

OPRAH WINFREY PRESENTS

The
Color Purple
The Musical about Love.



ILLUSTRATION BY PETER SALVADA

December 13, 2007 – March 9, 2008
Ahmanson Theatre

The Color Purple
Based on the novel
by Alice Walker
Book by Marsha Norman
Music and Lyrics by
Brenda Russell, Allee
Willis and Stephen Bray
Directed by Gary Griffin

TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS

How to Use the Discovery Guide

**If God listened
to a poor, black woman,
the world would be
a different place.**
—Celie in *The Color Purple*
by Marsha Norman

To the Teacher

This Discovery Guide for *The Color Purple* has been developed as a prompt-book for a standards-based unit of study appropriate for grades nine through 12. The specific learning activities in Theatre Arts can be readily integrated with other content areas, particularly Language Arts and History/Social Sciences, to accelerate teaching and learning.

The Discovery Guide is a starting point. Please adapt the material and extend the learning activities to meet the needs of your students. Our hope is that the structure and content of this guide will be functional and inspiring – and that teachers and students will share the joy of learning through theatre arts.

The Discovery Guide is not designed as an independent workbook. It is a resource for learners to develop skills in storytelling, literary analysis and collaboration that are essential in Theatre Arts, Language Arts, History/Social Sciences and other content areas. Oral discussion and writing prompts are designed so that students may relate key ideas to their personal experiences and the world around them. Teachers are expected to adapt or extend the prompts. Teachers may choose some prompts for small group discussion and others for the whole group.

Writing Applications

Many of the prompts in the Guide are easily adaptable to match your current writing objectives. Written responses to the prompts may range from short expository answers in complete sentences to formal, five-paragraph persuasive essays.

Teachers in all grade levels are encouraged to design at least one rigorous, standards-based written performance assignment in conjunction with their unit on *The Color Purple*.

Scope and Sequence of the Lessons

In order to provide a comprehensive and sequential unit of study, we suggest that students explore the entire Discovery Guide.

The activities are designed to be completed sequentially. The activities on pages 4 – 11 are to be completed before the students see the production of *The Color Purple*. The discussion and writing prompts on pages 12 – 14 and the resources listed on page 15 are intended to stimulate reflection, analysis and further inquiry after students attend the play.

Vocabulary: Introduce the key vocabulary words on each page as they occur. Help students pronounce the words correctly; provide opportunities to use the words in complete sentences.

The Goals

Regardless of grade level, the unit is designed to teach **enduring understandings** that students will take with them for life. The themes and questions in the chart can be discussed before and after the students' experience at the performance to guide them toward the enduring understandings.

	THEATRE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	SOCIAL AND LITERARY THEMES
Enduring Understandings	<p>Theatre teaches by “showing,” not “telling.” Stories have instructional as well as entertainment value.</p> <p>Theatre allows us to examine multiple points of view presented by various characters.</p>	<p>One’s upbringing and social milieu affect behavior and perceptions.</p> <p>Negative social conditioning can be overcome.</p> <p>Power comes in many forms. It can be wielded by violent or peaceful means.</p> <p>You are in control of your life. Your experience is determined by the choices you make. <i>You</i> have the power.</p>
Essential Questions	<p>How does theatre deal with social change and broad sweeps of history?</p> <p>What is the value of theatre and storytelling?</p> <p>How can the retelling of history build empathy for the viewer?</p> <p>In what ways does the play challenge current notions of family in contemporary America?</p>	<p>How are your opportunities and challenges similar to and different from those faced by people who lived 100 years ago?</p> <p>What factors hold one back or propel one forward in the world?</p> <p>What tactics do you use to get what you want?</p> <p>What does it mean to be a family?</p>

The Standards

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing Strategies: *Organization and Focus*

1.1 Establish a controlling impression or coherent thesis that conveys a clear and distinctive perspective on the subject and maintain a consistent tone and focus throughout the piece of writing.

1.2 Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, appropriate modifiers and the active rather than the passive voice.

Writing Applications

2.3 Write reflective compositions.

2.4 Write persuasive compositions.

Listening and Speaking Strategies:

Comprehension

1.1 Formulate judgments about the ideas under discussion and support those judgments with convincing evidence.

Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication

ALL

Speaking Applications

2.3 Apply appropriate interviewing techniques.

2.5 Deliver persuasive arguments (including evaluation and analysis of problems and solutions and causes and effects).

HISTORY/SOCIAL SCIENCES

Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills

Historical Literacy: Develop research skills and a sense of historical empathy.

Ethical Literacy: Understand that the ideas people profess affect their behavior.

Realize that concern for ethics and human rights is universal and represents the aspirations of men and women in every time and place.

Cultural Literacy: Recognize that literature and art shape and reflect the inner life of a people.

National Identity: Recognize the status of minorities and women in different times in American history.

Participation Skills: Develop group interaction skills.

