpo and Mr. _____ when she visits their home.

Make a list of at least seven ways in which Sofia and Celie are different. Include differences in appearance, emotional makeup, and other characteristics.
19. Many of the church women seem to look down at Celie while she scurries about the sanctuary trying to help the preacher. However, some of the facts may be distorted by Celie’s perception. Still, the fact that the preacher praises Celie for her help while her husband sits in the back lends some credence to her interpretation of events.

Why do people gossip? What basic human impulses are satisfied by the simple act of spreading rumors about other people?

Think about a time when you and your friends spread an unkind rumor about someone else or made fun of a person in your class when he or she was not present.

Now imagine that you are a member Celie’s church, and you are writing a blog on your MySpace page about what happened at the service when the women were talking about Celie. Give your interpretation of events using some of the information from the text.

20. There are few events in the novel to this point that equal the surprise of Shug Avery’s arrival and move into Celie and Mr. _____’s home. It is difficult to imagine the humiliation and anger that Celie represses in order to accept this change.

In the 21st century, news headlines are filled with scandalous affairs and stories about the unusual lifestyles of famous athletes, actors, and musicians. If you look in any major newspaper, the latest political and economic headlines are surrounded by stories about the latest celebrity scandals.

Imagine that you are a gossip columnist, and you have heard the rumor that Shug Avery is moving in with Celie and Mr. _____’s. You have stationed yourself and your photographer on the road leading up to their house. Write an article, from a journalist’s point of view, that describes Shug’s arrival at her new home. You should interview Shug, Mr. _____, and Celie.
21. After a few days of having Shug Avery in her home, Celie concludes, “She sicker than my mama was when she die. But she more evil than my mama and that keep her alive.”

What does this statement mean? What do you think Celie means when she says Shug is “sick” and “evil”? Does she mean this sentence to be understood literally? In addition, why does it give Celie pleasure to see that Shug Avery is more sick and evil than Celie’s mother?

Write a letter to a classmate who doesn’t understand this passage and explain what Celie means in these two sentences. Be sure to emphasize what forces and ideas strengthen Shug that did not strengthen Celie’s mother?

22. One bonding experience that Celie and Shug share is Celie’s combing of Shug’s hair. At first, Shug wants Celie to hurry up and finish, but as she continues combing, the close contact reminds Shug of the way that her grandma combed her hair when she was a girl.

Celite depicts this incident in a very interesting way. She pretends Shug is a doll, who Celie names Olivia. Olivia was a newborn baby who was taken from Celie years ago. Olivia remains an important, but conceptual, part of Celie’s life, and this shows that the mother-child connection is alive within Celie.

Write this scene from Shug’s point of view instead of Celie’s. What do you think is going through her mind while she is having her hair brushed?
23. Celie’s father-in-law learns that Shug Avery has moved in, and he comes to the house to chastise his son. He tells Mr. _____ that this scandal will shame not only Shug Avery, but will also shame Mr.____ and his entire family.

Celie does not delight in Mr._____’s embarrassment, as one might expect of a wife who has been replaced in her own household. Instead, she gets angry with the old man for being rude. She spits in his water glass and thinks about putting even worse in the water the next time he speaks that way.

What do you think is going on in Mr. _____’s mind while all of this is happening? If he had been a braver man, what do you think he would have said to his father? Imagine that the two men meet later and argue about their previous conversation. Write the dialogue that would have ensued.

24. After Mr. _____’s father leaves, his brother Tobias comes by with very similar intentions in mind: Tobias wants to humiliate his brother for asking Shug Avery to live with him. During this conversation, Shug comes outside and shares the quilting with Celie, therefore positioning Celie between Shug and Mr. _____.

This juxtaposition—the placement of Celie between her husband and his lover—as well as the united opposition against Tobias and “his fly speck box of chocolate” makes Celie feel “just right” for the first time.

Think of a time when you felt close to someone, but other people couldn’t understand why. This may have been because that person betrayed you in the past or because he or she did other, unforgivable things.

Write a journal entry of at least half a page discussing a time you felt especially close to someone, despite the numerous reasons why you shouldn’t. Give details about the history of the relationship so the reader understands what is going on, but focus particularly on the emotions you felt. Also, tell the reader how the situation turned out.

