

OPRAH WINFREY PRESENTS

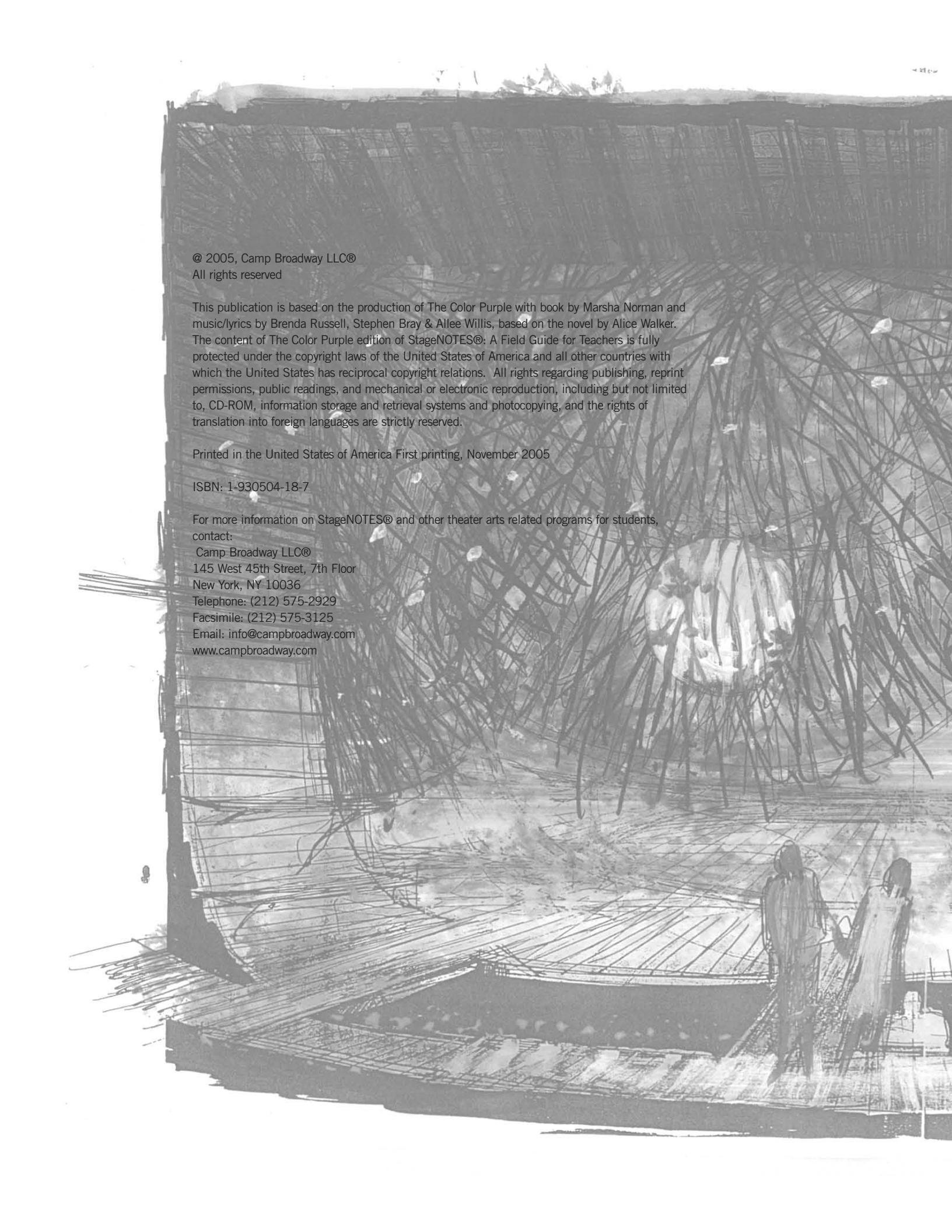
Stage [®]NOTES

A FIELD GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

The Color Purple A NEW Musical



THE COLOR PURPLE



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Stage **NOTES**TM
A FIELD GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

The
**Color
Purple**
A NEW *Musical*



CAMP BROADWAY LLC
NEW YORK

Table of

Contents

Using the Field Guide 3

A letter from Oprah Winfrey 4

Synopsis of the musical *The Color Purple* 4

Overture to History and Social Studies 6

 An interview with Alice Walker, author of the novel *The Color Purple* 6

 Celie’s home: A brief overview of African-American life in rural Georgia 8

 Nettie’s journey: African-American missionaries in West Africa 10

Overture to Language Arts 12

 An interview with Marsha Norman, the bookwriter of *The Color Purple* 12

The Color Purple and the epistolary novel 15

Overture to Performing Arts 17

 Interviews with Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray, composer/lyricists of *The Color Purple* 18

 The evolution of the blues and African-American-influenced music 20

 Sidebar: W.E.B. DuBois

 Shug Avery’s sisters: female blues singers 22

 In the footsteps of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith: A Timeline of Blues, Jazz and Soul Singers 24

Overture to Behavioral Studies 27

 Interview with LaChanze, star of *The Color Purple* 27

 Gender roles in *The Color Purple* 28

 Interview with Donald Byrd, choreographer of *The Color Purple* 29

Overture to Life Skills 31

 Interview with Gary Griffin, director 31

 Madame C. J. Walker, entrepreneur 33

 Words of advice from the creators of *The Color Purple* 34

Resources 36

Field Guide

Using the

Camp Broadway is pleased to bring you this edition of **StageNOTES™** written for *The Color Purple*, the sixteenth in our series. We are proud to be affiliated with this joyous musical adaptation of Alice Walker's award-winning novel. This guide has been developed as a teaching tool to assist educators in the classroom who are introducing their students to the story in conjunction with the Broadway production.

By using **StageNOTES™**, you will understand how *The Color Purple* exposes the past (**History**), expands our visual and verbal vocabulary (**Language Arts**), encourages creative thinking and expression (**The Performing Arts**), illuminates the human condition (**Behavioral Studies**), and aids in our own self-exploration (**Life Skills**).

The Camp Broadway creative team, consisting of theater educators, scholars, researchers, and theater professionals, has developed a series of lesson plans that, although inspired by and themed around the musical *The Color Purple*, can also accompany class study of the period and other related literary works. To assist you in preparing your presentation of each lesson, we have included a **discussion topic**; a **writing assignment**; and an **exploration activity** that encourages students to research and investigate on their own.

The curriculum categories offered in *The Color Purple* study guide have been informed by the basic standards of education detailed in Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education, 2nd Edition, written by John S. Kendall and Robert J. Marzano (1997). This definitive compilation was published by Mid-Continent Regional Education Laboratory, Inc. (McREL) and the Association for Supervision and Curricular Development (ASDC) after a systematic collection, review, and analysis of noteworthy national and state curricular documents in all subjects.

The study guide for *The Color Purple* is for you, the educator, in response to your need for standards-compliant curriculum. We hope this study guide will help you incorporate *The Color Purple* into your classroom activities.

Marcie Sturiale
Director of Education
Camp Broadway

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OUTSIDE
BEDROOM
July 2005
JB.
the color purple



A Letter from Oprah Winfrey

Dear Students,

From the moment I read Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Color Purple* over 20 years ago, I knew it would be a powerful force in my life. As you may know, when I'm passionate about something – especially a great book – I want to share it with as many people as possible. So, I used to pass out copies of the book to friends and strangers alike with the hope that they'd read it and experience what had touched me so deeply.

Nearly two years after I discovered the book, I got the opportunity to play the role of Sofia in the feature film version of *The Color Purple*. For me, it was one of the greatest experiences of my life. Courage, redemption, love and hope – I learned so much from this story!

Twenty years later, I'm blessed to be a part of the team presenting *The Color Purple* on the Broadway stage – it's a full circle moment in my life. It makes me so very proud to know that it will reach a whole new generation and an even wider audience.

I hope that you enjoy every step of your exploration of *The Color Purple*. I know you will be enlightened as well as entertained and perhaps it will become a powerful force in your own life.

Blessings,

Oprah Winfrey

Synopsis

of *The Color Purple*

The *Color Purple* begins in 1911 as young sisters Celie and Nettie play a hand-clapping game in a field. They leave their game, and join the residents of their rural Georgia community, heading to church on Sunday morning. Celie, age fourteen, is pregnant with her second child. The women of the church, who act as a commenting chorus throughout, observe that Celie's own father is the father of her children.

Celie gives birth to a boy, whom she names Adam. Pa takes the baby away, just as he did her first child, Olivia. Mister, a local farmer and landowner, wants to marry Nettie. Pa refuses, offering him Celie instead. Mister grudgingly agrees.

At Mister's house, Celie is weighed down with work: laboring on the farm, cleaning the house, and looking after Mister's children, who have run wild. Nettie arrives at Mister's house, saying she can no longer live with Pa. Mister allows Nettie to stay, but begins to make advances. When she resists, Mister throws Nettie out. When Celie protests, Mister threatens Celie, saying she will never see Nettie again; Nettie vows to write to Celie – only death will keep her from it.

1919. Years have passed, and no letters have arrived from Nettie; Celie believes she must be dead. Mister's 17 year old son, Harpo, brings his intended bride Sofia home to meet his father. Mister doesn't approve of the match, but stubborn Sofia does not back down. Celie is entranced with Sofia's strength and willpower.

Three years pass, and Sofia and Harpo are married, but constantly battling. Mister advises Harpo that he needs to beat Sofia if he expects her to mind him. Harpo asks Celie what she thinks: she also tells Harpo to beat Sofia.

A furious Sofia confronts Celie. She explains that she's had to fight her entire life, but never thought she'd have to fight in her own house. She advises Celie to fight back against Mister's

mistreatment, but Celie doesn't have the strength. Sofia departs to stay with her sisters.

It's 1922, and with Sofia gone, Harpo has decided to turn his house into a juke joint. Squeak arrives to apply to work as a waitress; she also wants to sing. She tells Harpo that if he can get the blues singer Shug Avery (who happens to be Mister's old girlfriend) to sing at the juke joint, he'll attract a huge audience.

The entire town is abuzz with the news that Shug Avery is coming to town; when she arrives, she is ill and exhausted. Celie nurses her back to health. Mister's father, Ol Mister, shows up to criticize his son for keeping company with Shug Avery. Mister, angered, shows him the door.

As Celie tailors a dress for Shug, they talk about Mister: Shug has always had a passion for him, while Celie doesn't think she's ever felt passion or love. Shug realizes that Celie can't see her own beauty and strength of character; she encourages her to find her own inner power.

Performing in the juke joint, Shug brings down the house with a raucous blues. Sofia arrives with her new boyfriend, Buster, a prizefighter. Harpo and Sofia dance, causing a jealous Squeak to pick a fight with Sofia. The fight escalates into a bar brawl; Celie and Shug escape to get some air.

Walking back to the house, Shug tells Celie that she's feeling well enough to go back on the road. Celie doesn't want her to leave; the two of them begin to realize how strong of a bond they have. Shug reveals that she's found a letter for Celie that has come from Africa. Celie is stunned to discover that the letter is from her sister: Nettie is alive. End of Act One.

Act Two a moment after Act I ended, as Celie reads the letters that Mister has kept hidden from her. Nettie describes her journey to Africa, working with the missionary couple who adopted Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. Celie is filled with rage that Mister has kept Nettie's letters from her for so long, but Shug counsels her not to confront Mister.

While shopping in town, Sofia encounters the mayor's wife, who admires how well-groomed Sofia's children are. The mayor's wife, who is white, tells Sofia she wants her to be her maid; Sofia rejects this idea with a hearty "Hell, no." Enraged, the mayor's men attack and beat Sofia. Celie comes to Sofia's jail cell to care for her.

