



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2015 Volume II: American Culture in the Long 20th Century

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## **Placing Literature in a Cultural Studies Framework: The Color Purple**

Curriculum Unit 15.02.08  
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### **Introduction**

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The reading of culture and the creation of culture are part of students' everyday lives as expressed through music/lyric, fashion, television, film, social media, etc. By engaging students in an analysis of a text as a cultural phenomenon and situating that text within a cultural framework, students are able to access understandings relevant to their experiences. In this unit, students will examine a novel as a cultural artifact. They will analyze the literature and place it in conversation with a variety of other cultural artifacts from the same period to better understand its influences and meaning.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, "culture is the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group," or, "the beliefs and attitudes about something that people in a particular group or organization share<sup>1</sup>." By framing a novel, in this case *The Color Purple*, as a cultural artifact, students are able to apply a critical lens to the text and probe the social and political context of the work, which arises out of a rich political history, caught within the intersection of race, gender and class. Because of the mature content of the novel and the sophisticated discussion of multiple oppressions, this unit is designed for high school seniors but could be adapted for sophomores or juniors. The unit is designed for students of mixed ability within the same classroom, and provides strategies to differentiate.

The Engineering & Science University Magnet School where I teach is a 6-12 STEM themed inter-district magnet school. 60% of ESUMS students are New Haven Residents while the remaining 40% live in the surrounding suburban towns. ESUMS has a disproportionate amount of male students enrolled in the school; approximately 70% of the student body is identified as male whereas only about 30% of the student body is identified as female. This demographic provides a challenge in that sometimes female voices are marginalized in the classroom. Teaching a unit of study in which, *The Color Purple*, is used as an anchor text provides the opportunity to explore issues of feminism and the feminine experience which male students are less likely to be familiar with. Similarly, the unit has the potential to elevate female student voices. The ESUMS student body is fairly ethnically diverse. 8% of students identify as Asian, 44% identify as Black or African American, 18% identify as Hispanic, and 31% identify as White. Situating a study of Walker's, *The Color Purple*, in a historical and cultural framework will allow this diverse body of students to access some of the political nuances of the novel they may otherwise miss.

While the primary focus of the unit remains culture, it is necessary for students to understand the material conditions and social conditions that give rise to cultural expression. Throughout the unit, students will have opportunities to explore and define culture, analyze culture and investigate the ways culture expresses the ideas of a set of people in a given time.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) emerged in 2009 and were initially adopted by 48 states, signaling a shift in the teaching of literature and literacy. Reviled by some and revered by others, the CCSS unmistakably harken back to the theory of New Criticism, a pedagogy popular throughout the mid-century that places an emphasis on the text alone. According to Daniel Katz, director of Secondary Education and Secondary Special Education Teacher Preparation at Seton Hall University, “In New Criticism, the text is treated as self-contained, and it is the job of the reader to investigate it as an object to be understood via the structure of the text and without reference to external resources such as history, culture, psychology or the experiences of the reader,” (Katz). Close reading and analysis of particular word choice or literary devices are examined as parts of a whole that interact to create meaning—the text itself. Katz argues that while this is an important skillset for readers to develop, it is not the only skillset necessary for a comprehensive literacy experience. In criticizing the architect of CCSS, David Coleman, Katz writes, “As a student of classical philosophy and literature, he (Coleman) is no doubt quite familiar with literary criticism, but to infuse common standards in the English Language Arts with tools for literary criticism to the exclusion of all other ways to interact with texts *all the way down to Kindergarten* is a thoroughly strangled view of the role literature plays in the classroom.” Reading is a complex act where meaning is made both on the page and in exchange with the reader and all that the reader brings to the experience. This unit is built on the belief that the skills described in the Reading and Literature standards of the CCSS should be supplemented by other pedagogical practices that allow students to critically explore the socio-political, historical and cultural complexities that lend meaning to a text. The unit doesn’t seek to abandoned the CCSS but to join the approach described in the CCSS with other critical lens in order to broadened students’ literacy experience and equip them with them ability to make meaningful connections between the world and the text.

By placing literature in the context of cultural studies, this unit hopes to expand the toolkit of the CCSS enabling students to study a piece of literature as a cultural phenomenon. In doing so, students are still able to investigate the choices an author makes and how those choices impact the meaning of a text as a whole but also to situate whole meaning in its cultural context leading students to think about the social, economic and political conditions that influenced the writer to make those choices to begin with. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill defines cultural studies as, “an innovative interdisciplinary field of research and teaching that investigates the ways in which “culture” creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, social relations and power....Combining the strengths of the social sciences and the humanities, cultural studies draws on methods and theories from literary studies, sociology, communications studies, history, cultural anthropology, and economics.” The University further asserts that, “Cultural studies is devoted to understanding the processes through which societies and the diverse groups within them come to terms with history, community life, and the challenges of the future.” In essence, by using the framework provided by cultural studies, students can investigate the conditions that produce a text as a cultural phenomenon and the way a text speaks back to the cultural conditions it emerges from.