THEATRE

Artistic Perception: *Development of the Vocabulary of Theatre*

1.1 Students observe theatrical productions and respond to them, using the vocabulary and language of the theatre.


Historical & Cultural Context: *Role and Cultural Significance of Theatre*

3.1 Describe the ways in which American history and culture is reflected in theatre.

Connections, Relationships, Applications: *Connections and Applications*

5.1 Students apply what they learn in theatre, film/video, and electronic media across subject areas.

Before the Play



How to Use this Discovery Guide

The Color Purple is a musical adapted from the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Alice Walker. It is a sprawling story that spans several decades in the life of Celie, a poor, rural black woman. The story references many details of African-American life in the Deep South in the first half of the 20th century. This Discovery Guide contains a brief summary of life in the rural South as well as some background about Alice Walker. We hope that the brief overview of the period and the source material will enhance your enjoyment of the show.

Discovery Guide Objectives

- Provide background material that will illuminate the context of the story
- Prepare the audience for the play's mature themes, such as domestic and racial violence
- Promote independent thinking about violence, oppression and personal relationships
- Explore what makes a "family"
- Encourage further reading and study

Vocabulary
words are in **bold type**.
Definitions are within
each section.

DISCOVERY GUIDE CREDITS
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Pages 2–3: How to Use this Discovery Guide

Rationale: Students will be able to optimize their learning if they have a clear understanding of the layout of the Discovery Guide and objectives of the exercises contained in the unit. This will help them describe their learning process.

Exercise: Read and discuss the objectives of the Discovery Guide with the class.

Exercise: Have the students identify the name of the Discovery Guide writer and graphic designer.



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Before the Play

[BEFORE THE PLAY]

Alice Walker



THE COLOR PURPLE IS BASED ON A NOVEL OF THE SAME TITLE BY ALICE WALKER. When the book was published in 1982, it won both the Pulitzer Prize for literature and the American Book Award. In 1985, Walker and a co-writer adapted the story for the screen. The film, also called *The Color Purple*, starred Whoopi Goldberg, Danny Glover and Oprah Winfrey and was directed by Steven Spielberg. *The Color Purple* you are going to see is a stage musical, which premiered on Broadway in December, 2005; so Walker's novel has been adapted for the second time.

Walker attended Spelman College and Sarah Lawrence College, where she was one of six African-American students. She also spent time in Africa, worked in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and taught college in Mississippi and Massachusetts. She currently lives in Mendocino, California. She has written many novels, essays and short stories, but *The Color Purple* remains the work for which she is best known.

Alice Walker was born in 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia. When she was eight years old, she was accidentally shot in the eye with a BB gun, and she developed a disfiguring scar in the injured eye. The accident left a scar on her personality, too. For six years afterward, she kept her head down and would not look up. (The eye was successfully repaired many years later.) Perhaps as a result of this experience, self-esteem and body image issues appear in Walker's writing.

As the saying goes, "Write what you know." Walker knows life in rural Georgia with all of its racial beauty, racial discrimination and violence. She writes, "In my immediate family too there was violence. Its roots seemed always to be embedded in my father's need to dominate my mother and their children and in her resistance (and ours), verbal and physical, to any such domination." Walker's father had a limited education and feared that if his children were educated, they wouldn't relate to him. Walker was a natural student, and her father's opposition to her academic aspirations created the very rift that he feared; by the time she left for college, their relationship was finished. Walker came to terms with her father's attitude many years after his death, but her difficulties with him left an indelible mark on her thinking and her work.

Many of the characters in *The Color Purple* are based on Walker's family members and other people she knew as a young person. A big influence on her work is the writer Zora Neale Hurston, whom Walker calls her "foremother." Walker is credited with rediscovering Hurston's work, which had fallen into obscurity, and bringing her back to the attention of academics and the reading public. The character Shug Avery in *The Color Purple* is partly based on Hurston. Walker feels strongly that women need to connect with the experiences of their female forebears. According to Walker, the stories of the women who came before us are an indispensable part of our collective history. Knowing where we come from makes us whole and provides a wellspring of knowledge and wisdom.

Walker is a "womanist." In contrast with feminism, which is viewed by many as a movement primarily for and about white women, womanism affirms the experience and contributions of Black women. Womanism is not a philosophy of exclusion, however. It is a holistic theory that supports all who have been oppressed, including

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Page 4–5: Alice Walker

Rationale: The play will be better understood and appreciated if something is known of the story's originator and her literary devices and intentions.

Exercise: Read and discuss the section on Alice Walker. There are several themes in Walker's life that pertain to the play, such as body image – an especially loaded topic for teenage girls. If appropriate for your class, discuss how dissatisfaction with one's body can hinder social activity and development, or conversely, how it might (as in Walker's case) spur creativity.

Womanism will probably be an unfamiliar topic. Start the discussion by asking how many in the class consider themselves to be feminists. Elicit definitions of that term, then segue into womanism and see if that theory is more or less attractive than feminism. (A comprehensive understanding of womanist theory is not necessary for either you or the students. Feel free to speculate about the meaning and practical application of the theory.) The discussion may divide itself along gender lines. Ask the boys to make an argument for womanism; ask the girls to argue against it.

Ask your students whether "isms" of any kind are useful. Have the students play "devil's advocate" and argue the opposite of what they really think.

Walker has been an activist throughout her life and career. Discuss writing in the context of activism and womanism. Are the two concepts related, and if so, in what ways? Ask them to watch the show with a view to spotting Walker's personal philosophy. (The quote at the top of this teaching instruction guide might be a good place to start.)