Time has passed: it is 1937, and Shug has arrived for Easter, bringing her new man Grady with her. Celie is bitter; she has not heard from Nettie, Sofia has been beaten down, and Mister still mistreats her. Shug tries to get Celie to see the simple joy in everyday life that is all around

her – it is there if you look for it, like the color purple flowering in a field.

Celie, Mister, Shug, Grady, Sofia, Squeak, Harpo and Ol Mister sit down to Easter dinner. Shug announces that she and Grady are leaving for Memphis, and Celie is coming with them. Squeak wants to come along. Mister scoffs at the women, but Celie stands firm. She curses Mister: "Until you do right by me, everything and everyone you touch will crumble, everything you even dream will fail."

Shug, Celie, Grady and Squeak depart, leaving Harpo and Sofia alone; they decide to live together as man and wife again. Celie, who has been sending letters to Nettie in Africa, now writes to Nettie describing Shug's house in Memphis.

After a storm, Harpo finds Mister lying in the road. Just as Celie predicted, everything has gone wrong for Mister. Harpo tells him that it's no curse: he has made a mess of his life with his own hands. Mister has a moment of insight, and realizes he must do his best to repair the mistakes he has made.

It is 1943; Celie gets the news that Alphonso has died – the man she knew as Pa, although he was really her stepfather. She has inherited a house and a store; she decides to open a sewing business, making one-size-fits-all pants for her customers.

Meanwhile, Harpo and Sofia are rebuilding their relationship, working together to run their household. Mister comes to them, saying he's gotten a letter from Nettie; she and the children have run into difficulty in trying to come home. Mister makes a plan with Harpo and Sofia.

Shug and Celie relax eating Chinese food. Shug tells Celie she is involved with a young musician in her band; she is leaving the life she and Celie have together for one last fling. Now alone, Celie reaffirms her belief in herself – that she has everything inside of her that she needs to live a bountiful life.

It is the 4th of July, 1945. People gather at Celie's house for a celebration. Mister comes to make amends; he asks Celie to marry him again, but she decides that they are better off as friends – "two old fools left over from love."

Celie notices a group of strangers approaching the house. It is Nettie, along with Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. Everyone gathers around Celie and Nettie, as the long-parted sisters are reunited at last.

Overture to

History & Social Studies



Interview with Alice Walker, author of the novel *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, the eighth and youngest child of sharecroppers Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker. When Alice was eight years old, one of her older brothers accidentally shot her in the eye with a BB gun. Her father and brother tried to flag down a passing car to take Alice to the hospital, but the driver, a white man, would not stop. Alice's family treated her injury as best they could, but she ultimately lost her sight in her right eye. When they were able to take her to a doctor, he brusquely dismissed her case as untreatable, offering only a bottle of eyedrops. Her experience with the doctor was an example of the pervasive racism present in the South at the time.

Scar tissue formed over Alice's damaged eye, causing her to be shy and self-conscious. When Alice was 14, her brother Bill, who had moved North, was able to raise enough money for her to have an eye operation in Boston. In contrast to her experience in Georgia, the surgeon who removed Alice's cataract treated her with respect and care.

Although she was still self-conscious about her appearance, Alice was popular in high school. She was valedictorian of her class, and earned a scholarship to Spelman College, a school for black women in Atlanta, Georgia.

After spending two years at Spelman, Alice transferred to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and during her junior year traveled to Africa as an exchange student. She received her bachelor of arts degree from Sarah Lawrence College in 1966.

Alice's writing career began to take off: in 1967, her story "To Hell With Dying" was published in *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers*. Her collection of poems, *Once*, was published in 1968. In 1970, she published her first novel, *The Third Life of Copeland Grange*.

She received the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for *The Color Purple*, her third novel. She has received many awards and honors including the Lillian Smith Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rosenthal Award from the National Institute of Arts & Letters, a nomination for the National Book Award, a Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, a Merrill Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Alice Walker was active in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and continues to work as an activist. She has spoken for the women's movement, the antiapartheid movement, for the antinuclear movement, and against female genital mutilation. She currently resides in Northern California.

Summary of Standard for HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

1. Understanding and analyzing chronological relationships and patterns:

- Analyze influence of specific beliefs on these times. How would events be different in the absence of these beliefs?
- Analyze the effects specific decisions had on history. How would things have been different in the absence of these specific decisions?

2. Understanding the historical perspective:

- Understand that the consequences of human intentions are influenced by the means of carrying them out.
- Understand how the past affects our private lives and society in general.
- Perceive past events with historical empathy.
- Evaluate credibility and authenticity of historical sources.
- Evaluate the validity and credibility of different historical interpretations.

STAGENOTES: What were your experiences in high school?

ALICE WALKER: I have really good memories of my high school experience. I was voted "Most Popular" in my senior year, I was Prom Queen, and I was valedictorian. So I had a really wonderful time. And why I was writing very sad and miserable poetry at the same time, I don't know. High school was good. It was a time when I connected very well with other students and teachers. I especially liked typing and learning to sew. I actually made my own prom dress out of chartreuse taffeta.

STAGENOTES: You're noted as a teacher as well as a writer.

ALICE WALKER: I have taught at many schools: Tupelo in Mississippi, Jackson State, Yale, the University of California at Berkeley, Wellesley, the University of Massachusetts. I enjoy it very much. But what happens to me as a writer when I'm teaching is that I get very involved with students. And when I'm involved with them, it's very difficult to have the quality time that I need to write, so I haven't taught in a while. But when I go out on the road, that's when I teach.

Part of having a creative life is understanding as early as possible how difficult it is to have all the responsibilities that you can have in life, and be a creative person. So part of what I do in my teaching is to say that to people. I have friends who married in high school, in the eleventh grade. They started having children at nineteen and eighteen. If you do that so early, it's not likely that you're going to be able to do what you discover later on that you'd like to do. So really think, think about it. When you're sixteen, when you're seventeen, when you're eighteen. Don't be in such a rush to get married. By the time you're twenty-five, if you're already married, you will have many a second thought, I promise you. Don't be in such a rush to have children. Actually, the planet has more children than we're able to properly serve, so really consider that.

STAGENOTES: Did you have advice for the writers who were adapting *The Color Purple* into a musical?

ALICE WALKER: We have a feeling of mutual respect. I knew they were about to embark on something huge, and it would take them to some crevices and corners of the human psyche that maybe they were not thinking of going to. And I wanted to offer what support I could. So, when we met, I remember it as a time of us sitting around, and many questions arising. I remember encouraging them to have faith in the characters themselves, that they all have a reason for their behavior.

For instance, Mister didn't just bloom as a mean person for no reason. He has a history. He has a long past — his father, his grandfather, the plantation system. Enslavement. Reenacting the behavior that he sees around him, that his father saw around him, and then that their father, who was the plantation owner, who was the person that they were imitating. One of the things I like about *The Color Purple* is that it's like a mirror that reflects the whole period of enslavement for black people. So you get to see what people learned about behavior, and you get to say, "Don't keep doing this. This is why you were so sad and so depressed and so miserable, because you're continuing to enslave yourself."

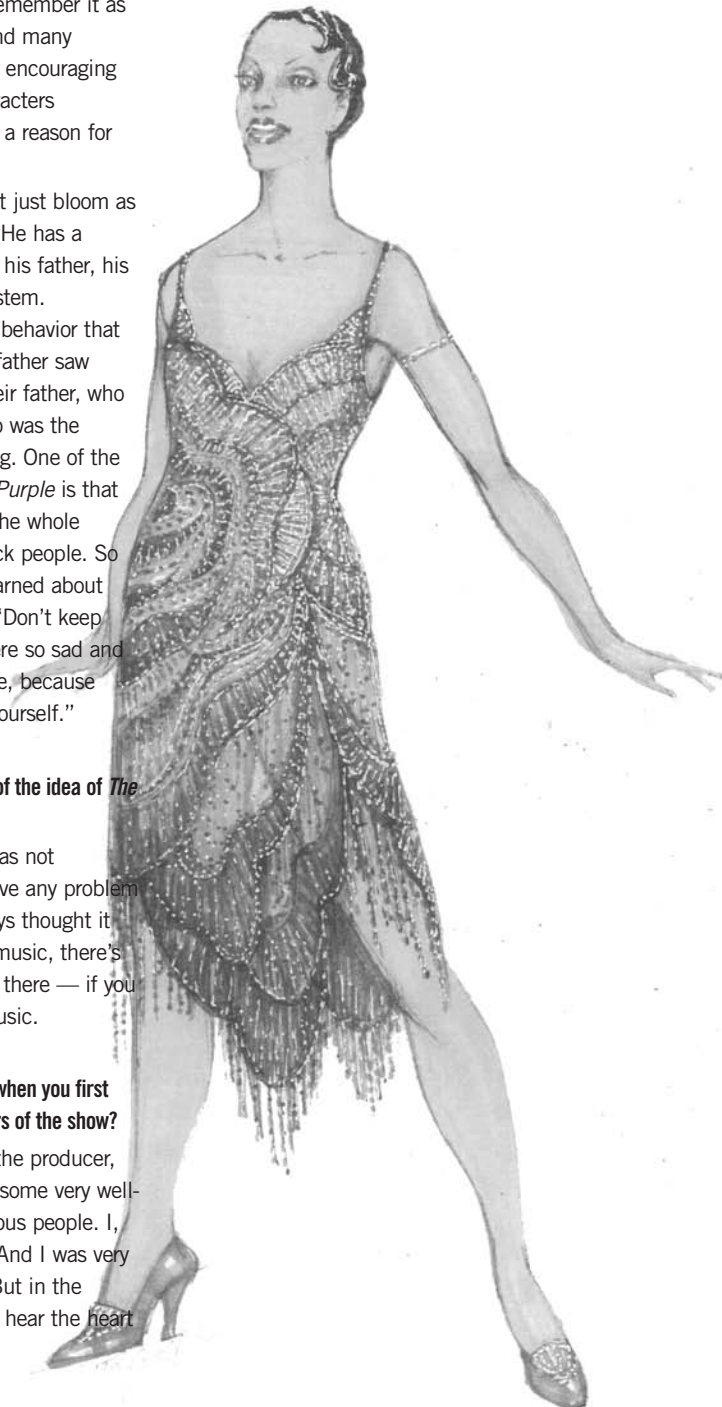
STAGENOTES: What did you think of the idea of *The Color Purple* as a musical?

ALICE WALKER: Well, at first I was not enthusiastic. I didn't really have any problem thinking of it as a play. I always thought it would be a play with a lot of music, there's music all through it. It's all in there — if you have a juke joint, you have music.

STAGENOTES: What did you think when you first heard the music by the composers of the show?

ALICE WALKER: Scott Sanders, the producer, had earlier sent me music by some very well-known people, extremely famous people. I, of course, didn't know them. And I was very open to trying to hear them. But in the music that he sent, I couldn't hear the heart

and soul that they really have got to have to do this play. And then he finally sent this recording, and he said, "You know, I have these friends, and I really like this. See what you think." He said they were just tapping out some things with spoons around Allee's kitchen table. And I put it in [the player], and I knew right away that they had it. They had the heart. So I was excited. Finally!



Celie's Home **A brief overview of African-American life in rural Georgia**

The Color Purple takes place in a rural Georgia community near the town of Eatonton, where Alice Walker, the author of the novel, was born.

In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which prohibited slavery, freeing the slaves throughout the South. This was known as "Emancipation."

In Georgia, there were more than 400,000 slaves. It took until the end of 1865 for Northern troops to spread the news of Emancipation to every corner of the state. Some Georgia



freedmen (the term for the newly emancipated slaves) immediately went to the major cities, Atlanta and Savannah, looking for a new way of life. Others traveled

throughout the South, seeking to reunite with family members from whom they had been separated. Others opened schools or established churches. And some took their freedom in small steps, finding out what it was like to be able to take a few hours off from work during the day, or to enjoy a stroll wearing one's best clothes in the town streets.