If you have never felt close to someone you should have disliked, write a hypothetical situation and follow the same guidelines.
25. After Harpo and Sofia have been married for a while, Harpo starts to overeat and become lazy. Sofia starts to do male jobs that Harpo was supposed to do, and she even puts on Harpo’s pants to do some of the work on the house. This is a literal and figurative indication of what is going on in their marriage.

Initially, this overeating is a puzzle for both Celie and Sofia. In the first days of marriage, Harpo and Sofia were a blissful couple, but Harpo became depressed. Could depression be the cause of Harpo’s change in eating habits?

Why do you think Harpo is overeating? Imagine that he appears on a talk show and takes part in a panel discussion about overeating. On this panel, there are a couple overeaters, a professional therapist, and the host. Write the script for the show. Include the therapist’s advice, Harpo’s motivations for overeating, and other details about the conversation.

26. As Celie and Mr. ____ listen to Shug Avery’s concert at Harpo’s new club, Shug surprises Celie by announcing that she has named a song after her.

This is one of the first signs in the book that Shug and Celie have developed an emotional bond that could potentially deepen later in the plot. Put yourself in Celie’s place and imagine her delight as she listens to a song that had been written and named just for her.

Celia doesn’t mention the lyrics of the song. With what you know about Celie and Shug’s relationship, write “Miss Celie’s Song.” Try to make it at least sixteen lines and have a basic rhyme scheme.
27. Shug Avery tells Celie that she plans to move out in June. The prospect of her leaving makes Celie feel as empty as she did when Nettie moved out. She tells Shug that she is worried that Mr. _____ will start to beat her again if Shug leaves, perhaps for the simple reason that she is not Shug.

Shug is shocked by the prospect of Mr. _____’s beating Celie. She promises to talk to him and stay until she is certain the beatings will not start again.

Like many of the conversations that take place in this novel, the talk that Mr. _____ and Shug Avery have about the way he treats Celie must have been intriguing. What do you think they said to one another?

Write out the conversation that you imagine took place between Mr. _____ and Shug Avery. Your conversation should be long enough to convey what was happening.

**Letters 34-43**

28. Sofia and her new boyfriend, known as the Prizefighter, show up at Harpo’s new club, which used to be Harpo and Sofia’s house. There are many details in the opening scene that reflect emotional tension, including Shug’s tight dress.

Think about an extremely uncomfortable situation that you were involved in or personally witnessed. Reflect on the various ways your senses were alerted to the tension in the room.

Make a short list of the sensations you felt that made you aware of the tension. Classify the sensations by the five senses. Compare your list with Celie’s observations at Harpo’s club and explain the similarities and differences between them.

29. After Sofia and Squeak’s brief fight, it appears that Harpo has the opportunity to choose which woman he wants to have with him: the mother of his children, who would be more than a match for him physically and mentally, or a weaker woman who could be more easily dominated and controlled.
After much contemplation, Harpo chooses Squeak. Why do you think he chose her over Sofia?

Rewrite the section of Letter 35 that describes the situation, and imagine instead that Harpo had chosen Sofia. What do you think would have happened next if his choice been different?

30. Sofia has a life-changing altercation with the mayor and his wife. The decisions that she makes costs her the opportunity to see her kids grow up because of the length of her prison sentence.

Review the incident in your own mind. What possible stopping points were there? In what way did the mayor and his wife inflame the situation? To what degree is Sofia responsible for matters turning out the way they did? What could all three of them have done differently?

Imagine that you are a reporter for the daily newspaper. You have been assigned to write an article about the altercation for the next day’s paper. You were not there personally to witness the event, but you have interviewed the police, the mayor, his wife, and Sofia.

Your article should show the different viewpoints that all four parties would have of the incident resulting in the town police’s attack on Sofia. Remember that a local newspaper in the South would side with the white establishment; however, if you would rather write from a more objective, liberal point of view of a paper from the North, you may choose to do that instead.

31. Reread the physical description of Sofia as she appears when her first visitors come to see her in prison. Imagine that you are one of the town’s church ministers, and during your periodic rounds to visit prisoners and give them spiritual guidance, you come across Sofia. What kind of reaction would you have? How would her wounds make you feel?

After you return to your church office, sit down and write a letter to the local newspaper’s editor, stating your opinion about the way Sofia was treated by the town police. Use examples from her description of the confrontation to support your opinions.
32. At the end of this terrible day, Sofia is left isolated in a cell, too dazed, shocked and injured to do much else besides lie there and suffer from the pain of her many injuries.