Exercise: Read and discuss the sidebar about Zora Neale Hurston. Ask students to respond to the quote. What do students think about her ideas of "racial utopia"? If any students have read her work, ask what the books are about and if they see any similarities to what they know about *The Color Purple*.

Optional Exercise: Compare and contrast *The Color Purple* with Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Have students read short sections aloud, alternating authors. Stop frequently to point out similarities and differences in dialogue, dialect, style and tone. Discuss whose style they prefer and why.

Optional Exercise: Read aloud alternating sections of *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, paying close attention to the use of dialect in both novels. Discuss why the authors employ this literary device. Ask for a show of hands to see if the device is effective or not. Does the use of dialect help the reader "hear" the dialogue, or does it slow the reader and produce frustration?

Before the Play

people of all races, classes, sexual orientations and even the natural world itself. Walker expresses her womanist ideals by examining and re-telling the stories of her female ancestors.

The *Color Purple* is an expression of Walker's imagination, experience and personal philosophy. She feels a kinship with women of color worldwide and respects the voices of black women, whether rich or poor, illiterate or educated. By valuing her African-American heritage, Walker seeks to bring all people closer together. As Calle declares, "If God listened to a poor, black woman, the world would be a different place." ●

[EXERCISE] WHAT I BELIEVE
Alice Walker's beliefs grew out of her experience. Write a narrative paragraph about something you believe and how your life experience has shaped this belief.

Zora Neale Hurston

"Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to 'jump at de sun.' We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground." —Dust Tracks on a Road, 1942

ZORA NEALE HURSTON was born sometime between 1891 and 1901 — she was always vague about her exact age — and grew up in Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated all-black community in the United States. Hurston was an anthropologist and a writer who studied the dialects and customs of various black communities. She was a key player in the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement in the 1920s that celebrated the history and artistic contributions of African Americans. She believed in a kind of racial separatism: live separately from whites. She was critical of the civil rights movement, a stance that greatly eroded her reputation and popularity. She was influential and successful for a time, but fell into poverty in her later years. At the time of her death in 1960, Hurston was broke and all but forgotten. Alice Walker rediscovered Hurston's work in the 1970s and introduced it to a new generation of readers. Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, written in the dialect of Eatonville, was a direct influence on Walker. ●

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Pages 4–5: *cont'd*

Optional Exercise: Ask the students if they know of other writers who have used their personal history in fictional works. Ask the students if they know of other writers who represent a particular group, ethnicity or social class. Make lists of these writers; compare and contrast.

Optional Exercise: Divide the class into research groups to read about and report further on Alice Walker, womanism and Zora Neale Hurston. Start with the Resources section of the Discovery Guide and expand the search using the Internet and library.

Optional Exercise: Have your students research and identify other novelists who employ dialect (perhaps starting with Victorians such as Dickens and the Bronte sisters). Compare and contrast their use of the vernacular with Walker and Hurston. Also, discuss the difference between dialect and older forms of English, such as Elizabethan (Shakespeare) or Middle English (Chaucer).

Optional Exercise: As a play, *The Color Purple* is an adaptation. Make a short list of other novels that have been adapted for the stage or screen. Discuss whether the adaptations are successful and why.

Optional Exercise: *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel: It is written in the form of letters. Compare it to other epistolary novels such as *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes and *Carrie* by Stephen King. Have your students write a brief, autobiographical story using the epistolary form. Before the students begin writing, have them choose to whom the letter(s) will be written and why they wish to tell the story to that particular person.

Before the Play



Synopsis

THE COLOR PURPLE TELLS THE STORY OF CELIE, an African-American woman living in rural Georgia. The story spans the period of her life from 1909 to 1949. When we first meet 14-year-old Celie, she is pregnant by her own father for the second time. The baby is born and Pa takes the baby away, just as he did with the first one. Pa gives Celie in marriage to Mister, who already has a juggle of children, not much younger than Celie is. Mister beats Celie, yells at her and puts her to work as gardener, cook, maid, handmaid and ranch hand, while giving all of his affection to another woman, the singer Shug Avery. When Celie's sister Nettie, fleeing their father, asks to live with them, Mister sends her away, plunging Celie into loneliness and despair. Only two people have power over Mister: Shug Avery and his father, Ol' Mister.

Years pass, and Celie quietly endures much hardship and abuse. She builds an unorthodox family. She befriends gentle Harpo, Mister's son, who loves the feisty Sofia. Instead of fleeing from Sofia, Celie alienates her with a few words of bad advice to Harpo. Celie falls in love with Mister's mistress, Shug, and thinks she has found a true friend. Doris, Darlene and Jareni, the church ladies, are the "wagging tongues"; they spread gossip and express public opinion.

In spite of everything, Celie develops a strong self-identity and a spirituality that is true to her own experience and observation of the world. More than a simple tale of triumph over adversity, *The Color Purple* is a testament to the universal human striving for — among other things — peace of mind, wholeness and independence.

As in life, relationships in *The Color Purple* begin and end, evolve and change. *The Color Purple* portrays a family unit that is constantly in flux, people come and go in Celie's life, and roles are always shifting. Celie is the "star" of the show, but she and the other characters, when viewed as a group, form a constellation. Celie's story raises the question, "What makes a family?"