Cultural studies in many ways mirrors the critical literacy approach to the English classroom and so the following unit works to combine the techniques and theories of New Criticism with those of Critical Literacy. In an article published in the *English Journal*, Robert Petrone and Robert Gidney describe a similar approach applied in their American Literature courses; “While Reader Response and New Criticism remain important components of our pedagogy, we strive to foreground historical, cultural and social issues. We ask students to

seek out the history, value and functions of texts so they begin to see themselves not just as passive consumers of a tradition, but as active, critical thinkers developing skills, dispositions and habits of mind to question those traditions they are so often meant to take at face value, traditions that value certain voices over others.<sup>3</sup> This curriculum unit guides students to think about the relationship between history and culture. If we understand that culture—and by extension, literature—arises out of concrete material conditions, then those conditions must also limit, shape and expand a particular work of literature. For instance, works of literature such as *Johnny Got his Gun* and *Catch-22* arise as cultural reactions to the first and second World Wars. Without the material conditions and shifting relations produced by the wartime psychology, the works would not exist, as we understand them today. But culture is not a passive reaction to the material conditions of an epoch. Culture reacts and reflects back on the world in a dialectical relationship and thus changes it. It impacts the same historical conditions out of which it grows. *Johnny Got his Gun* and *Catch-22*, both criticisms of the irreverence the military bureaucracy shows towards the bodies of soldiers, become part of the cultural fabric of the American ethos and influence our understanding of war to the present.

## Content Objectives

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The goal of the unit is threefold; first, students will develop a definition of culture as well as an understanding of the way culture emerges, is shaped and changed. Second, students will develop analytical reading skills, and third, students will develop comparative analytical writing skills.

At the culmination of this unit, students will understand that a novel is a cultural artifact and that as an artifact, it tells us something about the people and period that created it, which includes an exploration of the way a historical period may have influenced a writer's choices. Similarly, a key understanding the curriculum unit explores is the way literature can push back on and influence the historical period it emerges from. Culture, and therefore literature, reflect back on the material conditions of a period; thus, helping to shape that period. The relationship is a dialectical one in which culture/literature arises out of particular social and material circumstances but has the ability to influence the social and material conditions of the period it exists in.

The unit is then centered on following essential questions:

- *What is culture and how is it created?*
- *Where do commonly held ideas come from?*
- *Does history limit, shape or impact literature or culture? How?*
- *Can literature or culture impact or shape history?*

While students can use a biographical lens to approach the work, a cultural studies framework requires students to have a broader understanding of the period from which Walker's writing emerges. The study is about more than just Walker's particular experience but about the ideas, events, art and writers that make up the fabric of the period. The unit explores how this body of thought shapes Walker's novel .

The *Color Purple* is a novel written in epistolary form. The protagonist, Celie, begins writing letters to God when her father rapes her at the age of fourteen. As the novel continues, Celie is married off to a man she calls Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (the reader later learns his name is Albert). Albert beats Celie, abuses her and forbids

her to see her sister, Nettie. Unbeknown to Celie, Nettie finds herself in Africa as part of a black missionary team, but Albert hides Nettie's letters and Celie assumes that she is dead.

Shortly into the novel, Albert's mistress, Shug Avery, comes to live with them because she is sick. At first Shug is mean to Celie but Celie nurses her back to health and the two develop an intimate relationship. After learning that Albert has kept Nettie's letters hidden for years, Celie leaves him for Shug Avery. The novel resolves itself when Celie inherits her family's farm after her stepfather's death. She makes a living off a small sewing business and is reunited with Nettie and her estranged children.

The historical period the novel was written in (1982) as well as the mid century that shaped Walker's early life influence Walker's writing. She chooses to set the novel in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and traces the life of her protagonist, Celie, as she confronts the world as a "poor, Black woman." Celie is challenged by this reality throughout the novel which, reaches its crescendo as her husband, Albert, tells her, "You're poor, Black, ugly; you're a woman, you're nothing at all." The novel sets out to explore the conditions of Black women in America but does not offer a coherent political ideology. Instead a variety of ideologies, popular throughout the mid century, make appearances in the text. Familiarizing students with the various strains of political thought will allow them to identify areas of the novel in which these ideas emerge. Students will also be able to use the novel as a way to complicate their understanding of the late Civil Rights Movement and the Second Wave of the Women's Rights Movement. Too often these periods are taught as single narratives (or omitted altogether) leaving out the complexities and multiplicity of social and political thought that characterized the epoch.