As her consciousness slowly returns, and the haze of pain gradually fades, it is very likely that Sofia replays the events of the day in her mind. If Sofia had asked the jailer for a pen and some paper so that she could write down her thoughts about what happened that day, what would she write?

Write a journal entry from Sofia’s point of view. Your entry should focus on her thoughts while these events were occurring. It should begin when Sofia encounters the mayor and his wife, and should end with her lying beaten and bruised in a jail cell, when her family shows up to see her.

33. Celie’s family discusses some creative ways to free Sofia from prison: The men talk about organizing a breakout, and Celie believes that Sofia’s can only escape prison through death. Eventually, Mr. ____ realizes that Squeak’s uncle is the warden. The family decides to use this connection to try to get justice for Sofia. What makes this connection so problematic, however, is that the warden is white, and his only family connection to Squeak is through the illegitimate children he had with black women.

Which of the three ideas do you think is most realistic way Sofia will leave prison? Is she most likely to leave via jailbreak, death, or Squeak’s family connections?

With this in mind, think about Celie’s description of an angelic rescue. It uses some powerful imagery. Take some of those images (and some of your own), and write a narrative poem of at least twenty lines depicting angels arriving and breaking Sofia out of her prison cell.

34. Sofia comes very close to getting into some serious trouble with the mayor’s family. One of the terms of her confinement in prison is that she be loaned out to work as a maid in the mayor’s house. When the mayor’s son steps on a rusty nail, he tells his mother that Sofia stabbed his foot with it.

Ironically, it is the son’s younger sister who tells her mother that her brother stepped on the nail himself. She intervenes so that Sofia can stay out of trouble.
Reflect on the events of this part of the story. Why do you think the young girl defends the maid instead of her brother? What could have been going on in her mind to make her stand up for Sofia and tell the truth when so many other white children (and adults) in this time period would have let the black maid be falsely accused?

Write an instant message to a friend who can't understand the reasons why the girl would tell the truth instead of letting the maid take the blame. In your message, defend the girl using information from the text to support your opinion. You may use some Internet shorthand if you’d like. Your message should be at least half a page long and include hypothetical responses from your friend.

Letters 44-60

35. After reading the letter that begins this section, you should be able to tell that the mayor and Miss Millie have a highly dysfunctional marriage. He buys her a car, but he parks it out in the driveway and refuses to teach her to drive it. Instead of giving her driving lessons, he taunts Miss Millie every day, asking her how she is enjoying the car.

In our own time, marriage counseling has become increasingly popular. Couples use counselors to talk about existing areas of conflict in their relationships, and the counselors attempt to come up with ways for the couples to move past those conflicts and make their relationships stronger.

What do you think are the dominant issues in the mayor’s marriage that need discussing? Write a dialogue between Miss Millie, the mayor, and the counselor. Write the problems in the marriage from Miss Millie’s point of view, the mayor’s response to Millie’s statements, and the counselor’s advice to them.
36. Miss Millie’s behavior toward Sofia is very contradictory. She insists that Sofia sit in the back seat on the way to Sofia’s house; however, every time they’ve gone out for a driving lesson, Miss Millie allowed Sofia to sit in the front seat. Miss Millie says that it would not be proper for them to sit together in the front seat if there is no reason for them to do so. Acceptable reasons, for example, could include giving driving lessons.

Consider a time when a person or a group of people has treated you in very contradictory ways. Racism does not have to be the source of the contradiction. You may write about any instance where you felt you had been treated one way for a period of time and then the opposite way once circumstances changed.

Write a journal entry of at least half a page about the situation. Be sure to describe what happened, your feelings about what was going on, and how the situation was resolved. Include the circumstances that resulted in the change.

37. After a lengthy absence from Albert’s (Mr. ____’s) home, Shug Avery returns, and she brings with her a new husband—a man named Grady. She and Grady move into the house with Albert and Celie.

The only hint that Celie and Albert have about Grady’s arrival is the letter they receive from Shug promising a big surprise at Christmastime. They expect a large present, but they get Grady instead. It is definitely a big surprise, and maybe the last thing either of them would have expected.

From Celie’s point of view, Albert looks “like the end of the world.” Imagine what Albert is feeling as the car door opens, and instead of Shug getting out with presents, she gets out with a new husband.