Porgy and Bess

ANOTHER SHOW about African Americans from the rural South is *Porgy and Bess*, which premiered on Broadway in 1935. Composed by George Gershwin with lyrics by his brother, Ira, and libretto by DuSane Howard, the show takes place in Catfish Row, South Carolina. It tells the story of Porgy, a crippled beggar, and Bess, a woman of low reputation. Like *The Color Purple*, the music in *Porgy and Bess* is a blend of Broadway, blues, jazz and other musical idioms. Although the show is considered to be a classic of American musical theater, it is not universally loved due to its portrayal of a seamy side of African-American life.

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Page 6–7: Synopsis of *The Color Purple*

Rationale: *The Color Purple* is a story that encompasses many characters and a relatively wide swath of history. The show compresses the events of the novel to make room for musical numbers. A review of the synopsis will allay potential viewer confusion and prepare your students for the mature themes in the play.

Exercise: Review the synopsis with your class. The show contains references to several sensitive issues such as incest, unwed and teenage pregnancies and domestic and racial violence. None of these things are portrayed in a graphic fashion, but they are integral to the story. For example, the curtain rises on a very pregnant teenage girl whose sexual partner is a topic of speculation for the townspeople; they guess correctly that the baby's father is the girl's own father. The opening sets the tone of the story and will probably generate some questions. Please guide your discussion according to your students' needs and developmental level. At the end of these Teaching Instructions are some websites that will prepare you for sensitive comments and questions.

Note any questions that may arise and assign students or groups of students to watch the show with those questions in mind. After the show, have them report the answers to the rest of the class. Discuss whether the questions were answered in the show and whether the students reported accurately. Welcome differences of opinion.

If you find that the topics of abuse and neglect are difficult to broach, keep in mind that although the show refers to such dark human tendencies, it is really about perseverance and overcoming. The character Celie rises above what would seem to be an impossibly rough beginning in life to become successful and happy.

Exercise: Read the Porgy and Bess sidebar. Discuss the controversy surrounding negative portrayals of men of color in film and theatre in general, and Porgy and Bess and *The Color Purple* in particular. In Porgy and Bess, for example, the most attractive character, Sporting Life, is what would be known today as a "player." Bess' boyfriend is a violent criminal. The most sweet-natured character, Porgy, is a cripple. In *The Color Purple*, the male characters (in Act I) are bent on satisfying themselves to the detriment of the women in their lives. Discuss whether these characters are specific to these shows or if they contain a larger message. What is the impact (if any) of these kinds of characters on the culture?

Before the Play

[EXERCISE]
Your Family Constellation

HOW IS YOUR FAMILY STRUCTURED? Does your family unit consist of Mom, Dad and siblings, or is there another arrangement in your household? Do other relatives or persons live with you? Are you close to people who do not live with you? If so, what is their role? What is your role?

In the space below, draw a constellation that represents your family structure. Be sure to include yourself. Label each "star" with the name of a family member and a short phrase or list of words that describe their role. (Example: Dad – provider/lawmaker, Mom – provider/enforcer, Aisha – baby sister/nursance, etc.) Give your constellation a shape and a name that reflects what your family means to you.

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Pages 6–7: *cont'd*

Exercise: Discuss what makes a family in preparation for the constellation exercise, in which students are asked to draw a shape that represents their family with short, descriptive phrases for each person. There may be many different types of families represented in your classroom, which is the point – The Color Purple celebrates diversity and the value of close relationships, no matter how unconventional or nontraditional. There are no right or wrong responses to this exercise. Ask a few volunteers to draw their constellation on the board. It's fine to note and talk about differences, but please encourage your students to be non-judgmental when discussing each other's families.


Optional Exercise: Have your students research and graph family structures other than the traditional American “nuclear” family. Try dividing the search by historical periods and geography. For example, what constituted a family in the peasant class in Medieval Europe? Did it differ from the aristocracy? How are families organized in contemporary Papua New Guinea? Which societies are or were matrilineal rather than patrilineal, etc?

Optional Exercise: Play excerpts from the soundtrack or DVD of *Porgy and Bess* in class. Compare and contrast with *The Color Purple*. Identify the musical idioms employed in both shows.

Optional Exercise: Have your students research and identify other musicals that are about a specific ethnic group. (Examples: *West Side Story*, *Puerto Ricans*; *Purlie Victorious*, *African-Americans*; *Miss Saigon*, *Vietnamese*) If possible, present sections of DVDs or other recordings. Discuss whether the shows represent those groups fairly and accurately.

Before the Play

[REORDER THE PLAY]



Way Down South in Dixie

Vocabulary

Antebellum: Literally, “before the war,” especially the American Civil War.

Sharecropper: A tenant farmer who receives credit for seed and tools and an agreed-upon share of the value of the crop, minus expenses.

Plessy v. Ferguson

In 1896, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that separate railroad cars for blacks and whites on interstate rail lines were constitutional. This ruling became the legal justification for the doctrine of “separate but equal” that allowed whites to separate themselves from blacks in almost every public place. Segregation, which was a main theme of *The Color Purple*, became the law of the land. It was not until the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that “separate but equal” was overturned. (The case for overturning *Plessy* was argued by Thurgood Marshall, who later became a Supreme Court justice.)

