



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Color Purple

Alice Walker

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Color Purple

Alice Walker

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Table of Contents

Summary.....	3
Characters.....	3
About the Author	4
Teacher Information.....	5
Scoring Rubric.....	6
Initiating Activities.....	7
Fourteen Sections	14
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	35
Post-reading Extension Activities.....	36
Assessment.....	37
Glossary.....	38

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Analysis, research,
compare/contrast

Vocabulary

Target words, definition

Comprehension

Cause/effect, predictions,
decision-making, conflict

Literary Elements

Characterization, simile,
metaphor, theme, allusion,
symbolism, inference,
foreshadowing, plot
development, universality

Writing

Poem, précis, character
sketch, response, Public
Service Announcement,
research paper, journal entry

Across the Curriculum

Art—collage, poster,
caricature; Drama—acting,
script; Music—appropriate
selections, ballad; Current
Events—newspaper/
magazine articles; Listening/
Speaking—discussion,
interview; Technology—
Internet research

Genre: fiction

Setting: rural Georgia; early to mid-1900s (based on cultural mores and allusion to events such as the beginning of World War II)

Point of View: first-person

Themes: survival, forgiveness (self and others), shame, courage/strength, perseverance, self-esteem, overcoming adversity, racism, sexism, reuniting with loved ones

Sensitive Issues: rape, pregnancy, sexual orientation, depiction of Negro culture as poor and uneducated, offensive language

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. person

Protagonist: Celie

Style: narrative; epistolary novel, i.e., told through letters

Tone: candid, confidential, confessional

Mood: initially pessimistic, finally optimistic

Summary

Through a series of letters, Celie tells of her struggles to survive. Her stepfather, Alphonso, rapes and impregnates her, then takes her two babies away shortly after they are born. She enters into a loveless, abusive marriage with Mr. _____ (Albert). Celie's story reveals an awakening to her own identity through her interaction with other women and her ability to speak for herself. She protects her sister Nettie, who lives with Celie and Mr. _____ briefly. Nettie runs away to escape Albert's advances and goes to Africa with a missionary couple. Years later, Celie discovers Nettie's letters to her and learns the identity of her lost children. Sofia, her stepson's wife, exemplifies the strength and independence Celie needs. Shug Avery, her husband's lover, teaches Celie to love and to become strong and assertive. Celie moves to Tennessee with Shug and becomes a successful businesswoman. She eventually returns to Georgia, financially secure and emotionally and spiritually free. She is finally reunited with Nettie and her children.

Characters

Celie: protagonist; poor, uneducated black woman; narrates most of her story through letters to God; survives abusive relationships with men; finds her true identity as a woman of worth and influence

Nettie: Celie's younger, prettier sister; goes to Africa with a missionary couple and discovers the identity of Celie's biological children; reveals African customs and history through letters to Celie

Alphonso: Celie's abusive stepfather; rapes and impregnates her

Mr. _____ (Albert): marries Celie but loves Shug Avery; abusive; views Celie as "dirt"; experiences personal transformation after Celie leaves him; finally respects her and becomes her friend

Shug Avery: Albert's mistress; has a singing career; teaches Celie to love and to assert herself as a woman of worth