As former slaves adjusted to freedom, Georgia society was in chaos. Northern officials assumed that whites and blacks would transition easily from the master-slave relationship to an employer-employee relationship. This was not the case; plantation owners wanted blacks to stay in their same powerless position, accepting the same conditions that they lived under during slavery. The freedmen, however, refused to work the same long hours for little or no pay. Tensions were high as each side tried to become used to a new relationship with the other.

As part of Reconstruction, the political and societal reorganization of the South after the war, freedmen were promised land. In Georgia, former slaves were granted 40-acre parcels, mostly near the coast. Only about 80,000 acres of land was distributed in this



way, and some of it was taken away after crops were harvested. Only those new landowners who had court decrees supporting their claim were able to keep their land.

For those who did not have property of their own, the white landowners created a system which was a new form of slavery: sharecropping. Black farmers (and some poor whites) would be granted the right to lease a portion of white-owned farmland, working the land in exchange for a share of the profit when the crop was sold. They were supplied by the landowner with all the seeds, food, and equipment they needed; the cost would be taken out of their profit at harvest time. When the black farmer brought in his crop (usually cotton), the landowner would determine that he was a few dollars short of repaying what he owed. The next season, the farmer would begin by

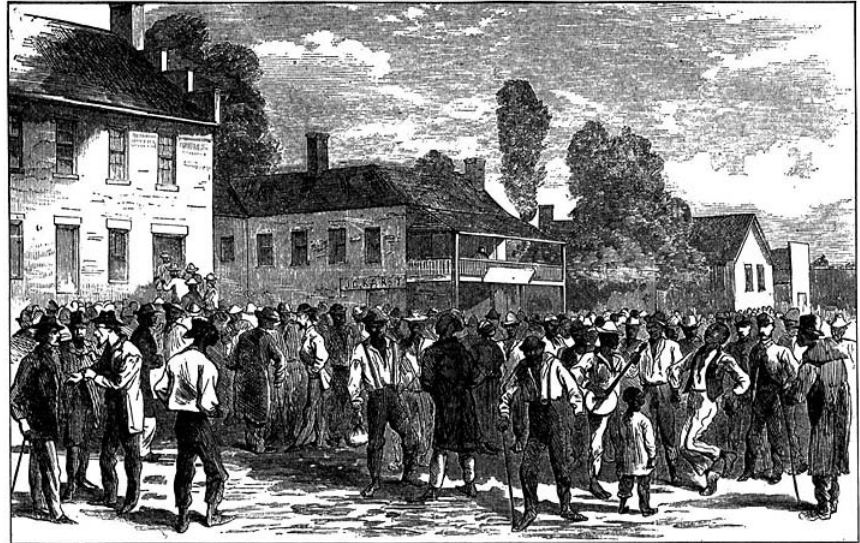
owing that money, and would come up short again, until the amount owed to the landowner was so great that it could never be repaid.

Seeing that owning property was the only road to prosperity, black farmers did everything possible to gain ownership of their land. By 1910, black farmers owned almost one fourth of the farms that were worked by blacks (the rest being sharecroppers). In *The Color Purple*, Mister is among this fortunate class of farmers who owned his land.

Georgia was not an extremely wealthy state; seeing blacks gaining in economic power made many whites determined to hang on to what power they still had by any means possible. The Supreme Court, in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, held that it was not inherently unconstitutional for black citizens to be excluded

from accommodations designated "white only." In the wake of this landmark case, which upheld a Louisiana law forbidding blacks from riding in the same train cars as whites, the doctrine of "separate but equal" came into practice: the races could be separated as long as the facilities were equal in quality. In fact, what was provided for African-Americans was almost without exception inferior. Blacks could not eat in white restaurants, swim in the same pools as whites, or use the same restrooms. Not only could blacks not ride in the same train cars, they could not even be in the same waiting areas in the train stations.

Whites also sought to disenfranchise blacks – to deprive them of their voting rights. A poll tax was instituted; many blacks were too poor to pay to vote. When blacks were able to pay a poll tax, a literacy test was added. Primaries were "white only." By 1920, a very strong anti-black feeling existed all across the



South. Membership in the Ku Klux Klan (a white supremacist organization) began to grow throughout the region.

In such a deeply divided society, some black citizens found it easier to establish all-black communities, usually organizing around the church. In cities like Auburn and Atlanta, black communities grew, as more and more rural farm workers migrated to the city in search of other jobs.

When the Great Depression struck in the 1930s, rural Georgia was hit hard. The cities did not fare as badly because of the developing industries like paper milling. President Roosevelt instituted programs for the unemployed such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC. Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge would not hire blacks for the CCC program, until Roosevelt forced him to by threatening to withhold all aid money from Georgia.

By the 1940s, the end of the time period covered by *The Color Purple*, the Georgia economy began to recover, along with the rest of the country, as production geared up for the beginning of World War II. In *The Color Purple*, Mister and his family would have been considered fairly prosperous in the African-American community. Mister has enough property to afford to have men working for him. His son Harpo, as the owner of the local juke joint, would also have made a relatively good living. Women's options were fewer: most worked in domestic service as cooks or maids (as Sofia is ultimately forced to do). Almost half of the white families in the South employed a black woman in their household. Only a very few African-Americans worked as ministers, doctors, or teachers, as Nettie plans to do.



History/Social Studies Exercises

Discuss: Alice Walker describes *The Color Purple* as “dealing with ancestral voices.” What does this mean to you? Who do you imagine your ancestral voices to be? Why do you think Alice Walker chose to create a fictional tribe, the Olinka, in *The Color Purple*, rather than write about an existing African society?

Write: Imagine that you have decided to leave your home and family in order to become a teacher in a far-off country. (Choose a country you are interested in, and read about it in the library or on the internet.) Your family is worried because they don’t know anything about where you’re going. Write a letter to a member of your family describing a typical day where you are. Use as many details as possible to make your description vivid and exciting.

Explore: What was life like where you live during the years that *The Color Purple* takes place? Choose a year between 1909 and 1949, and research what was happening in your town that year. You might begin looking for information on the internet; you might also look in the library for old copies of local newspapers from those years. Choose five interesting things, and report to the class what you’ve discovered.

Nettie’s Journey

African-American missionaries in West Africa

In the late 1800s, many European countries wanted to make use of Africa’s plentiful natural resources. To avoid confusion and confrontation, Otto von Bismarck, the chancellor of Germany, invited the major European powers together to negotiate control of Africa.

This gathering, the Berlin Conference of 1885, was attended by representatives of Germany, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, France, Russia, the United States, Portugal, Denmark, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, and Turkey. Over the next twenty years, the countries of Africa were conquered and divided up as colonies among the European powers. The largest African empires were controlled by Britain and France; Germany, Belgium, and Portugal had colonies as well.

In *The Color Purple*, the Olinka, the fictional tribe that Nettie visits as a missionary, were located in West Africa. Because the West African climate was uncomfortable for most Europeans, they used tribes who were native to the area as a source of labor. Rubber trees, which produce a sap that is processed into rubber, were a major crop throughout West Africa. In *The Color Purple*, the Olinka’s lands were destroyed to make way for rubber tree plantations.

There is a misconception that African tribes lived in isolation from one another; in fact, West Africa in particular had long been a bustling trade center. At the edge of the Sahara Desert, caravans took West African wares to the countries of North Africa. There was contact and interaction among many tribes throughout the continent.

The slave trade reduced the African population: twelve million Africans were taken into slavery over four hundred years, from roughly 1400 to 1880 (six million in the 1800s as the need for slaves in the South grew). This may have slowed Africa’s economic growth, since the workers who might have contributed to the further development of Africa were instead laboring in captivity in the Americas and elsewhere. Ironically, once the slave trade was outlawed, some African peoples then used slaves for labor to produce goods to trade with Europe and America.

African-American Missionaries

From its very beginning, Christianity has had a strong tradition of missionary work, seeking to spread the religion by converting people of other cultures. Besides establishing new churches, missionaries also provided health care, ran schools and orphanages, and helped promote economic development by sharing their knowledge of craftsmanship and farming.

In the nineteenth century, African-Americans who were active in the Christian church began to travel to Africa in increasing numbers as missionaries. All the major Protestant denominations of Christianity had established centers in Africa and Asia;

white missionaries tended to prefer Asia, while African-American missionaries were directed toward Africa, sometimes under the belief that they could withstand the rigors of the African climate more easily, and have a better chance of surviving disease. This turned out not to be true, and as many African-American missionaries succumbed to disease in Africa as did white missionaries.

Many African-American missionaries chose to go to Africa out of a sense of curiosity, wanting to visit the lands of their ancestors. Some believed that the "civilizing influence" of Christianity would help native Africans to better govern themselves and their countries.

Once European colonies had been established in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, and the numbers of white Europeans in Africa began to increase, African-American missionaries were regarded with increasing suspicion. The Europeans reasoned that, having been emancipated in the United States, the missionaries might encourage Africans to revolt against colonial governments. Still, African-American congregations continued to sponsor missionaries in Africa, sending them to establish churches, schools, and medical facilities throughout the continent. The numbers of African-American missionaries peaked in 1910, when their work was reaching greater and greater numbers of Africans. This was about the time that Nettie would have gone to Africa with Reverend Samuels.

By 1920, however, colonial

governments throughout Africa were actively hampering the activities of missionaries, regarding them as "undesirable aliens." Portugal required that missionaries in its colonies be fluent speakers of Portuguese, and only permitted missionaries who were registered and assigned by the government. Other governments refused to issue visas; the United States would often refuse to grant passports to missionaries, or else would make it difficult for missionaries to return to America.

Missionaries who ventured to Africa usually did so in groups, or at least in pairs — often married couples would travel together. In 1919, the Reverend Henry Curtis McDowell, (former pastor of a church in Chattanooga, Tennessee) and his wife Bessie Fonvielle McDowell, journeyed to Angola with their child to found a mission. After some time spent studying the language, the McDowells, along with two other missionary couples, established the Galangue mission. All were college graduates, which was a rare accomplishment for African-Americans at the time. The McDowells and their colleagues worked with the local tribe, the Ovimbundu, providing education, medical services, and religious instruction.

Reverend McDowell often wrote to congregations back in America, hoping to dispel myths about Africa among his fellow African-Americans. Many thought that African people were the same across the entire continent, and that Africa was a mysterious, exotic place. McDowell tried to address these

stereotypes in his letters home, writing travel essays that described Angola and the Ovimbundu in detail.

We are accustomed to think of Africa as the Sahara Desert and jungles of coconut trees and monkeys. I saw about a half dozen coconut trees at the coast and not one since. I haven't seen nor heard of the African monkey yet. Lobita reminds one of Florida and our station is very much like Talladega with its iron mountains and red soil.

As to the natives they are like American Negroes in that they have shades of color. They only need a few more clothes to make them look the same.

Today, Christian missions of all denominations continue to work in Africa, providing relief services in addition to their religious work. In addition, numerous secular organizations (such as the Peace Corps, founded by President John F. Kennedy) have undertaken the work of bringing education, health care and economic aid to the people of Africa.

Overture to Language Arts

An interview with Marsha Norman, the bookwriter of *The Color Purple*

Marsha Norman grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. She earned her B.A. from Agnes Scott College in Georgia and received her M.A. from the University of Louisville; upon graduating she worked writing reviews for the Louisville Times.