UNTIL THE MID-19TH CENTURY, 90 percent of African Americans lived on the rural South. By law and custom, the custom of white superiority influenced every aspect of daily life. The idea that all black people were inferior to all whites was not only enshrined in state and local laws, it also was an article of faith. Many white people believed that God had made them landowners, bosses and lawmakers. Blacks were only fit, as most whites saw it, for farming and domestic service. In the culture of white supremacy, the most degraded, useless white person was worth more than the very best black one in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, any black person who displayed wealth, self-confidence, learning or defiance toward a white person courted physical violence. Horrendous acts were justified by trivial excuses. For example, if a black man accidentally touched a white woman, he might be jailed, lynched or worse. That said, members of an oppressed group are not necessarily nice to each other. As you will see in *The Color Purple*, family members inflict violence upon each other. Caste exists in a society in which power is strictly stratified by color, class and gender. As a poor, black woman, Celie is at the bottom of the heap.

By the standards of their time and place, the characters in *The Color Purple* would have been considered very well off. Although most southern black farmers were **sharecroppers**, Mister owns, rather than rents, his farm. Shug Avery owns a home and a car. Some characters run their own businesses. That level of ownership and financial independence was the exception rather than the rule in a region where whites despised “uppity” black people and continued to keep them poor and subservient.

In the antebellum South, teaching slaves to read and write was forbidden by law. Up until the mid-19th century, black people still found that adequate schooling was difficult to come by. Hindrance to a good education included the underfunding of black schools, a general desire by southern whites to prevent blacks from advancing and Jim Crow laws that mandated segregation. When Nettie sings, “Picture me in a schoolhouse with my college degree,” she expresses the aspirations of everyone whose path in life is full of obstacles.

The church filled many roles in black society. It was, of course, a place of worship, but churches also served as schools, town halls, social halls and centers of political action. Attending church was expected, and pastors, preachers and other church officials held great power over their parishioners, often the power of Heaven and Hell. Just as the church was central to daily life in the South, gospel music was indispensable in black Baptist and Pentecostal churches. Gospel music grew from Christian hymns and the work songs of slaves. In turn, gospel

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Page 8–9: Way Down South in Dixie

Rationale: The story told in *The Color Purple* is part and parcel with its setting; this particular group of people and the events that occur among them are specific to their time and place. That said, the elements of Southern life presented in *The Color Purple* have been carefully selected for dramatic and entertainment value. A study of the conditions in the actual Deep South in the first half of the 20th century will place the story in context and fill in gaps not covered by the show’s book.

Exercise: Read the article on life in the rural South. *The Color Purple* makes indirect references to various aspects of rural Southern life, such as farming, racial discrimination, educational opportunities (or lack thereof) and the role of the church. Your students probably have more

information about the history of the American South than the Guide contains. Ask them to share in a class discussion what they already know about Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, sharecropping, etc.

Exercise: Read the sidebar on *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Have your students research *Brown v. Board of Education*. According to a recent report issued by The Civil Rights Project of UCLA, schools are re-segregating by race at a rapid pace, owing to a series of Supreme Court decisions that have dismantled desegregation policies. The phenomenon is most pronounced in the South, “where the percentage of black students attending majority white schools dropped from 44 percent in 1988 to 27 percent in 2005.” Ask your students to discuss what they think about this. Is it good, bad or something else? Discuss the impact of reversing *Plessy* as a preamble to debating the proposition in the Discovery Guide.

Before preparing to debate, remind the class that while it’s one thing to have an opinion on a controversial topic, it’s quite another to argue that opinion persuasively. Debate is a classic, time-honored way of honing critical thinking and rhetorical skills. The exercise can be used as an introduction to formal debate, or it can be a less formal, symposium-style discussion. Either way, it’s important to have ground rules so that the discussion stays on point, is respectful and does not become overly emotional. Divide the class into two groups, pro and con. Ask each side to research affirmative

action and come back to class with information. Further divide each half of the class into smaller groups who will then organize the results of the research. Ask each sub-group to elect a spokesperson. The spokesperson will form the two debate teams that will argue each side of the proposition. Give the two teams time to organize and plan who will cover which points of the argument.

Before debating the proposition outlined in the Discovery Guide, set up and review the rules for debate. There are many debate formats; the important thing is to have a structure and stick to it. Sources for classroom debate rules can be found in the resources at the end of these teaching Instructions.

If you want to create your own simple debate rules, try this template or your own variation: Begin with opening statements in which the pro and con positions are laid out by the team captains. Then have one team member from each side rebut the opening statements. The next round can further the original argument followed by another round of rebuttals, both of which will give each team member a chance to speak. (Set strict time limits.) Then go to closing statements that summarize what’s been said so far. No new material should be introduced at this point. Ask the audience (the rest of the class) to vote for the winner. (Team loyalty should go by the wayside in favor of an honest appraisal.)

Before the Play

[EXERCISE]
Leveling the Playing Field

SINCE *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION* (1954) and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Americans have struggled to correct imbalances in opportunities for non-white citizens. Today's news is filled with stories about challenges to school bussing and affirmative action programs. Research the history of affirmative action in college admissions and debate the following statement: The policy of affirmative action in college admissions has outlived its usefulness.

PRO	CON

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influenced later forms of music, such as blues, ragtime, honky-tonk and soul, all of which are included in the score of *The Color Purple*.