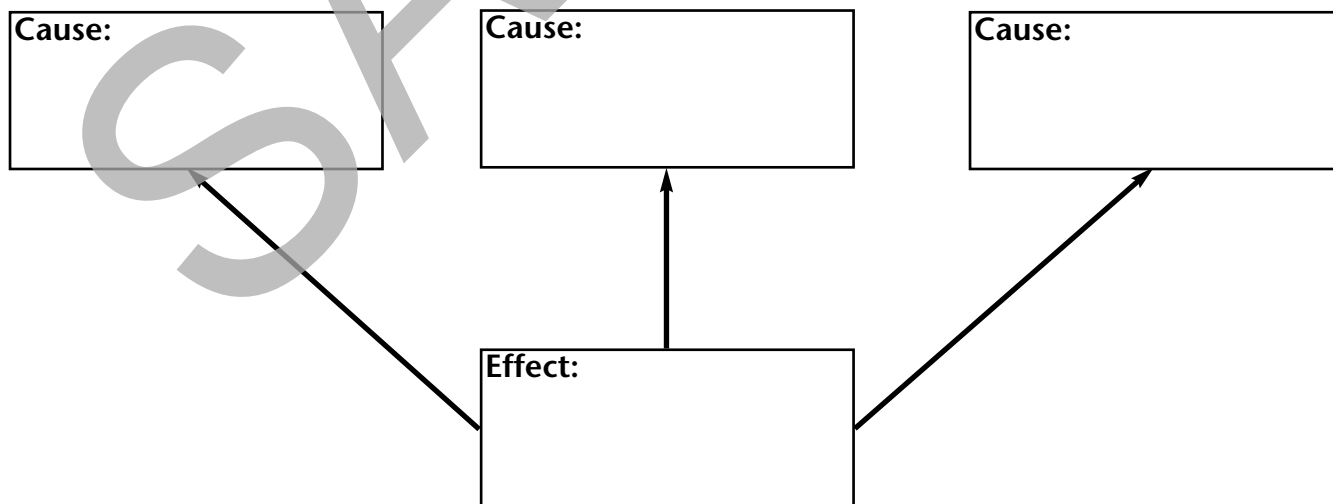
Harpo: Albert's son; Celie's stepson; drives his wife, Sofia, away by attempting to mimic his father's abusive ways; eventually changes and reconciles with Sofia

Cause/Effect

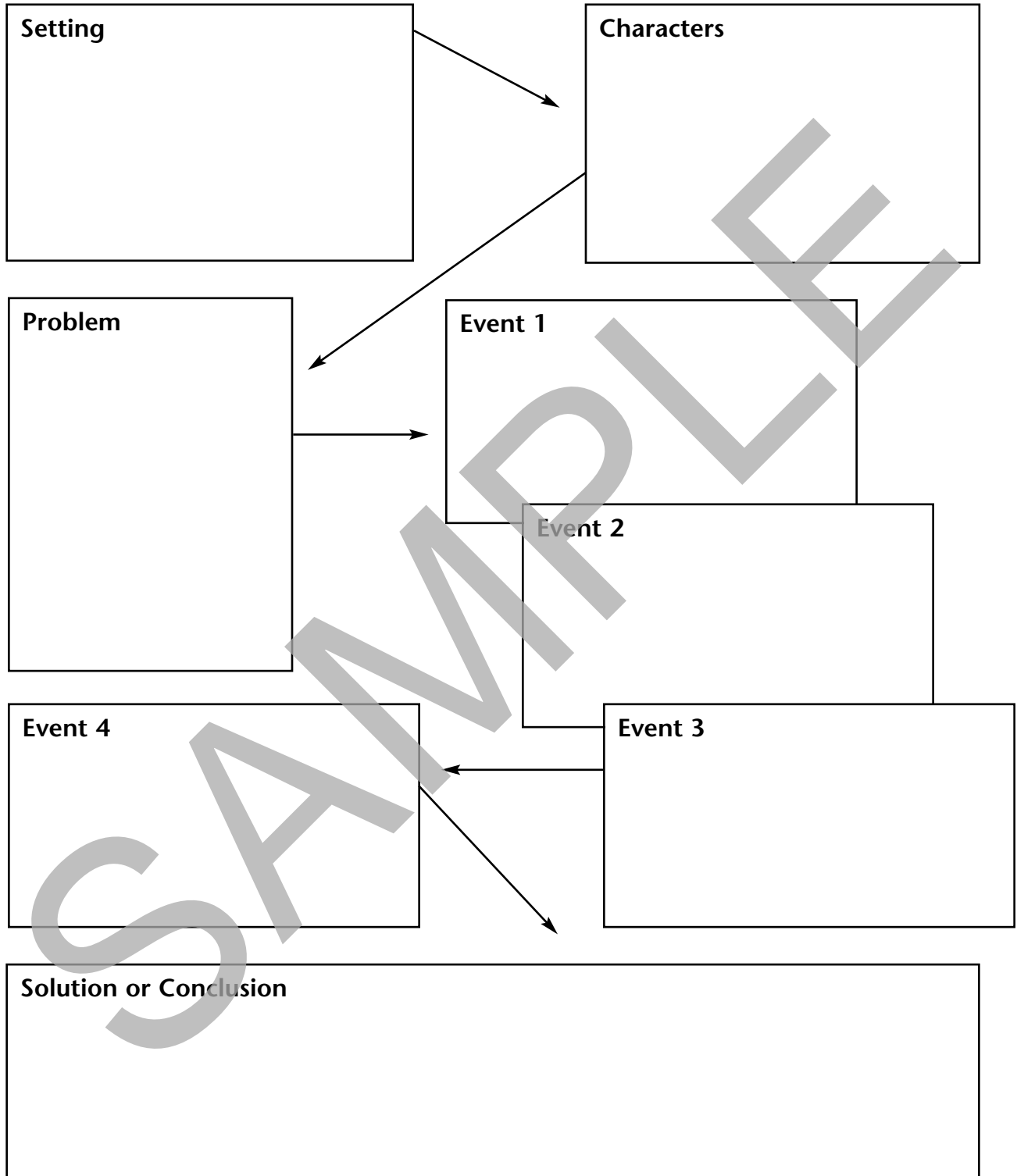
Directions: To plot cause and effect in a story, first list the sequence of events. Then mark causes with a C and effects with an E. Sometimes in a chain of events, one item may be both a cause and an effect. Draw arrows from cause statements to the appropriate effects.