Her first play, *Getting Out*, was produced in 1977 by the Actor's Theater of Louisville; it was voted the best new play produced by a regional theater by the American Theatre Critics Association. Her play *Night, Mother* won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Hull-Warriner and Drama Desk Awards, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1983, the same year that Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

In 1991, Marsha Norman wrote the book and lyrics for the musical *The Secret Garden*, with music by composer Lucy Simon. She won the Tony Award and the Drama Desk Award for her work.



STAGE NOTES: What was your experience in high school? Were you writing?

MARSHA NORMAN: I wasn't writing for the theater then, but I was certainly writing. I was one of those kids that wrote messages on little pieces of paper that said "Help, come get me" and stuck them behind the stairs. I wrote all through high school, and not for any reason other than I really liked it, and kept being told by people that I was really good at it. In fact I won a lot of state writing competitions and that sort of

Book: In a musical, the spoken dialogue is called "the book." The bookwriter also helps decide where songs will go within the dialogue.

Summary of Standards for LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing

- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process
Prewriting, drafting and revising, editing and publishing
- Demonstrates competence in the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
- Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
- Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Reading

- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process
- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts
- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts

Listening and Speaking

- Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning

thing. But then when I got to college, I studied philosophy and astronomy, and didn't do any writing, actually. I was editor of the paper, but that was not actual writing. But I did accompany the dance group as my scholarship work. I played piano for the girls to do exercises, and then for

producer and set designer) had done the set for 'Night, Mother, and we wanted to work together again, and she had the idea to do this musical. We got together and talked, and agreed that we would go full speed ahead. We did kind of a "composer bake-off," and picked Lucy Simon to

lot of the same problems that The Secret Garden has, so it really needed an active imagination on the part of everybody, really, to figure out how to make it into in this new thing. We had to figure out how to tell the story in another way, and yet give people the sense that they have re-experienced the material and it's just as thrilling as it was the first time. In other words, the desired outcome is to have the audience think, "Ahh, yes, that's just what I remembered." And in fact, it's not at all what they remembered.

straight play: a non-musical play

them to do the kind of Isadora Duncan dance that was being done — narrative American dance, they did a "Salem witch trial dance," that sort of thing.

It was fantastic training for the musical theater. I'd grown up at the piano, and I came to college on a music scholarship, actually. I quickly realized that I was not the kind of person that was going to be able to sit in a practice room forever, but that combined interest in music and writing has always been there. And at the point when I was finally able to stop work and take a year off and write, the first thing I sat down to write was a musical. Then I understood pretty quickly that I couldn't write musicals living in Kentucky by myself, outside of a kind of musical environment. So then I proceeded to write plays and developed a reputation. For a long time, that got in the way of my being able to do musicals, because people thought of me as grim and sad and just interested in tragedy. And this isn't who I am at all.

I always wanted to do musicals, and finally I got to write *The Secret Garden*. Heidi Landesman (the

do the music. *The Secret Garden* is still the most performed of the musicals in high schools in America. It gets done all the time, which is great.

I really loved working on *The Secret Garden*, it was extraordinary. Musicals are so difficult. And that's what makes it wonderful to work on them, because they're nearly impossible. So, after *The Secret Garden* I did *The Red Shoes*, which was a disaster, but was really one of those good learning experiences where you work with some famous people, but you work with them for the wrong reason. They lost sight of what the goal was. The goal can never be a faithful reproduction of a film, or a book, and I think that applies here.

STAGE NOTES: What are the challenges involved in adapting a book into a musical?

MARSHA NORMAN: You cannot just take the book, and simply put it onto the stage. You have to think about, what kind of a theater piece would this story make? What do we have to do to get this to stand up on the stage?

It's that old theatrical axiom, "you can't cut up a sofa to make a chair." It's really true. *The Color Purple* has a

What you have to try to figure out is, what was the thing, what was the mechanism inside the watch that makes it go? Because once people get to tinkering with the story, it's very easy to take out the thing, the real mechanism. You have to be really careful to think about what the heart of it is. What people remember is the hard part of *The Color Purple*, and I think that's our challenge here. We want to remind them that, yes, there was this hard part, but ultimately it was a story of triumph. It was Celie's march to freedom. And I think that that's exactly what the story is, as we present it: it is Celie's march to freedom. Her search for peace.

These are the questions that I have to ask. It's my job as bookwriter to ask these questions: what is it that makes this story tick? You cannot disguise the lack of a beating heart in musical. Once you have that, then you can pour on the songs and pour on the dancing and pour on everything else. But the beating heart of this story is taking Celie through to her triumph of soul and spirit.

If you look at all of Celie's lyrics, they really trace Celie's relationship to God. God, in her view, is the very classic Christian/American God. But in

continued on page 14

Quincy Jones



Quincy Jones, known to his friends as "Q", is an activist and writer, an award-winning composer, and a producer of records, television, and film. He is one of the producers of the Broadway musical version of *The Color Purple*.

Born in Chicago in 1933, Quincy Delight Jones, Jr., had a talent for music from an early age. His family moved to the suburbs of

Seattle when Jones was ten years old; he learned to play the trumpet, and formed a performing duo with a then-unknown Ray Charles.

Jones quickly rose through the ranks of professional touring musicians. He moved to New York, where he worked throughout the 1950s as an arranger for jazz greats Count Basie and Duke Ellington, as well as his friend Ray Charles. After living in Paris to study composition, Jones returned to the United States, where he was hired as music director by Mercury Records. In 1964 he became the first African-American vice president of a white-owned record label.

He began writing film scores, beginning with *The Pawnbroker*, directed by Sidney Lumet. He was soon in high demand as a composer of film and television themes. At the same time, he released a series of R&B-influenced jazz albums, winning several Grammy awards. He produced Michael Jackson's solo albums *Off the Wall* and *Thriller*; the enormous success of those albums made him one of the top producers in the recording industry.

He then made the leap to producing in film, becoming one of the producers of the film adaptation of *The Color Purple* (as well as writing the score.) He went on to produce television shows such as "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" and "Mad TV."

Quincy Jones is the most-nominated Grammy artist of all time, with 76 nominations and 26 Grammy Awards. Jones has been nominated for an Academy Award seven times; in 1995 he was awarded the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award, acknowledging the impact of his life's work in the worlds of music and film.

a kind of greater view, it's Celie addressing the beyond: "How do I understand my life?" And in the beginning she understands it very simply, very much the way she's been taught. Then she proceeds, through the course of the story, to understand her life in different ways. And finally she arrives at this final understanding, where she says, I thank God for all the days I've lived, not just the good days, the bad days too.

STAGENOTES: What is your working process with the composers?
MARSHA NORMAN:

We've been doing it in a pretty straightforward way. When I came into the process, they had written a lot of songs already. But I started over, and then pulled their songs in where I thought they could be used for storytelling, and then they wrote a lot of new songs. Probably three-fourths of the songs that are there now are songs that were written since I got here. So I was able to say to them, we need a song to do this specific thing. And lately, I've been outlining in a very concrete way what the song in a scene should do.

One of the problems in writing a musical is that you need the songs to sound like they're sung by the same people who are speaking. So some of my way of speaking needs to slip over into their way of writing, so that when the characters speak and sing, it sounds like the same person. I always think with musicals that the songs and the spoken text are the sort of inside and the outside of the person. The songs are this inside, secret hidden part, that's the part you can't say, so you sing that part. And the part that you can say is the dialogue, that's the outside part. But it does need to match.

And the composers have been really great about understanding that, and understanding that songs for the theater have to be very specific. This song can only be sung by this person at this time in this story at this point in this story. Theater songs need to start when a person's contemplating what to do, and at the end of the song, they figure it out. Songs in the theater have a journey aspect to them.

So I map out where the scene goes and what the song needs to do, and the composers go and write the song. They call me, we talk. I give them lots of phrases and lots of ideas—if I were a lyricist, I would write something like this. And then they do their own work, but it very much keeps it feeling like the same voice.

STAGENOTES: How do you know when you have the best version?

MARSHA NORMAN: I think you can never know what a

continued on page 16

The Epistolary Novel

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel. The term epistolary, drawn from the word "epistle" ("letter"), means that the novel is made up of letters and diary entries. We read letters written to Celie by her sister Nettie in Africa, and letters written by Celie directly to God.

One of the advantages of writing a novel using this form is that the reader experiences the voices of the characters directly, reading their thoughts in their own words. This style can also give a sense of mystery to the story, since events may not be related fully (since we are seeing only one character's point of view and only learning what that character knows), and may not be presented in chronological order.

The epistolary style has a long history, reaching all the way back to the Bible: the letters written by the Apostle Paul are a major part of the New Testament. The first epistolary novel is generally agreed to be *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson, published in 1740.

By the 1700s, the level of literacy in the general public was increasing. Letter writing was popular, and many manuals were published instructing writers in the proper form and etiquette of letter writing. (These kinds of manuals are still published today, giving correct forms of address, and even suggestions for the content of a wide variety of business and personal letters.)

The letter form was also used in writing for a broader audience, such as travel essays, which were popular with a public curious about the wider world.

Samuel Richardson got the idea to use letters as the basis for his novel *Pamela* while he was writing a letter manual. This style became popular because letters were an easily recognizable form of communication: reading a character's letters made that character seem like a real person.

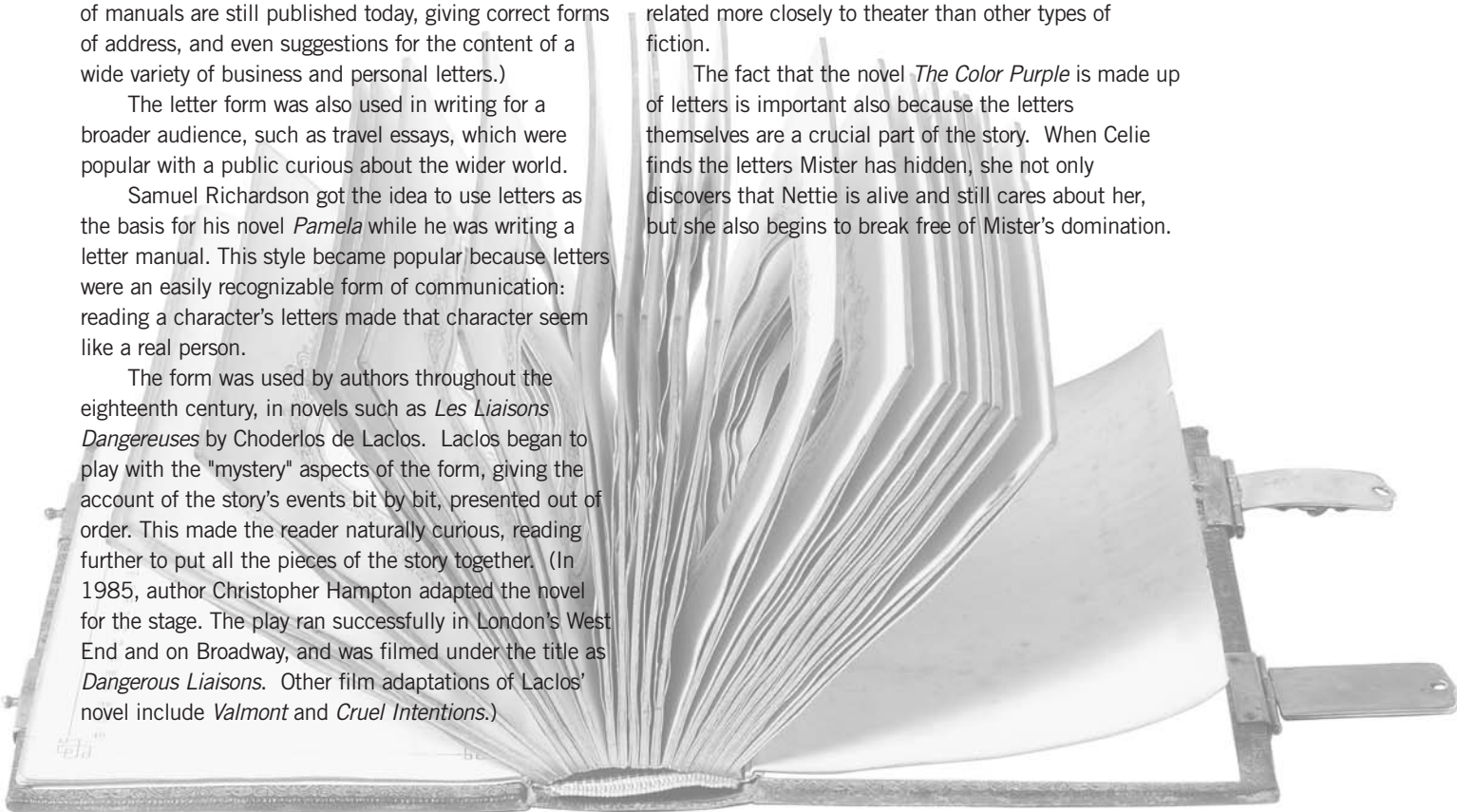
The form was used by authors throughout the eighteenth century, in novels such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos. Laclos began to play with the "mystery" aspects of the form, giving the account of the story's events bit by bit, presented out of order. This made the reader naturally curious, reading further to put all the pieces of the story together. (In 1985, author Christopher Hampton adapted the novel for the stage. The play ran successfully in London's West End and on Broadway, and was filmed under the title as *Dangerous Liaisons*. Other film adaptations of Laclos' novel include *Valmont* and *Cruel Intentions*.)