Music has long served as a vehicle for rebellion and dissent, particularly among people with little or no power. Music was one of the few arenas in which slaves were permitted self-expression. Their songs often held covert messages of power and freedom. "Follow the Drinking Gourd," for example, gives directions for the Underground Railroad, the ground being code for the Big Dipper. A far more rebellious place than church to hear music was the "juke joint" — a place to drink, dance, gamble, eat or do anything else that sounded like a good time. Juke joints usually operated continuously from Friday to Sunday nights and were located at remote locations, far from the authorities or "respectable" people who would have been shocked by the going-on within. The term "juke" has been traced to several West African words and may mean "party" or "disorderly." Many famous blues musicians started their careers in juke joints before they became recording artists. Juke joint music is "outsider music," even within the black community that invented it. It is an expression of the lowest stratum of working-class people — those with no influence at all — who need to cut loose, vent and even celebrate their frustrations about "the man," love, work and life. ●

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Optional Exercise: Celie's world consists of her immediate geographical area and the people who live nearby. The one exception is her sister, Nettie. Although the story spans 40 years, it seems that little of the outside world intrudes on Celie's consciousness. Here is a timeline of some of the events that occurred during the years spanned by the play. Review the timeline with your students to give some historical perspective to Celie's experiences.

- 1911** – President Taft sends 20,000 troops to the Mexican border as the Mexican revolution begins.
- 1912** – Woodrow Wilson is elected president. The postal service is created.
- 1913** – The refrigerator is invented.
- 1914** – The Panama Canal is completed. World War I breaks out in Europe.

- 1917** – Congress declares war on Germany. The civil service, or military draft, is created.
- 1919** – World War I ends. The League of Nations is created. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, prohibiting the manufacture, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages.
- 1920** – The 19th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, granting women the right to vote.
- 1925** – The Scopes "monkey trial" brings the theory of evolution to national prominence.
- 1927** – Marcus Garvey, a voice of black pride and leader of a "back to Africa" movement, is deported to Jamaica. Charles Lindbergh makes the first trans-Atlantic flight. The first "talkie," *The Jazz Singer*, premieres. Henry Ford's Model T car reaches \$15 million in sales. The first garbage disposal, nicknamed "The Electric Pig," is invented.
- 1929** – The stock market collapses and banks fail, triggering the Great Depression.
- 1932** – Franklin Delano Roosevelt wins the presidency by a landslide.
- 1933** – The 21st Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, which cancels the 18th; a decade of Prohibition is at an end. The Tennessee Valley Authority, a massive engineering project, is created, bringing electricity to millions of rural Americans.
- 1935** – The Supreme Court overturns the convictions of "The Scottsboro Boys," which is seen as a victory for those in favor of equal rights and justice for all races. The clothes dryer is invented.

- 1939** – Germany invades Poland. France and Great Britain declare war on Germany.
- 1941** – Japan attacks Pearl Harbor. The U.S. enters World War II.
- 1944** – D-Day: Over 150,000 American troops invade Europe on a single day.
- 1945** – Germany surrenders to the Allies. The U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. Japan surrenders.
- 1947** – Harry S. Truman is the first American president to address the nation on the new medium of television. The House Un-American Activities Committee opens an investigation into Communist influence in Hollywood. Sears markets the first top-loading automatic clothes washer.
- 1949** – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is formed. The U.S.S.R. (Soviet Union) tests an atomic weapon.

Optional Exercise: Have your students research and create their own timeline of events for the first half of the 20th century.

Before the Play

BEFORE THE PLAY

Dog Eat Dog

The Color Purple addresses issues of personal power as well as cycles of oppression. People who are abused often pass on violent behavior to those less powerful than themselves, and victimized groups often accept the status quo without question. Mister is a black landowner oppressed by white society. In turn, he oppresses his workers, who are also black. He gives Celie a hard time because he can, because he thinks she is ugly and because for a time, Celie believes him. Sula will not allow anyone to treat her badly, and her outspokenness gets her into trouble with the white people in town. Shug Avery parlays her beauty and voice into a successful singing career and several romances, but her overt sexuality engenders the judgment and disapproval of her family and the community — a form of oppression in itself.

All the characters speak in dialect. Their use of language indicates their race, class, location and education. It dictates their role in society and limits their opportunities. However, as you'll see in the play, those obstacles sometimes spark innovation and resourcefulness. Adversity is indeed the mother of invention.

[EXERCISE]
Generations of Oppression and Opportunity

What obstacles do you face? What advantages or tools do you have? What were the obstacles and advantages that your parents and grandparents experienced when they were your age? Interview a parent and grandparent—or other adults from their generations—to fill in the chart below.

	OBSTACLES	OPPORTUNITIES
Me BIRTH YEAR		
Parent BIRTH YEAR		
Grandparent BIRTH YEAR		

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Page 10

Pages 10–11: Dog Eat Dog

Rationale: As Alice Walker notes in many of her works, an appreciation of one’s forebears is essential to understanding one’s own challenges. This was a primary motivation for writing the novel, and the theme is also present in the show. Celie’s transformation is directly related to her knowing more about her family of origin. Allowing the class to write about and share their own backgrounds will enhance an appreciation of the show as well as the strengths and weaknesses of other cultures and peoples.

