



Fig. 1: Alice Walker (2007). Source: Wikimedia Commons, <https://bit.ly/3Y11o2L>.

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As I strolled the sunlit halls of the university library in the city center, my eyes glossed over hundreds of books; some small, some big, all of them itching to be read. I was looking for *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, a book I had been wanting to read for ages. But something always held me back. I'm not quite sure what, but I think it might be the book's age – *The Color Purple* was first published in 1983, a full twenty years before I was born. Since we are celebrating the Aanzet's birth, also in 1982-1983, I finally went looking for a copy. When I found it, it turned out to be the twenty-fifth anniversary edition. The outside is, though a bit on the nose, a royal purple flecked with white. The pages are yellowed and the book smells like any good library book should. It has clearly been loved and loved well by many students before me. This love also shines through in the accolades the book has gotten over the years: the Pulitzer Prize and the American National Book Award, and it has also obtained an impressive 4.25 average rating on Goodreads. I was guaranteed to be in for an excellent read.

Life is brutal for young Black girls, and so is this book for its readers

The well-thumbed pages tell the stories of sisters Celie and Nettie, who live in rural Georgia at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first part of the book consists of Celie's letters to God ("You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy."¹), after which the story continues through letters from Celie and Nettie to each other.

From the very first page, it is clear that this will not be a cozy read. Life is brutal for young Black girls, and so is this book for its readers. The hits keep coming, even after you're already down. Trigger warnings for domestic and sexual abuse are very necessary. Other topics that Walker deals with, some more directly than others, are the treatment of African-Americans in the United States, the havoc European colonists wreak on

¹ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2007) 1.

Africa in the interbellum and the tricky relationship between African-Americans and Africans. Most importantly, however, are the topics of women, women's rights, and female relationships.

On to the story, without giving too much away. Celie and Nettie are separated at a young age, when Celie is married off to Mr -----. This last name is never revealed. For me, this strengthened the alienation both Celie and the reader feel. After marrying Mr -----, Celie is responsible for his household and his many children by his first wife. Nettie is left behind and eventually ends up in Africa as a missionary to the fictitious Olinka people. The contrast between these two lives could not be starker. Celie lives a small life, centered on her home. She has never even seen the ocean, while Nettie has crossed this wide expanse to move to Africa. The use of language is also a major difference between the sisters. Celie's letters are written how she would speak. Riddled with words not quite spelled correctly and some interesting sentence structures, it took some getting used to. I was initially a bit put off, but it is worth it to push through. Nettie's letters, on the other hand, are written in perfect English.

Two other women play a large role in this book. The first is Sofia, the wife of Celie's stepson. She stands her ground where many other women would or could not. The second is Shug Avery, Mr -----'s former lover. She's a singer, a free spirit and eventually becomes the person Celie loves most.

Ultimately, I would describe *The Color Purple* as an ode to female relationships. It doesn't matter whether these are romantic, platonic or familial. All three are found in this book. Sprinkled in are also some more philosophical debates about God and the form He takes. Finally, the tremendous personal growth these characters experience and the way their relationships develop, makes me look forward to getting older. The passing of time has so much to offer. Growing old is



Fig. 2: Rendition of *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, made with artificial intelligence Dall-E.

a privilege, is what I have taken away from this book.

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