Events in the story	Cause	Effect
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

Another way to map cause and effect is to look for an effect and then backtrack to the single or multiple causes.



Story Map



Note: The Cause/Effect chart found on page 7 of this guide can be used with many of the Discussion Questions.

Pages 1–19

Celie begins her letters to God. She tells of being raped by her father, her two pregnancies, and the loss of both of her children. She enters into an abusive marriage with Mr. _____. Celie sees her daughter on the street with her adopted mother. Nettie runs away from home to be with Celie, but soon leaves to escape Mr. _____'s advances.

Vocabulary	
	notion (5)
	horsehair (8)
	dote (11)
	pondering (14)
	impish (16)
	hospitality (16)

Discussion Questions

1. Analyze what happens to Celie and why. Discuss the possible significance of the introductory statement by Celie's father, "You better not never tell nobody but God..." (p. 1). Note Celie's first letter, where she marks out "I am" and replaces it with "I have..." (*Celie has always been a "good girl." She knows nothing about sex until her father violates her. This defining moment affects Celie for the rest of her life. Her father, Alphonso, rapes her after becoming frustrated when his wife refuses to have sex because of the recent birth of a child. Celie, who loves to learn, must withdraw from school because of her first pregnancy. Alphonso takes away her two children. Celie believes he kills the first one and sells the other one to a couple. Celie is sterile after the second birth. Her father beats and rapes her again when his new wife is pregnant. Answers will vary. pp. 1–4, 9*)
2. Examine circumstances surrounding the death of Celie's mother and discuss what her conversation with Celie infers. (*Celie is pregnant for the second time when her mother dies, screaming and cursing at Celie because she suspects the truth about the pregnancies. When her mother asks Celie about the first one, she replies it is God's child and that God took it. Alphonso sits by his wife's bed begging her not to die. No one comes to help the family. Celie attributes her mother's death to trying to believe her husband's lies. After her mother's death and the birth of her second child, Alphonso leaves Celie alone but begins to "look" at her little sister, Nettie, even after he marries a young girl. pp. 3–6*)
3. Discuss Celie's concern for Nettie and her advice to her. Why is Mr. _____ unnamed? (*When a widower, Mr. _____, begins to notice Nettie, Celie advises her to keep to her books. She is concerned that Nettie will marry him and have to take care of his children. Celie soon reverses her advice because she is afraid her father will rape Nettie. Celie reveals her pessimism about marriage when she tells Nettie to marry and have one good year because then the babies will begin to come. When his young wife is pregnant, Celie offers herself to Alphonso if he will leave Nettie alone. Answers will vary. pp. 5–6, 8*)
4. Analyze Celie's reaction to Shug Avery's picture. Note the foreshadowing of Celie's love for Shug. (*Celie's stepmother gets the picture for Celie when it falls from Mr. _____'s billfold. Celie thinks Shug, who is dressed in furs, is the most beautiful woman she has ever seen, but she notices the sadness in her eyes. Celie stares at the picture all night and later has dreams about her. Shug symbolizes wealth, laughter, and beauty to Celie, who is poor, lives in a joyless atmosphere, and has always been told she is ugly. p. 7*)