Exercise: Read the article “Dog Eat Dog.” This will be a good opportunity to address questions or concerns about the sensitive issues in the show and the Discovery Guide itself. As the title of the section implies, the show

can be viewed as a series of power struggles: boss v. workers, men v. women, homely v. pretty, white v. black, and so on. These divisions are obvious in the play and may provide a starting point for a discussion about obstacles and opportunities. Life is generally more complex than theatre, however, so please encourage your students to think about the subtleties of these issues as they relate to real life. For example, what combinations of factors hurt or help? Does education trump being from “the wrong side of the tracks”? Do good looks open doors? Does a poor command of English close them?

Exercise: For the chart, “Generations of Oppression and Opportunity,” encourage your students to conduct their interviews the way a good journalist would. Instead of asking yes or no questions, ask open-ended questions that start with “when, where, how and why.” For those students who do not have access to grandparents, encourage them to interview people over the age of 55 who might have some things in common with their grandparents. Encourage students to use additional paper if they need more space for their research.

Exercise: Ask for volunteers to share the results of their research into their own families’ advantages and challenges. Discuss with a view to methodology; how was the information obtained, exactly? Is the source of the information reliable? Why or why not? (Has Grandma been known to spin a tale?)

Exercise: The lined page will give your students room to write a standard five-paragraph essay (although some students will need more space and that’s okay, too). Suggested forms are persuasive or reflective. Discuss with your class what one or both of these entails before they begin writing.

Alternate: If you wish to make this a creative writing assignment, have students write three sections in the “voices” of persons from 1907, 1957 and 2007. It could be in the form of diary entries, job applications, college application essays, excuse notes from a parent to a teacher, help wanted ads or any other “borrowed” format.

Optional Exercise: Focus on English as a second language. Make a list of all of the languages spoken in your students’ homes. Make a chart of which generations of the family also speak English. Discuss how language can help or hurt one’s ability to advance.

Optional Exercise: Make a second list or chart of regional American accents in your classroom. Discuss the concept of “Standard American Speech” and whether it has relevance in today’s world.

After the Play



Page 12

Page 12: Celie's Musical World

Rationale: Musical theatre is different from “straight” plays in that songs are used to further the story and delineate character. A full understanding of how this theatrical device works will enhance your students’ enjoyment of *The Color Purple* and musical theatre in general.

Exercise: For the exercise on page 12, first review the list of songs from the show. Some of the songs are quite brief but may have as much dramatic weight as some of the longer pieces. Some of your students will have a vivid memory of the show and some won’t. It’s not necessary to leave the theatre “humming the tunes” to have a general appreciation of the narrative value of the songs. Feel free to play a bit of the songs if you have the CD, or just ask the students what they remember about a particular

musical moment. Asking students to describe what was happening on stage during a song may help their classmates to remember it. A group “refresher” will help the class complete the written exercise.

1. Overture
2. Huckleberry Pie/Mysterious Ways
3. Somebody Gonna Love You
4. Our Prayer
5. That Fine Mister
6. Big Dog
7. Lily Of The Field
8. Dear God
9. A Tree Named Sofia
10. Hell No!
11. Brown Betty
12. Shug Avery Comin’ To Town
13. All We’ve Got To Say
14. Dear God
15. Too Beautiful For Words
16. Push Da Button
17. Uh Oh!
18. What About Love?
19. Act I Finale
20. African Homeland
21. The Color Purple
22. Church Ladies’ Easter
23. I Curse You Mister
24. Celie’s Curse
25. Miss Celie’s Pants
26. Any Little Thing
27. What About Love (Reprise)
28. I’m Here
29. The Color Purple (Reprise)

The written exercise is a bit of a brain tickler; it should be approached in a fun way and without pressure. Your students’ favorite songs from their own playlists will be easier to recall than songs from the show. They probably have many lyrics committed to memory, so the questions that reference their personal choices will

be easier to answer. If it’s too difficult to remember the show’s songs for the written exercise, complete those questions as a group and write the responses on the board.

Optional Exercise: Ask your students to make a list of songs that tell a story or describe a character. If possible, have them play a snippet of each song in class and explain the story or character. Musically inclined students should be encouraged to sing the song; others can write some lyrics on the board.

Optional Exercise: Have your students research the history of American musical theatre, with an emphasis on seminal shows such as *Showboat* and *Oklahoma!*, which broke ground in terms of telling the story through song.

Optional Exercise: The score of *The Color Purple* is an essential element of the show. It tells Celie’s story in musical, rather than purely verbal or visual, terms. Ask your students to compile a list of songs that they would use as the score of their own lives. If possible, play snippets of the songs and ask for a brief explanation of their significance.

After the Play

[EXERCISE] **Celie's Musical World**

Celie's world is portrayed musically. Each song in the play furthers the story. Some songs describe an action or a character. A character might express her fears or desires, proclaim her beliefs, make an important decision or come to a realization in a song. Consider how music was used in *The Color Purple* to answer the following questions.