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the epistolary style was becoming less popular. Jane Austen originally wrote *Pride and Prejudice* using the epistolary form, but then changed her mind. She rewrote the story using a different device—the third-person omniscient narrator: the reader is told the story by a narrator who is not a character in the action, and who has access to the inner thoughts of all the characters ("omniscient" means "knowing all").

The epistolary style is still used today: some modern examples include Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *P.S. I Love You* by Cecelia Ahern. Other epistolary novels use e-mails in place of letters: *P.S. He's Mine*, by Rosie Rushton and Nina Schindler, and the companion works *Blue Company* by Rob Wittig and *Kind of Blue* by Scott Rettberg.

Adapting a novel into a play or musical presents certain challenges: the playwright usually cannot use narration or description. He or she has to primarily use dialogue—what the characters say to one another. In a musical, songs can also reveal the characters' inner thoughts. Because the epistolary novel is made up entirely of the characters' own words and thoughts, it is related more closely to theater than other types of fiction.

The fact that the novel *The Color Purple* is made up of letters is important also because the letters themselves are a crucial part of the story. When Celie finds the letters Mister has hidden, she not only discovers that Nettie is alive and still cares about her, but she also begins to break free of Mister's domination.



Performing Arts

Exercises

Discuss: Have you seen movies or plays that have been based on books? Did you like one version of the story more than the other? Why?

Write: Try writing your own epistolary story using e-mail and instant messages. Imagine your story being told through instant messages or e-mail sent back and forth between two characters.

Explore: Choose a favorite book and create your own stage adaptation of one section or chapter. Remember, you aren't limited to only the dialogue that exists in the book; feel free to imagine what other things the characters might say, or what other things they might see or do. You may also combine events, or move them to a different time or place.

Then produce your own reading of your play: make as many copies as there are parts, and distribute them to classmates you've cast in the roles. Have your cast sit in chairs set in a semicircle, and read the parts out loud. Listen to see if any ideas occur to you for rewrites or changes.

musical is until you see it on the stage. You can write it and it can seem perfect, and then you get it up there, walking around in real bodies. It's just like a drawing of a dress, you know? A drawing of a dress can be fantastic on the paper. And then it gets made with the material, and it gets put on a person, and only then do you realize that the person can't move, or that isn't the size of person that will fit that dress. Basically the book for a musical is a design.

STAGENOTES: Do you ever write specifically for the actors in the cast?

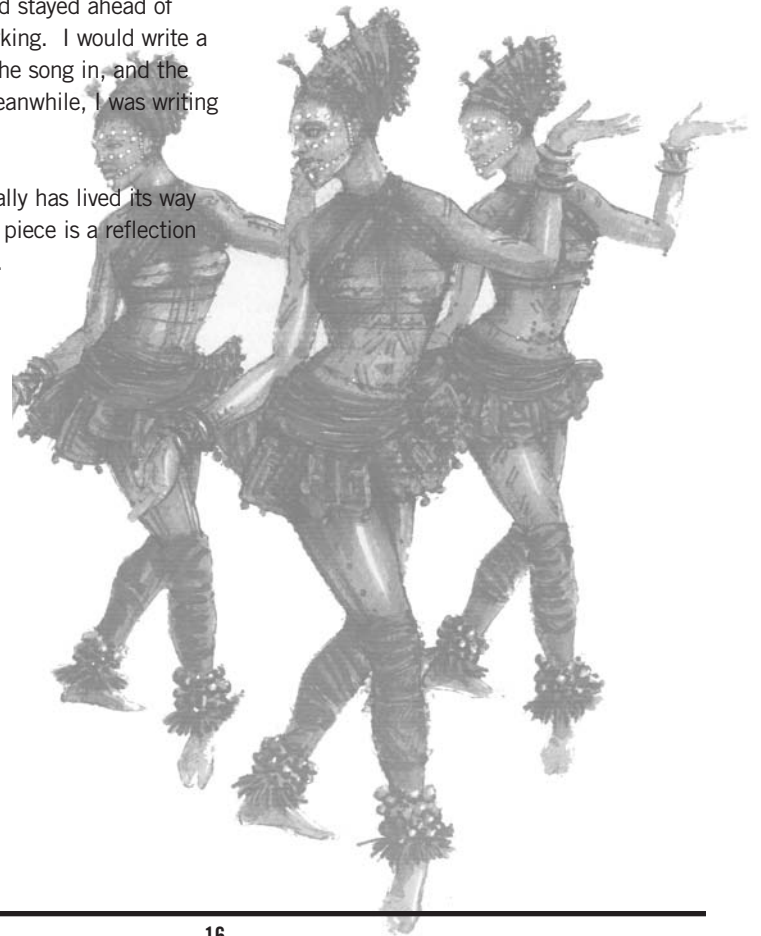
MARSHA NORMAN: With this process, it's been really thrilling that we've had the same cast for so long. We had them in the first workshop, and we had them down in Atlanta in our production there, and we have them again for this workshop, and we'll have them again on Broadway. And I've been able to write directly for them.

During the first two weeks of the first workshop, I just sat in the room with the virtual "hundred pieces of blank paper," and wrote a scene a day and stayed ahead of them, as they were working. I would write a scene, and we'd drop the song in, and the cast would learn it. Meanwhile, I was writing the next day's scene.

But now, this cast literally has lived its way into the piece, and the piece is a reflection of them in lots of ways.

STAGENOTES: How did you come to be working on *The Color Purple*?

MARSHA NORMAN: Alice Walker and I won Pulitzers on the same day. She won for *The Color Purple*, and I won for *'Night Mother* — so I had a connection to it. When Steven Spielberg got ready to do the movie, he called me to come out there and talk to him about writing the screenplay. We didn't quite have the same idea about what the movie should be. And after we talked and agreed that we weren't a good match, I walked out and was feeling kind of dejected. Then Quincy Jones, who had been in the meeting to represent Alice, took me out to lunch. This was the most generous thing to do: I was so disappointed that I didn't get to do it, really disappointed. And Quincy took me for lunch, and we had this two-and-a-half-hour conversation — it was this act of generosity that was so profound. I don't even know if he remembers doing it now, but it really meant something to me, to have him take me to lunch. He didn't have to do that.



Overture to The Arts

Summary of Standards for THE ARTS

Art Connections

- Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines

Music

- Sings, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- Performs on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- Improvises melodies, variations, and accompaniments
- Composes and arranges music within specified guidelines
- Reads and notates music
- Knows and applies appropriate criteria to music and music performances
- Understands the relationship between music history and culture

Theater

- Demonstrates competence in writing scripts
- Uses acting skills
- Designs and produces informal and formal productions
- Directs scenes and productions
- Understands how informal and formal theater, film, television, and electronic media productions create and communicate meaning
- Understands the context in which theater, film, television, and electronic media are performed today as well as in the past

Visual Arts

- Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts
- Knows how to use the structures (e.g., sensory qualities, organizational principles, expressive features) and functions of art
- Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts
- Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
- Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others

Interviews with Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray composer/lyricists of *The Color Purple*



Brenda Russell (composer/lyricist)

Brenda Russell grew up in Brooklyn, New York and in Hamilton, Ontario. She first began writing songs while performing in the Toronto company of the musical *Hair*. After moving to Los Angeles, her first single, “So Good, So Right,” was released in 1979. She released several albums in subsequent years; her song “Piano in the Dark” was nominated for a Grammy award in 1988.



Allee Willis (composer/lyricist)

Allee Willis grew up in Detroit; she moved to New York and became a copywriter for Columbia and Epic records, where she began her career as a songwriter. In 1995 Willis was nominated for an Emmy for her #1 hit, “I’ll Be There for You,” the theme from *Friends*. In 1985 she won a Grammy for Best Soundtrack for *Beverly Hills Cop*.



Stephen Bray (composer/lyricist)

Stephen Bray grew up in Detroit, where he met and worked with Madonna at the beginning of her career. Trained as a drummer, he produced and cowrote many of Madonna’s hits, including “Into the Groove” and “Express Yourself.” He played in the band Breakfast Club (writing and producing as well), which had the 1987 Top 40 hit “Right on Track.”

STAGE NOTES: A question for each of you — what were your experiences when you were just starting out? Were you interested in music in high school?

STEPHEN BRAY: I was busy getting kicked out of the musical department in my high school, actually. Because I wasn't inspired by the high school where I went. This was in Detroit. I played the drums but they didn't really take good care of us drummers. I knew the rhythms and I could hear what was going on, but I just sort of made up my own drum parts. It got to be a problem when we were playing classical music, it wasn't really working to make up my own part. So I eventually got kicked out, but I had my own rock band, which was good, playing R&B and rock, and that was fun. And I sang in a church choir from during third grade on up. My musical life in terms of organized music was mostly the church, actually. That was scary and wonderful because by the time I got to be a teenager there were only three guys left in the choir. I always had to sing out loud and make sure I was heard. It was a good experience. I really, really had a good time that way.

ALLEE WILLIS: Well, I just was a music fanatic. I was a radio fanatic, and I grew up in Detroit when Motown was really just starting, so I was absolutely obsessed with Motown. And I would go every Sunday and sit out on the front lawn, it was just in these two little houses on a main street in Detroit. I would sit on the front lawn, and you could see all the singers walk in and you could hear, because they had thin little walls, the bass lines and the background vocals. So before these records even came out, I knew the bass parts and the background parts to "Heat Wave" and "Come and Get These Memories" and all the songs. But I was more of a fan. I would hum little melodies, but not really write. I actually just found a whole bunch of little short stories that I wrote, but they were hideous. (Laughs) You know, I thought I was a genius, but they were so embarrassing and so bad.

BRENDA RUSSELL: I started writing music when I was in the Toronto cast of *Hair*. It was when I first learned how to play piano, they had a piano in the lobby, so I would play that. And the theater owner had the piano locked because he heard some cast members playing the piano. So the musical director of the show bought me a piano for my birthday. I was nineteen at the time and had just written my first song.

ALLEE WILLIS: When I went to college, I went to the University of Wisconsin, and I majored in journalism. I wanted to be in advertising. I think trying to write ad copy that was snappy and short was actually great preparation for lyric writing. When I graduated from college, a friend said to me, you know, they have advertising departments in record companies. You should try for that.