Walker, who was born in Eaton, GA, grew up as the daughter of sharecroppers who lived in extreme poverty. In a biographical documentary, *Beauty in Truth*<sup>5</sup> (see teacher resources) , Walker describes the conditions of her childhood home as well as, the unending labor and sacrifices her mother, Minnie Lou Tallulah Grant, gave. As a youth, Walker was confronted with systematic racism. She attended segregated schools, but graduated as Valedictorian and earned a scholarship to attend Spelman College where she worked with the late historian Howard Zinn, author of a *Peoples History of the United States* . Walker's participation in the sit-ins, which characterized the third period of the Civil Rights Movement (spanning from 1960-1965), put her in conflict with the conservative administration at Spelman. It was Zinn who helped her obtain a scholarship and transfer to Sarah Lawrence College where she graduated from in 1965. While at Sarah Lawrence, Walker worked with poet, feminist and activist Muriel Ruckeyser who is best known for her collection *The Book of the Dead* (1938) which explores the Hawks Nest industrial disaster that lead to hundreds of miners dying of silicosis. Walker has spoken about the influence Ruckeyser has had on her own writing including turning Walker's poems over to her own publisher (see teacher resources for an interview of Walker discussing this influence).

The period in which Walker begins teaching and later writing is characterized by near social and cultural revolutions. Walker is a coming of age when in 1954, the Supreme Court decides in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, that public schools must be desegregated. The following year, 1955, Emmet Till is brutally lynched by two white men who are later acquitted by an all white jury in Mississippi. Till's mutilated body is featured in the pages of *Jet* magazine, a Black periodical. The magazine issue becomes a cultural phenomenon spreading awareness about the horrors of racism in the South and adding fuel to the Civil Rights Movement. Walker's college years are dominated by the politics of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and the Woolworth sit-ins. During the summer of 1964, when the Civil Rights Act finally passes Congress, a series of riots erupt in northern cities from Philadelphia to Rochester to New York and New York's Harlem. The riots are caused by poverty, unemployment, ghetto conditions and police brutality. As Walker leaves Sarah Lawrence and begins her early teaching career, Stokely Carmichael coins the phrase Black Power and the Black

Panthers publish their 10-point program<sup>6</sup>. The politics that come to mark these moments make an appearance throughout Walker's novel.

*The Color Purple* depicts the extreme poverty of the Black family in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the grotesquely inhumane treatment of Black Americans, which is explored primarily through the subplot of Sofia's character. Sofia is incarcerated for sassing the mayor's wife and assaulting the mayor. While in prison, Sofia is brutalized and nearly killed. Students might consider how the experience of Emmett Till's murder or the rebellions in the summer of 1964 may have influenced Walker's depiction of the justice system and the creation of Sofia's story within the novel. What does Sophia's story add to the novel? What historical or cultural experiences may have influenced Walker's imagining of Sophia?

As mentioned before, the novel doesn't provide a central thesis on racism but instead creates a story set within a particular historical context in which racism is a significant feature. Influences of nonviolent resistance (Celie's character), violent resistance (Sophia's character), Black separatism (Nettie's character) and Black capitalism are all present within the text. The film and its accompanying written text, *The Black Power Mixtapes*<sup>7</sup> (see teacher resources), explores the multiplicity of Black political thought emerging from the mid to late century. This resource allows students to explore the historical fabric that is the backdrop for Walker's evolution as a writer. Students can use this pairing to examine how the novel represents or is shaped by the variety of ideas arising from this period.

Similar to the multiplicity of ideas concerning race and racism, the novel is also influenced by a variety of ideologies that dominate the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of the women's movement. A strand of feminist separatist thought threads throughout the novel and is embodied in Celie's character. Feminist Separatism was popularized by writers such as Rita Mae Brown in 1960's and 70's; and espouses the theory that there can never be true equality between men and women; therefore, women are left to separate themselves from men to create spaces where they can thrive<sup>8</sup>. This is evidenced by Celie's desire to partner exclusively with women and her rejection of Albert, her reformed former-husband, at the end of the novel.