Rewrite the arrival scene from Albert’s point of view. Be sure to focus on how he feels about the situation, and reflect his feelings in the narration.
38. While Shug and Celie are creating a new relationship with one another, Grady and Albert take the car out and are gone almost until dawn. While this is a period of bonding for the two women, this has to be a difficult situation for both men.

If you were in Albert’s situation, what would you talk about with the man who is married to the woman you truly love? If you were in Grady’s situation, how would you respond?

Write the dialogue you imagine between these two men. Your dialogue should include how you think both men would interact with each other. Since the only information we receive about their evening is that they are out all night, be creative.

39. Neither Celie nor Shug Avery likes Grady’s pet name for Shug. He calls her “Mama,” and this receives an irate reaction from Shug.

Think about which of Grady’s character traits that might help explain why he keeps using this pet name for his wife even though he knows she doesn’t like it. Also, what is it about this name that you think Shug finds unpleasant? Why do you think Celie doesn’t like when Grady refers to Shug as “Mama”?

Write a letter to Grady in the persona of Celie, that is at least half a page in length. In the letter, detail the reasons why you think Grady should stop calling Shug “Mama.” Be sure to use specific details about Shug and Celie’s perspective to support your opinion.
40. Celie finds out that Albert has been keeping Nettie's letters from her. Interestingly enough, instead of throwing the letters away, Albert has been stashing them away in a trunk. Shug notices Albert's strange behavior, looks in the trunk, and discovers letters that, from the exotic-looking stamps on the envelopes, she believes are from Nettie.

Reflect on the reasons why Albert might be keeping Nettie's letters from Celie. Why would he keep the letters in a trunk instead of just throwing them away? Why would Albert prevent interaction between Nettie and Celie? How would you feel if someone hid letters from a family member from you?

Letters 61-70

41. Shug suggests that she and Celie make some pants and distract her from the rage that has filled her mind since finding out that Albert had hidden Nettie's letters from her.

Celite balks at the idea of making and wearing pants on the premise that she isn't a man, and pants are strictly men's clothing. However, Shug points out that she had worn pants in the past, and pants would be more flattering than a dress on Celie's figure.

Consider this paradox: women often wear men's clothing, and not only pants, but dress shirts and ties as well. This is unusual, but not generally perceived as strange. However, if a man were to put on a dress or any other garment associated with women, it would be considered strange.

Why do you think this paradox exists? Write a hypothetical, editorial piece to the editor of your school's newspaper, detailing what you think about this disparity. Use examples from personal experience to support your opinions.

42. When Nettie, Samuel, and Corrine arrive at the Olinka village, they create a sensation among the people living there. The inhabitants are shocked at the sight of their new missionaries.
Make note of the aspects of Nettie’s, Samuel’s, and Corrine’s lives that the villagers are most curious about. Consider what these areas of curiosity imply about what is most important to the villagers. After you have finished, write a letter to a confused classmate and explain why the villagers are shocked by their new missionaries. Be sure to explain in detail what aspects of the missionaries’ lives are of such curiosity to the villagers.

43. The rootleaf is more than just a building material for the Olinka villagers: over time, the root leave has taken on a religious significance because of the importance it plays in maintaining health and safety of the Olinka.

This importance given to an object that provides security is common in many older religions. The ancient Egyptians revered the sun god as their primary deity because it rose and set each day. It was the only source of light and warmth, and had it failed to rise one morning, the Egyptians would have perished.

The situation is similar with the rootleaf. The chief, who plants other crops on rootleaf land to satisfy the foreigners, commits a terrible wrong. He is forced to give up his wives and leave the village.

An ode is a celebratory poem written about a revered person or object. From the perspective of an Olinka villager, write an ode of at least twelve lines to the rootleaf. Rhyme scheme and meter are up to you.

44. In one particular letter to Celie, Nettie outlines her daily schedule while she lives among the Olinka. Take a few minutes and look it over, taking care to note ways in which her routine is similar to, and different from, the routine that you follow.

Do you get up as early as she does? Why or why not? In what way is her routine dependent on factors different than those controlling your life?