So I went to New York. And then, as fate would have it, I went into Columbia Records, and the head of advertising's assistant that day had told them she was going to Europe. I flunked the typing test eleven times, which is true, but got the job because they needed someone so quick and no one else applied.

So I went to work there, and I met Janis Joplin the first day, days before she died. And I built my way up over the course of that summer from a secretary to a junior copywriter, and wrote the ads that would go into *Rolling Stone* and *Billboard*, and wrote the backs of albums and radio commercials. I was writing for all the girls, and all the black groups who were of course lumped together in the "minority catalogue." But it was great, because I ended up writing for a lot of people that I eventually wrote songs for.

I really did love school, but I'm a very unschooled creative person. To this day I don't read, write, or play music, but yet I can compose the music. That's my vice and my virtue.

BRENDA RUSSELL: After I'd written my first song so easily, I got really paranoid that I would never be able to do it again. But I had an enlightening moment where I understood, this is not just for you...you're just tapping in to something greater. I realized that it was not all on my shoulders. Once I realized that, then I thought, I can write anything, so I became fearless. I just knew the most important thing was, you have to stay open.

STAGENOTES: How did you come to be working on *The Color Purple*?

ALLEE WILLIS: I met Scott Sanders (the producer of *The Color Purple*) when I directed the video for Stephen's band *Breakfast Club*. We kept in touch, and then in 1999, he called me up and said, I've got the rights to do *The Color Purple* as a musical.

I hadn't written music at that point for five years. And I think, Oh great, he's going to ask me to do *The Color Purple*. But instead he gave me the name of two songwriters and said, "I'm

between these two."

And one day in 2000 he calls me up again, and he said, okay, they're out. And I think, OK, now he's going to ask me to write *The Color Purple*. And instead he bounces the names of fifty songwriters off of me.

All the way at the end of the list he gets to Brenda Russell. And when he said "Brenda Russell," I thought, if I don't do this now, I'm never gonna do it. So I said to him, how about if I write a song with Brenda? And how about this other guy Stephen Bray? And he said, "Okay, but no special favors."

So, I called up Brenda and Stephen and said, do you want to go for this, and they said yes. We worked for two and a half months on the song, which is a long time to spend on something.

STAGENOTES: What song did you write?

BRENDA RUSSELL: We looked at the script that they had, and we took the two hardest scenes. We thought, well everybody's going to be trying to write a blues song or gospel. That's way easier than having a song with characters coming and going, with the mood changes. That's what we went for.

ALLEE WILLIS: We tried to pick what we thought was the most complex thing from the script. And we wanted to choose a multicharacter song. We had been working with animation, and what I loved about scoring in animation, is that it's visual. Characters have themes, and they have certain instruments associated with them. We thought if we put what we do in animation toward this, we're going to come up with something unusual. You know, which is what we did.

The song was, "Shug Avery Is Coming to Town," which still remains in the show. It's changed — some sections have been thrown out and some sections have been added, but essentially it's the same song.

STEPHEN BRAY: (Laughs) We're still working on it five years later. We're still tweaking it.

STAGENOTES: Can you describe your working process? How do you write together?

BRENDA RUSSELL: Usually I'd sit down and try to generate some music at the piano, and then we'd all fall in. Everybody contributes musically and lyrically. It's magic, I think. It's extremely fluid.

There's a great balance.

STEPHEN BRAY: We're all completely intuitive.

We're really working by ear. With melody and with lyrics, it just keeps going around. We constantly refine and refine and refine, until we're all happy. Which is often the case but not always the case. If two people are sufficiently happy, they can overrule the third. And the balance of power kind of shifts all the time. It changes enough that it's very healthy, I think. Sometimes Allee and I will gang up on Brenda on a melody thing, because Allee and I like dissonance, we like to hear the crazy note. But then Brenda and I will always gang up on Allee on word flow, if it has to do with the rhythm of a phrase. Let's see, who does that leave? Brenda and Allee, do they gang up on me? Do they gang up on me? I don't know.

BRENDA RUSSELL: Stephen's just a great balance between Allee and I, we're both very wild women. (Laughs.)

STEPHEN BRAY: Well, on the meaningfulness of the phrase. That's where I get overruled a lot. I usually want it to be completely logical, and be really crystal clear. Whereas they're more trusting in the essence of a line communicating what it needs to communicate. If two people are sufficiently happy, the third person will have to learn to live with it.

BRENDA RUSSELL: He keeps us on track all the time. It's just a magical collaboration.

When we write together, honey, if it makes it out of the room, it's going to be good, because it's a tough room. You've got to fight for your stuff.

The thing about collaborating is, you have to put your ego aside. You have to feel free enough to say, no, this is not working, and not feel you're going to offend your cowriter. They have to be willing to say, okay let's look at that, and not take it personally. You can't just fold your arms and take your ball and go home.

ALLEE WILLIS: We have a lot of similar areas, and then we have places where we're hugely different. Brenda's the best player, so Brenda is the one usually who will be at the keyboard. I'm primarily, I'd say, melody and lyrics. Although everyone does everything. Stephen's a drummer, so there's his sense of time and precision—which used to drive me crazy, because I am as loose as a goose, I love being behind the beat, I love mistakes. But what's really interesting is when you get

someone who is totally precise and someone who's totally loose who have to work together, you get this middle ground that is something neither one of you could have achieved on your own.

I think we've all learned how to be a trillion times better writers than we were. It's very hard writing with other people now, and I'm someone who's written with thousands of people. It's been a creative high.

STAGENOTES: What kind of musical inspiration did you have for this score?

STEPHEN BRAY: Some of our original ideas have changed—some of those songs don't exist anymore where we were trying to be completely rootsy. In 1910, we wanted it to be somebody on a porch just stomping their foot, and then playing guitar, and that's pretty much all it was. It moved from what we call "back porch," front porch, whatever porch you're on, with somebody stomping for rhythm, with gutbucket—like a tub with a single string for the bass thumping along. Then it went to gospel music. And then, spirituals. We have an a cappella spiritual. And then when we get to the twenties, we have more jazzy blues. And we get into some swinging.

At the end of the show we're in the forties. We don't quite get into the early underpinnings of bop, but we do get jazzy. The score covers a lot of bases, but at the same time, we were never really pinned down. Even when we're doing our blues, our straight-up blues, it's not really a straight-up blues. Because we felt that, if they'd really wanted a completely "authentic" type of show in terms of the musical styles, they would not have hired us. Because it's not what we do at all, we're not musicologists in that way. We tried to be completely sensitive so that we'd be appropriate—it would be very distracting to have sort of like a techno-rave number in 1912. But we're in musical theater, and there is a suspension of disbelief. It's really emotionally driven.

And we're learning not to be too attached to songs, because if it doesn't fit the drama, you need to be flexible.

STAGENOTES: Let's talk about rewriting. People might not know that many Broadway musicals begin with a production somewhere outside of New York City. This allows the writers to see the show in performance, and to make changes to improve the script. (*The Color Purple* had a production at the Alliance Theater in Atlanta, Georgia, in the fall of 2004.) What is the rewriting process like for you?

BRENDA RUSSELL: Rewriting. It's constant. I have cried, literally cried, "You can't cut that song, you can't." But when you start realizing, okay, the ultimate goal is to have the whole thing work, the story needs to be told in the best way possible.

Sometimes we'd be working, and we thought we were so great, and these songs are so great...but then the director would say, yeah but you know, story. Oh, that! (Laughs)

In Atlanta, we were writing in the week up to the previews. During the previews we were still rewriting. The amazing cast, they learned things in a day. In one day. It's unbelievable. I don't know how they do that.

STEPHEN BRAY: That was a wonderful time. First of all, Atlanta's just a great town, and the people at the Alliance Theater were fantastic.

They took such good care of us. The company of actors was so enthusiastic, and so excited to be working on this material, so that was inspiring in and of itself.

Night after night we were getting great feedback from the audiences. Even though they were in general very, very positive, I could still tell the moments where, you know, we thought we'd really nailed a particular moment, and then you learned—no, you didn't.

ALLEE WILLIS: You know, in pop songwriting, there's not really that much rewriting. Someone may ask you to change a verse or a word. But that's maybe one or two tweaks, and it's not a big deal. In musical theater a song can change twenty times, thirty times. They can tell you it's brilliant in the morning, and by the afternoon it doesn't work.

In some cases it took four years to learn, okay, what makes this song work, and this one not work. But you cannot be in theater and not be fine with having your stuff thrown out constantly. I think all of us look at this as actually like being in analysis for four and a half years. (Laughs) It really is about learning how to do your very, very best, and believe in yourself at all times, because if you don't this is not the medium for you. And learn how to be ego-less while at the same time having a tremendous amount of confidence.

The evolution of the blues and African-American influenced music

Worksongs

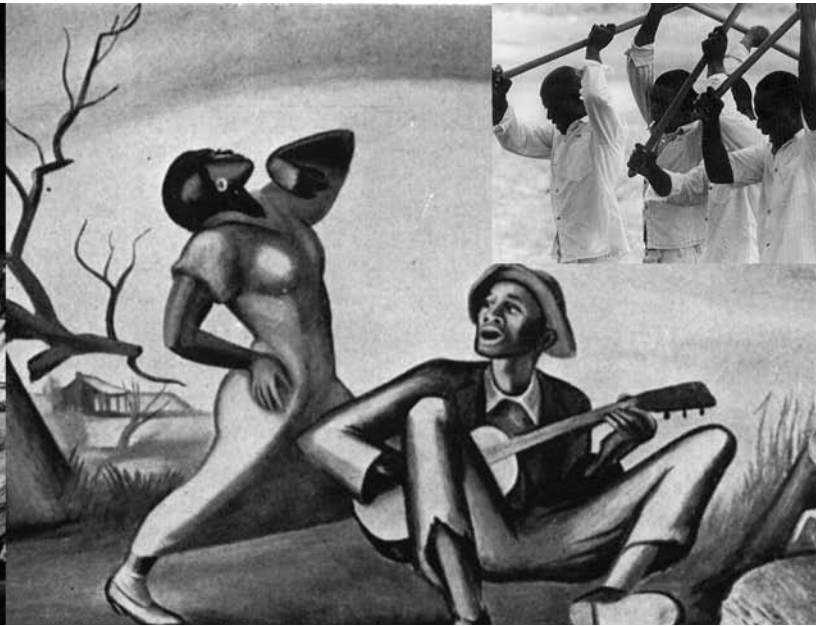
Africans who were enslaved and taken to America brought the tradition of the work song with them. As they worked in the fields, laborers would sing rhythmic songs that coordinated their movements (swinging hammers or farm implements, etc.). In the musical *The Color Purple*, the song “Brown Betty” is an example of a work song.

Work songs were also known as work calls, field hollers, or arhoolies. They could also serve as communication, as workers shouted down the fields to one another. A sung/shouted line would get an answer in response.

This “call and response” structure is characteristic of many work songs. A lead singer “calls out” a line, and the rest of the group

before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black man spoke to men. Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and mine.

...Out of them rose for morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past... The songs are indeed the siftings of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words...



responds. This pattern can be heard in marching cadences used in the military—a sergeant calling out a line, and his soldiers responding in rhythm. “Call and response” can be heard in gospel music as well, and the rock & roll/rhythm & blues music that draws on gospel for inspiration (such as the music of Ray Charles).

Work songs and field hollers gave rise to spirituals and the blues.

Spirituals

Author, philosopher, and social crusader W.E.B. DuBois wrote, in his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*.