In addition to Separatism, Shug Avery's character stands out as being influenced by the politics of personal sexual liberation. She pursues her desires despite the reactions of the town around her even dating a young man 20 years her junior in the later half of the book. Similarly, Sofia's character stands out as a matriarchal figure despite her absence throughout much of the book. This position indicates the power some feminists believe is inherent in motherhood. In a journal article entitled, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality," writer Sharon Smith describes the conventional thought regarding the Black family and matriarchal figures:

*In 1965, the US Department of Labor issued a report entitled, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." The report, was written by future Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and describes a "Black matriarchy" at the center of a "tangle of pathology" harming Black families, resulting in a cycle of poverty. "A fundamental fact of Negro American family life is the often reversed roles of husband and wife," in which Black women consistently earn more than their men, argues Moynihan. The report states, "In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole."*

The report is evidence of the muddled thinking around the position of women in the family. On the one hand, feminists celebrate the strong matriarchal figure, while on the other the Moynihan report is evidence of the

way mainstream thinking pathologizes female led families.

The novel and its film interpretation, which received heavy criticism for its negative depictions of the black family and black males in particular, is also a reflection of this multiplicity of thought on women and the family. Alice Walker is writing the novel as the Civil Rights Movement and Women's Rights Movement are on the decline. The novel is very much shaped by the politics of its time.

In order to analyze how the ideas of the period may have impacted Walker's development of her characters, students' might explore the questions: *Describe Walkers depictions of males in the text? Why does Walker depict the male characters negatively? or, What social and material conditions may have influenced this decision?* Students might also read excerpts from essays or studies during the period to understand the body of thought that influences the novel.

A second goal of this unit is to develop students' analytical reading skills. Students will consider the social and material conditions of the period Walker is writing in and consider how those realities may have impacted her choices as a writer. This approach merges with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by focusing on CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3, which asks students to, "Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).<sup>9</sup>" The standard is placed in conversation with the new history standards, specifically CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 which requires students to, "Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem." Essentially, students will study the events and conditions that impacted Walker's life and the period in which she was writing. Further, the unit asks students to explore the meaning created by the technical and literary choices Walker makes while investigating the historical influences on her craft decisions.

Students will use close reading to analyze passages, thinking about the details, images, symbolism or other literary techniques Walker employs to develop her characters. Ultimately, the unit will guide students to develop an understanding of the influence socio-political contexts have on a piece of literature as they explore primary source documents, essays, and other works of culture that emerge from the same period. By pairing Walker's novel with other works of culture (song, poetry, art, film) as well as critical nonfiction, the unit will complicate student understanding of the essential questions.

The final goal of the unit is to develop students' comparative analytical writing skills. This unit is being developed inside a district curricular requirement which requires students to compare a text and film adaptation analyzing the way the artists choices alter meaning and the way medium limits, expands or shapes the construction of a story. As a final assessment, students will write a comparative analysis about the novel, *The Color Purple* and its 1985 film adaptation by Steven Spielberg. Using the cultural studies framework described above, students will define and describe the way ideas of right and wrong evolve over a given period. In this case, morality is influenced by the socio-political fabric of the Civil Rights Movement, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave of the Women's Rights movement and the reaction to those advancements. Students will select 2-3 scenes in the novel and compare them to the corresponding moments in the film. Students will apply New Criticism methods of analyzing literature by investigating the way Walker uses particular words, images and details to develop character at points in the novel. Students will layer a cultural studies frame and critical literacy methods by investigating the social and political context that influences Walker's understanding of morality and ultimately shapes the choices she makes as an author.

## Teaching Strategies

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### Note taking

Note taking is essential to the development of close reading. Authors of the Carnegie Corporation Study from Vanderbilt University, *Writing to Read*, explain “Note taking involves sifting through a text to determine what is most relevant and transforming and reducing the substance of these ideas into written phrases or key words. Intentionally or unintentionally, note takers organize the abstracted material in some way, connecting one idea to another, while blending new information with their own knowledge, resulting in new understandings of texts.<sup>1 0</sup>” Students practice this skill in English classrooms by annotating texts, or creating dialogical notebook entries. A dialogical entry provides a form for note taking in which evidence or observations are listed on the left margin of the page and student reactions or ideas that emerge from that evidence appear on the right. For example, students might be required to note an observation about imagery, word choice, or tone shifts in the left margin and then explore its purpose or effect on the viewer in the remainder of the page. The dialogical notebook essentially creates a space for students to talk back to the text. This model helps students to focus their observations and prevents the task of analysis from becoming overwhelming. The Facing History Website<sup>1 1</sup> and the AP Central<sup>1 2</sup> page of the College Board site offer more information about two-column journals.