Write a brief essay comparing and contrasting your schedules. Make note of both the similarities and differences, and explain why those similarities and differences exist.
45. In the Olinka village, the majority of the residents believes that girls should remain uneducated and focus their energies on tasks at home. When Tashi’s parents come to see Nettie, they ask her to send Tashi home the next time she comes to visit Olivia. The reason for this request is that Tashi’s parents fear that Tashi is learning habits in Olivia’s home that will hinder her from becoming the kind of woman that the Olinka view as the ideal.

One common part of growing up is having our parents or guardians keep us from certain experiences that they feel will be harmful to us. We often feel as though we are ready for these experiences, but our elders think otherwise. The resulting conflict can create problems within the family unit.

Recall one situation in your life when you were denied permission to have a particular experience. How did that denial make you feel? How did you handle the situation?

Write a journal entry in which you describe the situation. Make sure to emphasize the feelings of everyone involved, the effects of the disagreement, and how the situation was eventually resolved.

46. The Olinka are surprised to learn that a road is being built to the village. They aren’t informed about the road by an announcement or a radio broadcast; instead, they hear the road builders slowly making their way through the trees.

Excitedly, the Olinka rush to bring food and other gifts to the road builders. They believe that the road has come to connect them to the port.

Pretend that you are a journalist writing an article for a magazine that will be circulated throughout Africa. What effect does this new road have on the Olinka people? In your article, you should interview the chief, at least one of the builders, one of the missionaries, and one of the villagers.

47. The initial excitement that the Olinka tribe feels at the arrival of the new road is short-lived. The purpose of the road is not to connect the Olinka to the ocean; it is to help facilitate transportation around the country for the rubber industry.
The church and school are in the planned path of the new road, and the road builders quickly demolish both buildings. However, the road is still not complete; it has thirty more miles to go. In addition, tribesmen from other regions appear to chop down the existing trees and, in effect, kill the existing wildlife to make room for rubber crops. The land has even been purchased without the Olinka's knowledge, and the tribe must now pay water tax and rent to live on their land.

From your knowledge of history and from personal experience, think of a historical or technological development that did much more harm than good. Prepare a brief account of that development and include the positive and negative changes that the innovation brought.

48. Nettie gives Celie information that completely changes her perceptions about her past. The man she thought was her father isn't her father at all. Her biological father was lynched long ago for the simple fact that his store had done so well that it took business away from the white-owned store.

The next letter briefly summarizes the assumptions Celie made throughout her entire life that have proven to be false. Many of her beliefs about relationships and family have been based on those assumptions.

Write a eulogy for the parts Celie that have died as a result of this new information. How has the destruction of assumptions she made about her father destroyed part of her character, her values, and her outlook on life?
Letters 71-82

49. Answer this question BEFORE you start to read the first letter in this section. This letter describes Celie’s return to visit Alphonso, the man she had was her father (and the father of her children).

Why do you think Celie wants to visit Alphonso now, after all those years had passed? What do you think has changed in Celie's mind that makes her want to visit him and see what is going on in his life?

Write a brief paragraph in which you predict how this visit will turn out. How will Alphonso react when he discovers that Celie knows the truth? How will Celie respond seeing the man who raped her when she was only fourteen years old? After you have read the letter, review your prediction to see how accurate you were.

50. Nettie decides to tell Corrine the truth about Corrine's children: they are Nettie’s niece and nephew. Corrine has long suspected that the children were Celie’s because they bear a strong resemblance to her. Until then, however, Nettie had never informed her about this.

In the years that have gone by, even as Nettie grew closer and closer to the family while preparing for a life of missionary work, these doubts grew in Corrine’s mind. Now that they are confirmed, Corrine grows so angry that she becomes ill.

Have you ever told a small lie or let someone think that something was true when it wasn’t? Many times a tiny deception grows into an even larger one. If you have never had this occur, write about a time when someone told you a small lie that eventually caused a lot of trouble.

Create a two-column list. On the left, describe a deceitful situation. On the right, describe the outcome. Once you have finished, write a paragraph on whether making the lie was worth the results. Give the reader enough context to be able to understand the situation, but focus particularly on the specific ways in which the deception grew.
From the earlier conversation between Nettie and Tashi's parents, it is clear that the villagers did not expect their missionaries to last for the long term. They would die from sickness, or they would return to their home before too much time had passed.

However, the villagers had been excited when Samuel, Corrine and Nettie arrived in the village to take up their roles as missionaries, and it is clear that some bonding has taken place between the missionaries and their villagers.

