The Color Purple

Organizational Patterns

_The Color Purple_ has no chapters. It has no definite sections. The Color Purple consists of letters. These letters are mostly written by the protagonist, addressed to God. Some letters are written by others addressed to the protagonist. The letters follow the life of the protagonist, Celie, as she grows from an adolescent to a mature woman, encompassing the years of 1909 – 1937.

Students would need to be aware of this structure and understand that while the book consists of only letters, it still moves in a chronological order, telling the story of this unfortunate young lady. Along with this awareness, the students would be expected to fill in gaps between the letters, making inferences and predicting all along the way.

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Issues Related to this Study of Literature

**Theme:** The human need to be recognized and loved.
The theme of the novel really came out to me while Shug Avery and Celie walk through the field of purple flowers. Shug makes the comment that God becomes angry when people walk past the color purple and don’t notice it. She continues to explain that everything longs to be seen, noticed, recognized, praised, and loved. She even brings the example of trees doing the same things as people do to be recognized. It was then that I realized that Celie had been fighting inside all her life. All she needed, as a genuine human need, was to be recognized and truly loved by others.

**Setting:** The Color Purple takes place in Macon, Georgia. It is set mainly at two locations within Macon, those being Celie’s original home and Mr. _____ (Alvin’s) home. It runs through the early 20th century. Students would need to be sensitive to both this location and time. They would need to ask themselves, what was happening in the south during this time? Especially, what was taking place with blacks and whites and within the black community?

**Point of View:** The novel is written from Celie’s point of view, the protagonist. She tells the story in first person, again the form of letters. This style of narrative should be fairly easy for readers to follow because she is telling the story of her life directly. Though she is writing to God, the students may put themselves in His place, accepting the story as though Celie is communicating with them directly. The point of view does change only a few times throughout the novel, when letters are written from Nettie, Celie’s sister, to Celie.
Affective Issues Related to the Work

- Growing from adolescence to maturity; *Celie and Nettie*
- Abuse (family or other); *Celie*
- Self-exploration and realization; *Celie*
- Close family/friend relationships; *Celie and Nettie; Celie and Shug*
- Self-worth and self-esteem or the lack of it; *Celie, Sophia, Shug, Alvin*

Vocabulary Issues
The Color Purple uses vernacular and diction from the deep south in the early 20th century. This means that many students will not be familiar with word usage and vocabulary. Most unusual vocabulary in this novel would be words that simply have different pronunciations. These include:

- Ast = asked
- Git = get
- Kine = kind
- Tho = though

It would also be important to remind students that the grammar in The Color Purple is largely incorrect in a setting such as the classroom, or in modern society. It, however, was obviously appropriate for the time and setting of the novel.

Background Knowledge

There are just a couple things that would definitely prove beneficial if students understood previous to studying The Color Purple. It would be plausible to study/discuss/learn briefly about:

- The South in the early to mid 1900s.
- Treatment of African Americans within their own communities.
- Women’s roles during this same time period and setting.

Implications for Students of Diversity

Special considerations need to be taken into account regarding diversity and differing cultural backgrounds while studying this novel. It deals with a specific community and race of a people, which some students may have ties to. The instructor would need to be sensitive in remarks and things taught about that culture. Also, the instructor would need to be sensitive to those who have no connection with that group of people so as to help them to effectively and truthfully learn about others.