They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart. And so

A “Sorrow Song” was the way DuBois described a spiritual. These were songs sung to express the grief and anguish felt by the African-American slaves. They often drew on phrases and images from the Bible, especially the stories of the Israelites who were kept in slavery in Egypt. In these songs, the slaves released their pain, and tried to have hope for the future when they would be freed. One of the best known of all spirituals, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” also contained a subtle message, encouraging Southern slaves to find their way to the Underground Railroad, the “chariot” which could carry them “home” to freedom in the North.

W.E.B. DuBois

CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST



Noted African-American civil rights activist William Edward Burghardt duBois was known as a writer, poet, sociologist and historian. He was born February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. DuBois was a gifted student; although he wanted to attend Harvard, financial difficulties made him choose to enroll in Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Living in the South for the first time, duBois experienced the intense prejudice directed at African-Americans, and witnessed first hand the poverty that many African-Americans had to endure. He finally fulfilled his dream of attending Harvard, becoming the first African-American to earn a Ph.D. there.

DuBois was a believer in "Pan-Africanism", the idea that all those of African descent had common goals and should work cooperatively to achieve those goals. In 1909, he became a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (the NAACP, which is still in existence), editing their publication *The Crisis* for 25 years. He ultimately left the organization in 1934.

DuBois wrote constantly, promoting the African-American civil rights movement in editorials, articles and poems. Ultimately, he became disillusioned with conditions in the United States, and moved to Ghana, renouncing his U.S. citizenship. He died August 27, 1963. In 1992, the United States honored him with a postage stamp commemorating his life and works.

W.E.B. DuBois is referred to in the novel *The Color Purple*, when Samuel recalls "a young Harvard scholar named Edward. DuBoyce was his last name, I think."



The Blues

The blues grew out of work songs and field hollers, carrying on the tradition of the West African griots or storytellers, who would sing and recite the stories of their tribe set to music.

Work songs were sung in a group, but the blues were usually sung by one person. Instead of "call and response" between a leader and a group, the blues singer would repeat a line—answering himself or herself.

The blues was based on a simple pattern, usually twelve bars long (although it could be extended easily to thirteen or fourteen bars). A "bar" is a measure of music—usually four beats. The twelve-bar blues uses the three most common chords in a scale, known as the I, IV, and V chords. The blues singer is able to improvise over this basic chord pattern.

The other major characteristic of the blues are blue notes. These are notes that are "bent" or flattened from their pitch, giving the sound of a wail or a cry to the melody.

The blues gave birth to other kinds of music, including jazz, swing, and rock & roll. The same I-IV-V-I progression used in blues is used in many early rock & roll songs.

Jazz and Swing

Jazz music began evolving from the blues from 1900 onward, reaching its peak in the 1920s, a decade known as the "Jazz Age." Musicians began exploring more sophisticated harmony than the simple blues chords, although jazz melodies often used the blue notes—the flatted third and seventh notes of the scale. Jazz musicians still improvised most of their parts, just like blues players.

There was a lot of overlap between jazz and the blues—the first recorded jazz song was the "Livery Stable Blues," played by the Original Dixieland Jass Band in 1917. Many jazz players wrote and recorded songs that were titled "Blues": "West End Blues," "Potato Head Blues," "Basin Street Blues," and "Gutbucket Blues" were some of the songs recorded by trumpeter Louis Armstrong, who was one of the musicians helping to develop the new jazz style.

In the 1930s, jazz dance bands began to get larger. With more musicians in the group, bandleaders began writing out specific musical arrangements for the players; the only improvisation was in the instrumental solos given to certain members of the band.

This tighter musical style became known as swing, which was popular through the 1930s and 1940s. Swing referred to the way the musicians played with a slight "swing" or bounce to the notes, sliding behind the beat.



Shug Avery's sisters: Female Blues Singers

In *The Color Purple*, Shug Avery is a blues singer, who entertains in “juke joints.” Female blues singers had a freedom of expression that other women of their time did not; popular blues singers like Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith, just like Shug, were able to be wild and speak the truth as they saw it in a way that other women were not.

Ma Rainey

The first professional blues singer, “Ma” Rainey was known as “The Mother of the Blues.”

She was born Gertrude Pridgett on April 26, 1886, in Columbus, Georgia. Inspired by her parents, who had performed in minstrel shows, she was singing onstage by the age of fourteen. She left home to tour with a group called “The Rabbit Foot Minstrels.” In 1902, while in St. Louis, she heard a blues song sung by a local girl, and she began performing songs and others like it in her act.

Two years later, she married the singer William Rainey. He was known as “Pa” Rainey, so Gertrude dubbed herself “Ma” Rainey. The pair continued to tour with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels and other groups, billing themselves as “Rainey and Rainey, Assassimators of the Blues.”

Ma Rainey had an outspoken, brassy style on stage. Several of her teeth were gold, and she always appeared in extravagant sequined outfits with her trademark necklace of gold coins.

She was a mentor to future blues singer Bessie Smith, who was hired as a dancer in the same performing troupe as the Raineys. (Smith left the troupe to start her own career as a singer around 1915.)

Ma Rainey began recording her songs in 1923, and in the next five years recorded over 100 songs. Styles began to change, however, and by 1933 her popularity had waned. In 1939, Ma Rainey died of a heart attack.

“Black Cat, Hoot Owl Blues” (recorded by Ma Rainey in 1928)

Black cat on my door-step, black cat on my window-sill
If one black cat don't cross me, another black cat will

Last night a hoot owl come and sit right over my door
A feelin' seems to tell me I'll never see my man no mo'

I feel my left side a-jumpin', my heart a-bumpin', I'm mindin' my P's and Q's
I feel my brain a-thumpin', I've got no time to lose
Mama's superstitious, tryin' to overcome these blues



Bessie Smith

Bessie Smith

Bessie Smith was born in 1894 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. After a brief stint working as a dancer and getting to know blues legend Ma Rainey, twenty-year-old Bessie Smith began working as a blues singer herself. By 1920 she was well known throughout the South, as well as up and down the East coast.

She was an imposing presence on stage: six feet tall and 200 pounds, with a voice that could fill a room. Like other blues singers, she used her “chest” voice (the lower vocal register) to “shout” the tunes, knowing instinctively how to adjust any melody to keep it in the strongest part of her range.

She began making blues recordings in 1923, which made her popular nationwide. She toured extensively throughout the South, traveling in her own railroad car, becoming the highest paid black entertainer in the country.

Like all performing artists, her career suffered when the Great Depression struck. She still toured as much as she could throughout the 1930s, singing in clubs. She made one appearance on Broadway, in the 1929 musical Pansy. The show flopped, but Smith received good reviews.

On her way to a performance in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Bessie Smith was in a car accident that nearly severed her arm and left her near death. She was taken to the Afro-Hospital in Clarksdale (hospitals in the South were divided between those serving African-Americans, and those that were “white only”). She died of her injuries that day, September 26, 1937.

“Thinking Blues”

(Lyrics by Bessie Smith)

Did you ever sit thinking with a thousand things on your mind?
 Did you ever sit thinking with a thousand things on your mind?
 Thinking about someone who has treated you so nice and kind

You'll get an old letter and you begin to read
 You'll get an old letter and you begin to read
 Got the blues so bad tell that man of mine I wanna be

Don't you hear me baby, knocking on your door?
 Don't you hear me baby, knocking on your door?
 Have you got the nerve to drive me from your door?

Have you got the nerve to say that you don't want me no more?
 Have you got the nerve to say that you don't want me no more?
 The good book said you got to reap what you sow

Take me back baby, try me one more time
 Take me back baby, try me one more time
 That's the only way I can get these thinking blues off my mind



In the footsteps of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith: A Timeline of Blues, Jazz and Soul Singers



Ethel Waters (1896-1977)
Popularized the song "Stormy Weather"; the first African-American woman to be given equal billing with her white co-stars on Broadway.

Billie Holiday (1915-1959)
"Lady Day" started out as a jazz and blues singer in Harlem clubs in the mid 1930s, always performing with a signature white gardenia in her hair. She became popular with black and white audiences alike, becoming one of the first black singers to perform with white bands. She is best known for her songs "God Bless the Child," and "Strange Fruit."



Dinah Washington (1924-1963)
Known as the "Queen of the Blues", she began performing with jazz musician Lionel Hampton in the 1940s. She had her biggest hit with the Grammy Award-winning "What A Difference a Day Makes," released in 1959.

Nina Simone (1933-2003)
Trained as a classical pianist, she drew on jazz, soul and blues styles in her singing, with songs such as "I Want A Little Sugar In My Bowl." Known as the "High Priestess of Soul," she was active in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.



Etta James (1938 -) Her first recording, the song "The Wallflower" was a hit in 1954. She became best known for her songs "At Last", "Tell Mama" and "I'd Rather Go Blind," released by Chess Records in the 1960s. Her album *Mystery Lady*, a collection of songs associated with Billie Holiday, won a Grammy in 1994; she was honored with the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003.

Tina Turner (1939 -) She began her career with husband Ike Turner, with hits such as "River Deep, Mountain High" and "Proud Mary" in 1971. After leaving her abusive marriage in 1978, she began a solo career, earning three Grammy Awards in 1985 for "What's Love Got to Do With It"? She was included in the 2005 Kennedy Center Honors.



Aretha Franklin (1942 -) Known as the "Queen of Soul," she started off singing gospel music at her father's church. Signed to a record contract by age 14, she had her first hits in the 1960s with "You Make Me Feel (Like A Natural Woman)" and "Respect." She has won 16 Grammys, and was the first woman inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.



Patti LaBelle (1944 -) She began as the lead singer of Patti LaBelle & the Bluebells (later just "LaBelle"); their biggest hit was 1975's "Lady Marmalade." She went solo and had a string of hits throughout the 80s and 90s, including "New Attitude" and "On My Own."

Chaka Khan (1953-) She first came to prominence as the singer of the funk band Rufus; she had a #1 hit single in 1978 with "I'm Every Woman."



Macy Gray (1970-) Sometimes described as "Billie Holiday meets Tina Turner", Macy Gray won the 2001 Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance for "I Try"



Queen Latifah (1970 -) She began as a rap and hip-hop artist, releasing her first album All Hail the Queen in 1989. She was nominated for the 2003 Academy Award for Best

Supporting Actress for playing the Ma Rainey-inspired Matron Mama Morton in the film Chicago.

Erykah Badu (1971-) With a smooth "Neo Soul" style and a voice often compared to Billie Holiday, her best known songs include "You Got Me," "Tyrone," "Next Lifetime" and "On & On."



Mary J. Blige (1971 -) Her 1992 debut album, What's the 411?, earned her the nickname "The Queen of Hip-Hop Soul" for the unique way she blended the two styles. The winner of three Grammy Awards, her biggest hit has been "Family Affair", released in 2001.

Lauryn Hill (1975 -) She began her career with the group the Fugees; her 1998 solo album The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill was nominated for a record-setting 11 Grammys, winning five including Album of the Year. In 1999 she was named one of the "100 Most Influential Black Americans by Ebony Magazine."



Alicia Keys (1981-) Wrote her first song at age 14; her debut album Songs in A Minor earned her five 2002 Grammy Awards, including Best New Artist. Her followup album, The

Diary of Alicia Keys, won four Grammy Awards in 2004. Her albums have sold over 17 million copies. In 2005, the L.A. Times named her the second most powerful artist in the pop music industry (after R&B singer Usher.)