How do you think the villagers feel about Corrine's death? Do you think they had any satisfaction in seeing someone die who brought new, destructive ideas into the culture that were contrary to the Olinka way? Might there be some grief in watching someone pass away who had shown the community so much love?

Write the dialogue that you think two of the Olinka villagers would have had in the days following Corrine's death. Focus on their emotional response to the work the missionaries had done in the village and how you think the Olinka have come to feel about this family from America.

Celie and Shug discuss their ideas about God's identity, appearance and personality. Their opinions about relationships and family have been shaped by their views on God, and their views on God have been shaped by their early experiences.

Write a brief comparison essay of no more than one page in which you compare and contrast Celie and Shug's views on God. Then, state which view has more in common with your own perspective about a divine, supernatural being and why.
53. Reread the advice that Shug gives to Celie about religion and meditation. Shug was opposed to the belief that God is an elderly, white man, but she couldn’t picture him any other way. She used nature to recreate her perception of God, and after making that connection between nature and the divine, she realized that her emotions connect her with God as well.

Shug says that God loves emotions, and this idea gave her more personal freedom. She previously thought her emotions were sinful and that she had to hide them. However, once her opinion changed and she began to share and celebrate her feelings with God, her relationship with him improved dramatically. This allowed her to pray and meditate more easily.

Do you pray or meditate? If so, what helps conceptualize God or the divine? Write a descriptive essay in which you describe your usual prayer or meditation routine. What changes have you made over time? Who has given you the most helpful advice? If you do not pray or meditate, discuss a technique that you employ to understand very complex ideas.

54. Harpo and Squeak get into a small argument over Squeak’s desire to sing in public again. Harpo doesn’t understand her desire to do this. He makes enough money to provide her with everything she needs. Squeak has a different perspective on the situation. She doesn’t have to sing; she needs to sing.

Recall something that you felt that you needed to do, even though that thing was not necessary for your survival. How did it feel to have that desire either denied or fulfilled?

Write a letter to Harpo explaining Squeak’s point of view in this situation. Be sure to explain the difference between “having to sing” and “needing to sing.”

55. When Celie returns home, she is a different woman from the young girl who went to Mr. _____’s house to be his wife many years before. She has found love, success in a profession, and confidence in herself.
Think about someone who used to bully you and who, later in life, came to respect you. This might have happened because you both matured, you did something that caused that person to respect you, or both of these situations occurred.

Put yourself in Albert's position as Celie walks by his house in her dark blue pants, white silk shirt, and a flower in her hair. According to Celie, Albert does not even recognize her as she walks by.

From Albert's point of view, rewrite Celie's arrival. Does he recognize her? How would he describe the approaching woman? Write what you think is going on in his mind as she approaches. Your rewrite should be at least two paragraphs long.

56. Celie writes about an unusual illness that has taken hold of Albert. He loses all of his energy and lies in bed, staring at different things around the room. The cure for this malaise turns out to be his sending Celie the rest of the letters that Nettie had written her.

Celite explains this unusual healing by saying, “You know meanness kill, they say.” What does she mean by this? Think of some people that you know who are particularly mean-spirited. Does their physical well being reflect their negative behavior?

Write an editorial for your school newspaper on the topic of “how meanness does [or does not] kill.” To support your opinion, use examples from your own personal experience, sources you have read or seen in the media, and at least one example from The Color Purple.
The Color Purple

Letters 83-90

57. The call that comes to Celie in the middle of the night brings her what may be the most unexpected good news she has received in her whole life, with the possible exception of Shug's return. Alphonso has passed away, and the house and store that he had been running really belongs to Celie and Nettie.

Celic's first instinct is to reject the inheritance because it has been tainted by contact with her stepfather. However, Shug quickly convinces her to take possession of her land.

Recollect a surprise, expected or unexpected, that has come to you in your lifetime. Then, write a journal entry from your point of view on the day when you received that surprise. What were you doing when it arrived? How did you react? What were the positive and negative effects the surprises had on your life?

58. Sometimes it seems as though good news is closely followed by terrible news. That is what happens to Celie: right after she gets her inheritance and starts to dream about sharing a home with Shug and Nettie's family, Celie learns that Shug is in love with someone else. His name is Germaine, and he is nineteen years old.