5. Analyze the circumstances surrounding Celie's marriage to Mr. ____ and what this reveals about him and Celie's father. Discuss how Celie feels during the bargaining process. (*Alphonso refuses to allow Mr. ____ to marry Nettie, saying she is too young and he wants her to become a school teacher. Mr. ____ has several children, his wife was murdered, and he is scandalously connected to Shug Avery. Alphonso offers to let him marry Celie and gives him the following information: Celie is the oldest and should marry first; she has been "spoiled," i.e., impregnated twice; she is ugly but clean; she is a hard worker; God has "fixed" her so Mr. ____ will not have to worry about her having children for him to feed and clothe; she lies; she is nearly 20 years old. Alphonso says he needs to get rid of her because she is a bad influence on his other girls. He offers to give her a cow if Mr. ____ marries her. It is Alphonso, not Celie, who lies. When Mr. ____ finally decides to marry Celie, Alphonso makes her stand before him like a piece of property for which they are bargaining. pp. 7–10*)
6. Examine details about Celie's wedding day and Mr. ____'s family. What kind of marriage do you think Celie will have? (*Celie spends her wedding day running from the oldest boy, who finally throws a rock at her and splits her head open. The boy is 12 years old, his mother died in his arms, and he does not want Celie to take her place. Mr. ____ has no control over his four children. The two girls have not had their hair combed since their mother died, and Celie works for hours to untangle their hair. She endures her first sexual encounter with Mr. ____, wondering if Nettie is safe and thinking about Shug Avery. Answers will vary. p. 13*)
7. Analyze Celie's meeting and interaction with the child she believes to be hers. (*While waiting for Mr. ____ in town, Celie sees a baby girl and believes it is hers because she looks just like Celie and her father. Celie had embroidered the name "Olivia" on her baby's diapers before her father took the baby when she was two months old. She follows the child and her mother into the store and converses with the mother, learning that the child's father is a minister. After leaving the store, the three sit together in Celie's wagon while waiting for the minister to arrive. Celie discovers that the child's mother knows Mr. ____, that the little girl is the same age as Celie's child, and that her name is Pauline, but her mother calls her Olivia. Celie laughs for the first time in a long time. pp. 14–16*)
8. Examine details about Nettie's stay with Celie and Mr. ____ and what this reveals about him. (*Nettie runs away from home, implying that her father made sexual advances toward her. Nettie continues to study and tries to teach Celie. Mr. ____ tries to entice Nettie by complimenting her. When Nettie refuses to respond to him, he tells Celie that Nettie must leave. Celie gives Nettie the name of the minister and suggests that maybe his wife will help her. Nettie leaves, promising to write, but she never does. This section foreshadows Nettie's connection with the missionaries, Samuel and Corrine, and their adopted children [Celie's biological children]. pp. 17–19*)
9. **Prediction:** What will happen to Nettie? Will Celie ever hear from her again?

Supplementary Activities

1. Working in small groups, list the emotions Celie experiences in this section. Then choose one emotion and write a five-senses poem about it. Share the poems with the class.
2. Select three volunteers to reenact the scenes in which Alphonso bargains with Mr. ____ over Celie.
3. Begin filling in your Cause/Effect chart (see page 8 of this guide). Continue to utilize your chart as you read the novel.