Paper Chat

### Seminar Discussions

Throughout the unit, students will engage in seminar discussions about the novel and its film adaptation. When preparing for seminar discussion students should view a scene multiple times, taking notes as they watch. Students should also read the corresponding selection of the novel multiple times, taking notes during or after reading. The teacher may wish to provide a graphic organizer or assign dialogical notes to guide students in this process. Alternatively, the teacher may require students to write 2-3 questions about the film or passage. It is important to remind students that they need not know the answers to the questions they craft. Instead, emphasize that the questions are used to propel the conversation forward. Question stems such as Costa’s Levels of Questioning<sup>1 3</sup> may also be provided to help students craft strong questions.

During the seminar discussion the teacher should speak minimally in order to create space for students to arrive at analysis independent of instructor input. The role of the teacher is to track and monitor the conversation, intervening only when necessary. Desks must be arranged in a circle so that all participants can see one another. Discussion should flow freely and students are not required to raise hands.

Students should be evaluated based on their participation in the seminar discussion. A rubric, such as the example below, should be provided and discussed in advance. Reluctant contributors may be allowed to record notes on the conversation as it unfolds. They may then show their notes for credit. At the culmination of the seminar discussion students will complete a page long response journal addressing the following question(s): What ideas struck you during the seminar? What new ideas do you know have? What is still unresolved/what lingers? These response journals may also be used to inform the writing of the performance task.

### Speaking & Listening <sup>14</sup>

Prepare for and participate in formal and informal conversations, discussions, and presentations by building on others' ideas and expressing original ideas clearly and persuasively.

<b>Novice (1)</b>	<b>Emerging (2)</b>	<b>Competent (3)</b>	<b>Exemplary (4)</b>
-Little or no preparation evident.	-Prepared for discussion with some notes or a partial statement.	-Prepared for discussion with written statement or notes.	-Prepared for discussion with comprehensive notes and statement.
-Does not demonstrate listening with note taking or body language.	-Demonstrates some listening with sparse notes or appropriate body language.	-Demonstrates listening by taking notes on discussion, or responding appropriately to conversation.	-Demonstrates listening with detailed notes, clear body language and participation.
- Participates minimally or not at all.	-Participates with brief comments, agreement/disagreement, or clarifying question.	- Responds to questions being asked, agrees/disagrees with a peer, or asks a question.	-Responds to questions being asked with statements, further questions, or connections.

### **Performance task**

As a culminating assessment students write a comparative analysis of *The Color Purple* and its film adaptation. Students will closely compare 2-3 scenes in order to argue if the texts are the same story. Students should consider the ways the different political ideologies and historical occurrences discussed throughout the unit emerge in the novel and the film. They should consider whether one strain of thought dominates the novel vs. the film.

## **Sample Lesson Plans**

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### **Lesson 1**

*Objective:* 1) Read and annotate historical documents. 2) Make connections between historical documents and *The Color Purple* . 3) Understand the influence historical/material/social conditions have on the creation of culture.

*Warm up:* Respond to the following in a brief paragraph If literary scholars were to studying a novel set in *current year* , what events over the last 5 -10 years might influence the setting, characters or story?

- Facilitate a discussion about the warm up writing by selecting several students to share their ideas. *Ask:* The Color Purple takes place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, what do you know about this time period? What specific events might contribute to the novel? Feminism was becoming more prevalent when the novel was written, how might this impact the novel? What do you know about feminism or the Women's Rights Movement?
- Introduce the theme of the performance task and unit. Students should have a clear understanding of the performance task well before they begin writing it. Explain that throughout this unit we are going to study *The Color Purple* as a work of culture. We are interested in what the novel suggests to us about the values and beliefs of the late 1960's and 1970's. At the end of the unit we will write a comparative analysis essay tracing the moral development of a character throughout the text and its accompanying



film adaptation.

**Teacher Note:** It is helpful to provide students with a written copy of the performance task early on. The class can then refer back to this document periodically to anchor discussions and assignments.

- Quick Write: What is morality? Where does it come from? Is it constant/unchanging? What are the kinds of experiences that shape a person's morality?

After students have completed the quick write, ask them to share in pairs. Next, select several pairs to share their ideas with the whole class.

- Jig Saw Part 1: Arrange students into groups of 4-5. Distribute a different document to each group. Explain that the documents represent different ideas that emerged from the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of the Women's Rights Movement. Instruct students to read and annotate the documents paying special attention to words or concepts they find unfamiliar. After students have read and annotated the text, they will discuss their observations, questions and ideas.

**Teacher Note:** In a jigsaw activity, it is helpful to group students by ability to differentiate for reading levels. It is also helpful to provide each group with a laptop or tablet to reference unfamiliar words or ideas. If technology is limited, students may be able to use smart phones to access the same information.