Shug asks Celie for six months to have a last affair before settling down. Celie tells Shug that although she loves her, Shug must leave. In the event that her affair falls through, Shug wants to maintain the relationship with Celie as a backup. Celie isn't interested and refuses to be seen as Shug's security.

Could Celie have predicted this? Based on Shug's behavior throughout the story, does her mistreatment of Celie come as a surprise?

Write a letter to Celie giving your opinion on whether she could have predicted Shug's decision. Use examples from the text to support your answer.
59. Celie looks at herself in the mirror, searching for signs of something Shug might have loved. Her self-confidence has been lowered because of Shug's decision to take Germaine as a lover, even if it is only for a short period of time.

Has your self-confidence ever been shaken? Have you ever wondered what it was that people found appealing about you in a romantic relationship, a friendship, or in a family relationship?

Take this experience and compose a poem. It should be at least ten lines in length. Rhyme and meter are up to you.

60. In the same letter, Miss Eleanor Jane brings her baby to visit Sofia. Miss Eleanor Jane thinks, as many new mothers do, that everyone will be delighted and overjoyed to see her baby. However, Sofia surprises her with a lack of feeling towards her son, Reynolds Stanley Earl.

Miss Eleanor Jane is hurt by Sofia's indifference toward her baby, and her feelings of injury compel her to press for an explanation. Sofia explains that, while she appreciates the kindness Miss Eleanor Jane gave her when Sofia was a prisoner in her home, there are many reasons why Sofia can't love the baby.

Write a letter to a friend explaining in detail why Sofia feels she cannot love Miss Eleanor Jane's baby.
The Color Purple

61. The author intentionally places the news about Nettie’s death before the end of the story. Ironically, Celie continues to write letters to her sister, even though she knows Nettie is dead, possibly victim of a German U-boat attack.

Sequencing refers to the way in which various elements of a story are arranged. The events in this ending could have been arranged differently. Celie could have been standing on the porch and reading the telegram for the first time when her sister pulled up in the car. Celie could have also started writing letters to God again.

Did you find that the arrangement the author chose was the best, or do you think Celie should have received the telegram at another point in the story? Write a letter to the author using specific reasons to support your answer.

Wrap-Up

62. After completing The Color Purple, Alice Walker wrote Possessing the Secret of Joy in 1992 and focused on the marriage of Adam and Tashi.

With what you know about Adam and Tashi, having read The Color Purple, what do you consider to be their strengths and weaknesses as a couple? What areas of their relationship could be improved?

Write a paragraph in which you predict the success or failure of Adam and Tashi’s marriage. Be sure to refer to specific behaviors that they demonstrate in The Color Purple to support your prediction.

63. The Color Purple was published in 1982 to a storm of intense criticism. There were many people who thought the behaviors represented in the novel promoted stereotypes about the behavior of black men. Other critics thought that the novel focused on gender stereotypes and left racism relatively untouched in the novel.
Pretend you are a literary critic composing an article for a magazine. Choose one of the arguments on stereotypes in *The Color Purple* and defend it using textual evidence for support. Try to make your article at least one page in length.

64. The last line of *The Color Purple* reads, “Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt.” Reread the last letter, and consider the ways in which Celie has become younger over the long course of the novel.

In what ways do we use the terms “old” and “young” without referring to biological age? What major changes do you see taking place within Celie’s emotional makeup?

A classmate doesn’t understand the last line of the novel. Explain how Celie regains her youth, and refer to at least four major changes that take place within Celie in the story.

65. The most vocal supporters of *The Color Purple* after its publication were the feminist community and African American women. The fact that so many disputes arose after the novel’s publication shows how long these segments of the population have lived without having their personal stories of tribulation made public.

Alice Walker and the women in *The Color Purple* all grew up in the shadow of considerable adversity. What adversity have you faced in your own lifetime?

Like Shug, who wrote a song for Celie earlier in the novel, you want to write a song and dedicate it to the person who has helped you the most during times of adversity in your life. Write the lyrics in the form of a poem. Include some form of rhythm and rhyme.
66. Point of view is crucial in any narrative. The person delivering the story has total control over what information is included and what descriptions are provided.

In the instance of a first-person narrative, the reader must determine whether the narrator is reliable. The information related by the narrator should be as factual as possible or, at least, a believable version of events.