Name a song from the play that advances the story: _____

What information does it contain? _____

Name a song or musical genre that tells a story from your life: _____

What does it tell the listener about you? _____

Name a song from the play that expresses someone's fears, desires or beliefs: _____

What does it tell us? _____

Name a song or musical genre that expresses one of your fears, desires or beliefs: _____

How, specifically, does it relate to your life? _____

Name a song from the play about a decision or realization: _____

Whose decision is it and what is it? _____

Name a song or musical genre that describes one of your decisions or realizations: _____

What does it say about your thought process? _____

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Page 13

Page 13–14: Who's Wearing the Pants?

Rationale: Changing fortunes, changes of character, changes in relationships and power struggles are universal themes in literature and theater. Dynamic tension or “conflict” has been at the heart of dramatic literature since the classical Greeks invented theatre. Identifying role shifts is a way of deconstructing literature and theatre and is a component of critical thinking.

Exercise: Discuss the concept of “conflict” as it applies to theatre. Ask your class if they can imagine *The Color Purple* (or any show) without conflict. In theatrical terms, conflict can be defined as what occurs when characters want mutually exclusive things. Conflict can also be portrayed as an individual against mortality (a fight for survival), an individual against society (unjust laws and customs), an individual in conflict with herself (emotional problems), etc. The concept of theatrical conflict will provide a framework for the issues of power, violence and family roles addressed in the written exercise. After reviewing the concept of dramatic conflict in a general way, ask for examples of conflict as portrayed in *The Color Purple*.

Exercise: By now, your students will have had an opportunity to “digest” the play and think about its various issues. Give your class an opportunity to sound off about the play. If they liked it, ask why; if not, why? Let them vent, if necessary, about theatre in general before attempting the final exercise in the Guide.

Before they begin the written exercise, review the names of the characters and their relationship to one another. Draw a family tree on the board using Celie as the “trunk.” Extend branches according to each character’s relationship to Celie. Or, use the constellation form in the Before the Play exercise. One or more of these preparatory exercises will help make the written exercise clearer and more meaningful. Review the events that occur in the story and summarize them on the board.

Ask your students to write economically; express the essence of the relationships and their transformation in as few words as possible. That doesn’t mean they should give their answer short shrift; rather, encourage them to think before they write and be clear about what they want to say. Discourage repetition. Ask them to find different ways, using active verbs, to describe behavior. Of course, they can use additional paper, if necessary.

Optional Exercise: Examine how the women in *The Color Purple* treat one another. Look in particular at Sofia & her sisters, Nettie & Celie, Shug & Celie and the church ladies. Discuss the differences between supportive and competitive relationships. Also look at how men influence these relations, directly and indirectly. Ask why students think the women behave in these ways. Ask if they see parallels to their own behavior and relationships. Do the boys in class see things differently than the girls? What can they learn from each other?

After the Play

[EXERCISE] Who's Wearing the Pants?

The characters and relationships in *The Color Purple* are dynamic; they change over time. For example, the way Mister relates to Celie changes drastically from the beginning to the end of the play. Celie and Sofia undergo dramatic changes within themselves and in the way they relate to others. The relationships portray a series of power struggles, evolving as characters grow, change and learn.

Thinking about power, cycles of violence and family roles, compare and contrast the following relationships from the play.

Celie/Nettie & Celie/Sofia:

Mister/OP Mister & Harpo/Mister:

Sofia/Harpo & Shug/Mister:

Celie/Mister & Celie/Shug:

Celie/Mister at the beginning & end of the play:

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Page 13–14: *cont'd*

Optional Exercise: Ask your students if they think the story is realistic. If no, then ask why not. Ask them to separate the performance from the story; sometimes a character is likeable because the actor is likeable, and vice versa. Does this concept alter their evaluation of the story?

Optional Exercise: Make lists of popular films or TV shows in which one character cedes power to another. Act out scenes in class. (Free, full-length screenplays can be found at dailyscript.com.)

Optional Exercise: Have your students write a brief essay or narrative piece about gaining or losing power. The piece can be fictional, autobiographical or about someone they know.

Optional Exercise: *The Color Purple* is, in part, about cycles of violence; abused children sometimes become abusive parents. Perhaps some of your students have indirect or direct experience with this family dynamic. If appropriate for your class, discuss strategies for breaking this cycle. At the end of these instructions are some resources that contain advice, hotline numbers, etc.

Optional Exercise: After the students have seen the play, have them write a letter using one or more of the following elements of writing: Narrative, Descriptive, Expository, Response to Literature or Persuasive. Mail their responses to P.L.A.Y. at the following address.

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES Incest and domestic abuse information:

- incestabuse.about.com/cs/childabuse/ht/listentochild.htm
- findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3693/is_199601/ai_n8738862
- www.tamarashouse.sk.ca/myths.shtml
- incestabuse.about.com/od/domesticabuse/a/Top5DVMYths.htm
- www.healthyminds.org/multimedia/domesticviolence.pdf

On debate procedure:

- www.lalc.k12.ca.us/UCLASP/ISSUES/landfills/debate.htm
- www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson304b.shtml
- www.triviumpursuit.com/speech_debate/what_is_debate.php
- www.paulnoll.com/Books/Clear-English/debate-advice.html

Abuse hotlines:

- www.ndvh.org
- www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic_violence_abuse_types_signs_causes_effects.htm
- www.childhelp.org/get_help
- www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm
- www.thechildabusehotline.com