- Jigsaw Part 2: After students have completed the annotations and discussion described in part 1, regroup students so that each new groups includes a student who studied a different document. In this new grouping students will create a matrix on chart paper summarizing they key ideas from each document.

Combahee River Collective Statement Womanist NOW Statement of Purpose The Politics of Housework

**Teacher Note:** Alternative/additional texts that embody the various ideas of the Civil Rights Movement could be included in the selections as well. For example, A speech by Martin Luther King, a speech by Malcolm X, the Black Panther's 10-point program, etc. For struggling readers, an excerpt of a longer essay may be more appropriate.

- *Closure:* Exit writing: How might the ideas represented in the various documents we discussed today shape a person or character's sense of right and wrong? How might the ideas impact a novel or work of art emerging from this period?

## Lesson 2

*Objectives:* 1) Prepare for and engage in collaborative discussion about a text. 2) Compare and contrast the same story told over different mediums 3) Analyze how medium and artists choices convey a political message.

- *Warm up:* Read pages 39-42. What is the purpose of this scene? How does Walker achieve this purpose through detail, word choice or imagery?

**Teacher Notes:** In this short letter, Celie describes a confrontation between herself and Sophia. Harpo, Celie's stepson and Sophia's husband, is concerned because Sophia lacks the acquiescence women are expected to exhibit. Harpo, having sought Celie's advice, is instructed to beat Sophia; however, Sophia is the

stronger of the two and defends herself well. In this entry, Sophia confronts Celie for have advised Harpo to assault her.

Once students have completed warm up writing, facilitate a brief discussion.

- Say: *As we have discussed in the past, artists choices including the media the artwork is presented in, impact the meaning. Today, we will examine three versions of the same text and participate in a seminar discussion to compare and contrast the works.*

**Teacher Notes:** Distribute graphic organizer to facilitate note taking (see Teaching Strategies).

- Using an LCD projector, play the film scene that correlates with the text. The scene can be found <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5v5JjUZpAPk> or 43 minutes and 32 seconds into the movie. The clip should be played 2-3 times during which students should take notes.

**Teacher Notes:** During this scene Sophia stomps through the cornfield to confront Celie. Her walk is aggressive and masculine. She opens the conversation accusingly, "You told Harpo to beat me." Sophia continues stating, "All my life I've had to fight. I had to fight my Daddy. I had to fight my uncles. I had to fight my brothers. Girl child aint safe in a family of mens." Throughout her speech, Sofia's voice and mannerisms remain aggressive and angry. Celie responds, "This life be over soon. Heaven lasts always." She appears ashamed and afraid. Her brow is furrowed and she wears a concerned look on her face. Sofia answers her, "You better bash Mister's head in and worry about heaven later." AS Sophia speaks her expression remains rigid and angry. Her tone is curt and she stomps off through the cornfield. The scene suggests a divide between the two women. The tone is dominated by shame and anger though some comedy is interwoven as the scene cuts between the women's confrontation and Harpo trying to convince his father his facial injuries are due to the mule and not the fight he lost to Sophia.

- Using an LCD projector, show the Musical equivalent to the text. A clip of the Tony Awards performance can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM1pWvsi6d8> The clip should be played 2-3 times during which students take notes.

**Teacher Notes:** The emphasis and tone of the Tony performance is markedly different from both the film and the text. The colors of the set are bright and the music, which begins low in scale and tempo, shifts to a faster tempo and higher scale, in what resembles a church spiritual. Sofia enters stage right and begins with an attack on Harpo, not Celie: "I love Harpo, God knows I do, but I kill him dead before I let him or anybody beat me." The first verse of the song acknowledges Celie's submissiveness and frailty but shows empathy for her. The bridge, repeated throughout the song is sung as Sofia's character lifts her fist into the air in a cross between a punch and the historic symbol of peoples' (worker/women/black/etc.) power. She sings, "and when a man just don't give a damn...Hell, No!"

As the scene continues, the other female characters enter the stage each taking a turn adding to the claim that women must defend themselves. One character even brandishes a rifle. The scene is dominated by a show of female solidarity. The tone is upbeat and empowered. Unlike the close of the film and text, the musical performance resolves Sophia and Celie's relationship. The scene ends with the two women embracing.