Do you think that Celie is a reliable narrator? Are there any events that make you wonder if she is telling the truth? Why or why not?

Write a brief essay assessing Celie's reliability as a narrator. What are some events that you believe aren’t exactly true. In other words, if told from a different perspective, would they be different? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
Test

1. Why do Nettie and her family leave Africa to return to the United States?
   A. Nettie has heard about Celie’s successful pants company.
   B. Nettie and Samuel feel that they are no longer effective as missionaries.
   C. The British colonial authority sends home all foreign missionaries.
   D. They leave as a protest against the rubber plantations.

2. What was the purpose of the road that destroyed the Olinka village?
   A. The land is needed for a rubber plantation.
   B. The Olinka villagers needed a way to get to the ocean quickly.
   C. The advent of the automobile in Africa made roads necessary.
   D. The road is part of a defense infrastructure.

3. Which of the following is NOT true about Sofia’s incarceration?
   A. She gets almost no time credited to her for good behavior.
   B. She spends much of her time living at the mayor’s house.
   C. She gets to see her family on Christmas, Easter, and Mother’s Day.
   D. She is beaten so badly after her arrest that she looks like an eggplant.

4. What is the cause of Harpo’s sudden weight gain?
   A. He develops a taste for Sofia’s cooking and can’t stop eating it.
   B. He stops working in the fields and isn’t burning off as much energy.
   C. He is taking a medication that causes him to gain weight.
   D. He wants to get big enough to beat up his wife.

5. Where is Nettie most impressed by the quality of black culture?
   A. Harlem
   B. London
   C. Africa
   D. Atlanta
6. Albert clearly loved Shug. Why didn’t he marry her?
A. He didn’t want to spend so much time touring with her.
B. His family told him that she was beneath him.
C. She wanted to be free of commitments.
D. He had already gotten another girl pregnant.

7. What relation is Squeak to the warden of Sofia’s jail?
A. sister
B. granddaughter
C. niece
D. cousin

8. Why didn’t Alphonso tell Celie and Nettie about their real father?
A. He wanted to keep their inheritance for himself as long as he could.
B. He considered himself their father.
C. He had made a promise to their mother never to tell.
D. He had their emotional health in mind.

9. Why does Samuel accept Nettie into his home so quickly?
A. He had known Celie before and felt sorry for both her and Nettie.
B. Corrine needed help tending to the two adopted children.
C. He was physically attracted to her.
D. He thought she was the mother of his adopted children.

10. What color dress does Celie buy when she shops with Kate?
A. purple
B. brown
C. red
D. blue

11. How had Celie always imagined God before talking to Shug about it?
A. as a bearded, black man
B. as a force in nature
C. as a bearded, white man
D. as a motherly woman
12. What does Celie call Sofia’s boyfriend?
   A. Harpo
   B. Prizefighter
   C. Mr. _____
   D. Tobias

13. What does Celie put in her father-in-law’s water glass?
   A. her own spit
   B. urine
   C. dirt
   D. liquor

14. How does Celie convince Shug to wait longer before leaving Mr. _____’s house?
   A. She promises to be Shug’s lover.
   B. She threatens to stab Shug.
   C. She pretends to be very sick.
   D. She tells Shug that Mr. _____ beats her.

15. Who ends up running off to start a plantation with Grady?
   A. Celie
   B. Squeak
   C. Suzie Q
   D. Sofia

16. At the end of the story, Celie feels
   A. happy
   B. tired
   C. young
   D. wealthy

17. In the era of the novel, when is it acceptable for a black person to sit in the front seat next to a white person in a car?
   A. during driving lessons
   B. on the way back from the store
   C. when the black person has fixed the car
   D. on the way to church
18. What name does Grady have for Shug that she does not like?  
   A. Baby  
   B. Mama  
   C. Honey  
   D. Woman

19. What disease was so deadly to missionaries in Africa?  
   A. influenza  
   B. scurvy  
   C. bubonic plague  
   D. malaria

20. How old is the man that Shug leaves Celie to be with?  
   A. 30  
   B. 15  
   C. 19  
   D. 50
Test Answer Key

1. B  
2. A  
3. C  
4. D  
5. A  
6. B  
7. C  
8. A  
9. D  
10. B  
11. C  
12. B  
13. A  
14. D  
15. B  
16. C  
17. A  
18. B  
19. D  
20. C