- Distribute discussion rubric (see Teaching Strategies) and explain protocol for seminar discussion. Say: *Now that we have viewed several versions of the same scene and taken some notes about our*

*observations, we are going to have a discussion. As we discuss it is important to listen and make eye contact with the speaker. We will not raise our hands but will allow the discussion to flow organically. Set a timer for 10-20 minutes and begin the discussion.*

**Teacher Notes:** As additional scaffolding, you might provide students with a copy of Costa's levels of questioning stems[i] and instruct students to write 3 three level two or three questions (analysis and synthesis) before the discussion begins. Students can then use these questions to help generate discussion. The teacher can also write several discussion questions on the board to help scaffold for reluctant students.

Some examples might be:

- *What political ideas or messages are present in each version?*
- *Is this the same story?*
- *Which version is more successful?*
- *How have the artists' choices impacted the meaning?*

Remind students that they are to be graded on their participation in seminar discussion and review the rubric once more. I sometimes allow students to take notes on the conversation and then show me the notes if they are shy about participating at first. During the discussion, student desks should be arranged in a circle so that each participant can be seen by one another. Participation can be tracked by drawing a circle or map of the classroom and then draw lines between speakers to indicate discussion exchanges.

- *Closure* : Assign a journal writing, which should begin in class while ideas are fresh but may be completed for homework: Reflect on the seminar discussion. What ideas stuck out to you from this activity? What questions remain unresolved? What new questions or thoughts do you have?

### **Lesson 3**

*Objectives:* 1) Analyze the development of a theme throughout a text. 2) Make text to world connections 3) Write a thesis statement

*Warm up:* As students walk in, distribute a hand out including an excerpt from Kimberle Crenshaw's 1989 essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," (see appendix 2). Students will read, annotate and reflect on the quote. After 4-5 minutes, students will engage in a pair-share. Teacher will then select several groups to share out.

- **Paper Chat:** Prior to class beginning hang large pieces of bulletin board paper or chart paper around the room. Label each piece with a major theme or motif that runs throughout the novel: racism, women and sexuality, violence, religion, and power. Give each student a marker and then instruct him or her to move about the room making notes on the chart paper without talking. The purpose of this activity is to create a dialogue without speaking. Notes might include memorable quotes from the novel, details, illustrations, flow charts or words. Encourage students to draw on other source material presented throughout the unit and include these ideas on the chart paper. Students should move about the room freely but must visit all stations.

**Teacher Note:** You may have to model this activity on the board before moving into group work. Encourage students to respond to one another's notes and drawings.

- Once students have completed the paper chat ask them to spend several minutes in a gallery walk, just observing what their classmates have written. Instruct students to select the station they feel most comfortable with and move to that area.
- In these self-selected groups students will synthesize their classmate's ideas and generate a thesis statement. Instruct students to turn the chart paper over and respond to the following questions: 1) What ideas emerge from the notes? 2) If we consider the novel a work of culture, what does it suggest about the values and beliefs of the period it emerges from? 3) Generate a thematic thesis statement: What is Walker telling readers about this topic or idea?

**Teacher Note:** By this point in the unit students should already have a clear idea that the period the novel emerges from are the late 1960's throughout the 1970's. Additionally, the thesis writing should be reinforced practice. If this is the first time students are writing thesis statements, a mini lesson modeling how to do so will be necessary.

- Each group will share their findings out with the class. Allow opportunity for classmates in other groups to comment.
- As classwork or homework, assign independent reading of the novel. As students read they will look for further evidence or examples of the themes discussed in class and compose a journal entry. **Journal:** Think about the themes we discussed earlier in class. Discuss something that came up in your reading today and how it relates to this theme.

## Teacher Resources

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"Analyzing Images of Culture." AMNH. Accessed July 25, 2015.

<http://www.amnh.org/explore/curriculum-collections/structures-cultures/analyzing-images-of-culture>.

This resource provides a guide for helping students think about images in a cultural context. Photographs of significant moments from the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Rights Movement can be used to enrich student thinking about the cultural context from which the novel emerged.

"Dear Common Core English Standards: Can We Talk?" Daniel Katz PhD. September 19, 2014. Accessed April 4, 2015.

<http://danielskatz.net/2014/09/19/dear-common-core-english-standards-can-we-talk/>.

Daniel Katz, PhD. is the director of Secondary Education and Secondary Special Education Teacher Preparation at Seton Hall University. On his blog he describes the limitations of the Common Core State Standards and advocates for a broader approach to the teaching of literacy, which include more than the narrow pedagogical theory described in the CCSS.

Hamilton, Cynthia. "Alice Walker's Politics or The Politics of *The Color Purple*." *Journal of Black Studies* 18, no. 3 (1988): 379-91.

Accessed March 31, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784513>.

This article provides an analysis of the politics present in *The Color Purple*. The article is helpful for providing teachers with a deeper understanding of the ideologies present in the novel.

Petrone, Robert, and Robert Gibney. "The Power to Speak and Listen: Democratic Pedagogies in the American Literature Classroom."

*The English Journal* 94, no. 5, 35-39. Accessed March 31, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30047351>.

This article outlines an approach to Critical Literacy in the English Classroom. The source provides several concrete examples of Critical Literacy teaching practices and sets those examples among research.

Probst, Robert E. "Three Relationships in Teaching Literature." *The English Journal* 71, no. 1, 60-68. Accessed March 30, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/816550>.

This article describes the limitations of several approaches to teaching literature and advocates for a blending of several approaches. The author posits that the teacher's definition and understanding of literature directly impacts the methods employed to teach it. In this sense, the educator's values are transmitted to the student through the literacy experience.

## Student Resources

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*Alice Walker* . Kali Films Ltd., 2013. Film.

This accessible and student friendly biography traces the social and political conditions that impacted Walker's life including her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the march in Selma, AL

Friedan, Betty. "Statement of Purpose." National Organization for Women. October 29, 1966. Accessed July 27, 2015.

Excerpts of this statement are used in the sample lesson described above. The statement provides students with a primary source document that embodies one strain of feminist thought. This text can be use to help students develop a better understanding of the period that shapes Walker's writing.

Mainardi, Pat. "The Politics of Housework." *The Politics of Housework*. 1970. Accessed July 27, 2015.

This article was originally published in *Redstockings* in 1970. The articles is referenced in the sample lesson described above. The article provides students with a primary source document that embodies one strain of feminist thought. This text can be use to help students develop a better understanding of the period that shapes Walker's writing.

*The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* . MPI Home Video, 2011. Film.

This film uses archival footage from Swedish filmmakers and chronicles various voices and Black political though throughout the latter half of the civil rights movement. What makes this source so unique is that the footage is shot through a foreign eye and it included voices that are not typically part of the civil rights narrative that is presented to high school students. These first hand accounts are useful in helping students develop and understand of the various strains of political though that may have influenced Alice Walkers writing. A text based version of the material is also available.

"The Combahee River Collective Statement." The Combahee River Collective Statement. April 1, 1978. Accessed July 27, 2015.

Excerpts of this statement are used in the sample lesson described above. The statement provides students with a primary source document that embodies one strain of feminist thought. This text can be use to help students develop a better understanding of the period that shapes Walker's writing.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* . San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

This collection of essays was written by Walker between 1966-1982. Selections may be used to help students examine the political

thought that runs throughout *The Color Purple*.

Walker, Alice. "Muriel and I Had A Terrible Fight But Love Remained | Alice Walker | The Official Website for the American Novelist & Poet." Alice Walker The Official Website for the American Novelist Poet. 2015. Accessed July 24, 2015.

This video interview shows Alice Walker discussing the influences Muriel Rukeyser had on her life and writing. Walker met Rukeyser at Sarah Lawrence College and credits Rukeyser for help Walker get her first poems published.

## Appendix 1

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While the teaching of this unit requires touching on multiple standards, three of the CCSS are emphasized and explicitly assessed. Through close reading and text analysis students will practice CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3, which asks them to, "Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed). As a performance task, students are asked to compare the film version of *The Color Purple* to the novel, which requires student to demonstrate CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7 "Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)" Finally, because the culminating assessment is a written task, students will also practice CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2 which asks them to, "Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content."

Because the unit uses a cultural lens to examine the novel, students will also be addressing the social studies standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

## Appendix 2

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Teacher Created Materials

***Respond to the quote by black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term "intersectionality" in her insightful 1989 essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." <sup>3</sup> The concept of intersectionality is not an abstract notion but a description of the way multiple oppressions are experienced.***

Step One: Read the quote 2-3 times.

Step Two: Circle/Highlight any words or phrases that stick out to you.

Step Three: **Paraphrase** the quote in your own words. What is it **literally** saying?

Step Four: Consider why the author included this quote. How does it **connect** to the **big picture** of the text?

Step Five: Consider the **author's tone** and **word choice ( diction )**.

**What are your thoughts on her statement and how might this relate to *The Color Purple*.**

"Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. . . . But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. "

## Notes

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12. Accessed July 27, 2015. [http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/repository/ap04\\_preap\\_1\\_inter\\_st\\_35891.pdf](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/repository/ap04_preap_1_inter_st_35891.pdf).
13. "Costas Levels of Questioning." Accessed July 27, 2015.
14. This rubric was developed by Steven Staysniak, New Haven Public Schools.

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