A Music Listening List

African-American Music History

Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs and Ballads Rounder Select, 1998

Negro Work Songs & Calls Rounder Select, 1998

Southern Journey, Vol. 1: Voices From The American South - Blues, Ballads, Hymns, Reels, Shouts, Chanteys And Work Songs Rounder Select, 1997

Say It Loud! A Celebration of Black Music in America Rhino, 2001

Georgia Blues 1928-33 Document Records, 1994

Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: The Best of the Blues UTV Records, 2003

History of Jazz/Early Days Prism, 2001

As Good As It Gets: Jazz Early Days V.2 Disky, 2001

Swing: Official History of New Orleans Jazz 1917-1945 Retro Music, 2004

An Anthology of Big Band Swing (1930-1955) Verve, 1993

Juke Joint Jump: Boogie Woogie Celebration Sony, 1996

Women in Blues

House of Blues: Essential Women in Blues House of Blues, 1997

Blues Masters, Vol. 11: Classic Blues Women Rhino, 1993

Ma Rainey

Mother of the Blues: 1923-1928 EPM Musique, 1998

Ma Rainey Milestone, 1991

Bessie Smith

The Essential Bessie Smith Sony, 1997

The Bessie Smith Collection Sony, 1990

Ethel Waters

Am I Blue: 1921-1947 Jazz Legends, 2004

The Incomparable Ethel Waters Sony, 2003

Billie Holiday

Lady Day: The Best of Billie Holiday Sony, 2001

Billie Holiday's Greatest Hits (Decca) Verve, 1995

continued on page 26

Performing Arts Exercises

Discuss: Who are your favorite songwriters? Bring in an example of one of your favorite songs. Find out who wrote the music and lyrics, if you don't know. Play some of the song for the group, and describe why the song means something to you.

Write: Try writing your own blues songs. Notice how the examples given follow a pattern: the first and second lines are the same, followed by a different third line. Choose something that makes you "blue" and write a song about it.

Explore: the composers of *The Color Purple* describe their working process as a "fluid collaboration." Try writing a story in collaboration with two classmates. There are two steps to this exercise:

1) Begin by creating a drawing collaboratively. Get one blank piece of paper, and one marker, crayon, or pencil. Without speaking, one member of the collaborative team draws a shape or a line on the paper. When that person is finished, the next person picks up the marker and continues the drawing, still without speaking. After that person, the third person takes a turn, and so on. Continue until all agree that the drawing is finished. The goal is to pay attention to the actions of your collaborators, communicating without using words.

2) Now try a collaboration with words. Try writing a song together. Give yourself a time limit—for example, one hour. Everyone should try contributing to the words and the music. Don't worry about using a piano—just come up with a melody that you can sing or hum. The song does not have to be long. The goal is to try working in collaboration with your partners so that everyone has a hand in creating something.

A Music Listening List (continued)

Dinah Washington

The Essential Dinah Washington: The Great Songs Polygram, 1992

Back to the Blues Blue Note Records, 1997

Nina Simone

Nina: The Essential Nina Simone Metro Music, 2000

The Very Best Of Nina Simone, 1967-1972 : Sugar In My Bowl RCA, 1998

Etta James

Etta James, Her Best : The Chess 50th Anniversary Collection Chess, 1997

Mystery Lady Private Music, 1994

Tina Turner

All the Best Capitol, 2005

Proud Mary: The Best of Ike & Tina Turner Capitol, 1991

Aretha Franklin

Aretha Franklin: 30 Greatest Hits Atlantic, 1990

I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You Atlantic/WEA, 1995

Patti LaBelle

Pattie LaBelle: Greatest Hits MCA, 1996

Lady Marmalade: The Best of Patti and LaBelle Sony, 1995

Chaka Khan

Epiphany: The Best of Chaka Khan, Vol. 1 Reprise/WEA, 1996

The Very Best of Rufus featuring Chaka Khan MCA, 1996

Macy Gray

On How Life Is Sony, 1999

The Very Best of Macy Gray Sony, 2004

Queen Latifah

All Hail the Queen Tommy Boy, 1989

The Dana Owens Album Interscope Records, 2004

Erykah Badu

Baduizm Universal, 1997

Live Universal, 1997

Mary J. Blige

What's the 411? MCA, 1992

My Life MCA, 1994

Lauryn Hill

The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill Sony, 1998

Lauryn Hill: MTV Unplugged No. 2.0 Sony, 2002

Alicia Keys

Songs in A Minor J-Records, 2001

The Diary of Alicia Keys J-Records, 2003

Overture to Behavioral Studies



Interview with LaChanze, star of *The Color Purple*

LaChanze debuted on Broadway in the musical revue *Uptown...It's Hot!*, followed by an appearance in the revival of *Dreamgirls*. She starred as Ti Moune in the Ahrens & Flaherty musical *Once On This Island*. LaChanze played Marta in the Broadway revival of *Company*, and starred in the Off-Broadway musical *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*. She has reunited with Ahrens & Flaherty twice, appearing on Broadway in *Ragtime*, and starring in the Lincoln Center Theater production of *Dessa Rose*.

STAGENOTES: You're originally from Florida?

LACHANZE: Yes, I was born in St. Augustine, born and raised on a little dirt road. Small town, beautiful old town.

That's where the fondest memories of my childhood are. But we then moved to Connecticut, so I had the best of the South and the North. I ended up going to high school in Connecticut.

STAGENOTES: When did you know that you wanted to be a performer?

LACHANZE: My mom noticed very early that I had the performing bug, and she nurtured it by putting me in dancing school as a young child. I always had a desire to be onstage so I was the star of every production (laughs), from junior high all the way up through college. I've been at this for a while.

STAGENOTES: Where did you go to college?

LACHANZE: I went to two schools, Morgan State University in Baltimore, and then I transferred from Morgan State and went to University of the Arts in Philadelphia. And my major was theater dance.

When I went to University of the Arts, I studied technique, mostly. I performed outside of the school. I worked at local dinner theater, just to help me through school. Atlantic City wasn't far away, so my summer jobs were in Atlantic City. In fact, I left school to do a summer job that went to Broadway, which was my first show. So I haven't gone back since. But I intend to, at some point, because I only had a year left, and I wanted to go back and finish and

get my degree. I've actually given seminars and spoken at the school. I started programs there for African-Americans. It's just been that my life, my career really took off, and I haven't had a chance to get that piece of paper. But I intend to, one day. I was going to school to learn how to do what I ended up doing.

STAGENOTES: How did you prepare to play Celie? It's a big role.

LACHANZE: Well, I didn't necessarily approach it as if it were such a big thing. I had to just focus on this character: who she is and how she is in the world, what her relationship is to the world, how she sees herself, what her desires are. I had to sort of take on the spirit of Celie, so that I could just be Celie in this world of *The Color Purple*. To consider all that it is would be a little overwhelming for me.

One of the tools that I use in preparing for a character, is to just focus on the character, trying to get to know the character as much as possible. Seeing things through her eyes, understanding through the words of the play who she is, where she comes from, what she wants. Ultimately, what she fantasizes about. The details I find are interesting, because the details will dictate what she will do.

So I spent a lot of time just fantasizing about what Celie would think about, dream about, wish for, hope for, desire, what she's afraid of, what she likes. Just doing what we do as humans every day, walking around. What our insecurities are, what our strengths are. Our confidence, our weakness. Just all of the elements of one's personality. I try to find out

Summary of Standards for BEHAVIORAL STUDIES

- Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior
- Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function
- Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance and physical development affect human behavior
- Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions

Gender Roles in *The Color Purple*

The Color Purple, both the novel and its film version, ignited many discussions among readers and viewers concerning what the story says about the relationships between men and women. Critics claimed that the characterization of Mister was an attack on African-American males, while others maintained that there were a variety of male-female relationships, which depicted a range of truthful human behavior.

The Color Purple raises many questions about traditional gender roles: that is, how does society expect men and women to act? What qualities are considered "masculine" and "feminine"? What limits does society place on the ways men and women can act?

Southern society in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century was divided in many ways: wealthy and poor, white and black, male and female. Each division had one side with power, and one that was relatively powerless. This created incredible tension at every level of society.

The South's population was primarily rural. Extended families had to stay together, since a lot of work was required to keep any household running. The family structure was patriarchal, meaning that men were considered to be the heads of the household. Men did the majority of the farm work, took care of family finances, the building of the family home, and defending the family property, if necessary. The women were expected to care for the children, prepare family meals, wash clothes, clean house, chop wood, and carry water. Women often bore children every year, leaving them weaker and more vulnerable to illness. Women often died in childbirth; a man would frequently marry twice or three times, because a woman was needed to care for his children.

Large families were valued because the mortality rate was high. Many children did not survive to adulthood, so couples had as many children as they were able to. If family members survived to old age, they were kept as part of the extended family, helping to care for young children and assisting with running the household.

African-American families in the South had additional pressures. During slavery, families were often not allowed to be together; slave owners separated husbands from wives, and parents from

children. Slaves in a household would form their own family units; often these units were headed by the women of the group.

After slavery was abolished, freed slaves reunited their families. The strain of living under slavery took its toll on both men and women: men had to reassert their expected place as head of the family, while women were forced to give up their say in family matters. This was not true of all families, but it was a common situation among those trying to adjust to a new way of living.

By the time that *The Color Purple* begins, barely two generations have passed since the end of the Civil War. Family patterns have not changed greatly; men and women still have clearly defined roles in the family, and in society.

The central relationship triangle is among Celie, Mister and Shug. Shug, being a blues singer, is freed of the traditional expectations that a woman faces. Some may judge her, but no one expects her to cook the meals, wash clothes, or bring up children. For Celie, it is just the opposite: for most of her life, she is viewed only as someone who cooks, cleans, and cares for others. Mister is expected to fulfill the man's role – to be the "big dog" – in charge of everyone else in the household. At the time, men were considered free to discipline their wives and children in any way they saw fit, including physical punishment.

In contrast, the relationship between Harpo and Sofia is one in which they both try to define new roles. Harpo is criticized for being unmanly when he lets Sofia have her way; even Celie advises him to beat her to make her submit to him. Sofia is not content to be subservient, and when the situation no longer suits her, she leaves, rather than compromise.

Even Nettie, who has chosen the path of adventure in choosing to become a teacher and missionary in Africa, finds that she cannot escape traditional gender roles: the Olinka tribe have just as strong ideas about the relationship between men and women as Americans do.

The Color Purple has many layers of meaning for the audience to explore. It challenges us to reconsider our ideas about the way men and women—people—should treat each other, and the roles that they are given in a family and in society.

about Celie as much as possible. And ultimately, I'm finding out that she just has this incredible faith and belief, which is why she's so likeable. It's why we all love her. Because she has undeniable faith in the face of such tremendous horror. There's just no other way to describe it. She still has the spirit of hope, which is what I try to clearly understand and communicate to the audience.

STAGENOTES: What is it like working on a new musical, when so much of it is always being rewritten?

LACHANZE: It's amazing. There's this eagerness to make it the best it can be. Everyone is on the same page with that. There are no divas in the room. The show is the diva. And we are all very committed to supporting this show.

When the writers come into rehearsal with new words, it's my job to find the best way of

making it work, so that the director and the producer and the creators can see if it works for the show. My job is to do the best that I can do with it. If it works, they'll tell me. We're all very eager to make this the best possible thing that we can.

When people say, "How do you memorize those lines?" I've said this time and time again, it's not the lines that you memorize, it's your intention. Your intention is what you're trying to communicate, what you're trying to get across to the other person. It's your desire. That's what you memorize. That's much easier than a series of sentences.

STAGENOTES: You've been working on this show for a long time now, in workshops and in the Alliance Theater production in Atlanta.

LACHANZE: The longer you live with the music, the more beautiful it gets. We are musicians,

and our voices are our instrument. And first we learn how to play the music, and once we've lived with it for a while, not only can we play it, we can embellish on it, change the dynamics. It's just great to live with it for a while.

In fact, just today, I discovered something else about my character that I'd never thought about before now. And it was kind of nice for me to feel it.

It was a moment in a scene that Celie has with Sofia, when Sofia is trying to convince me to leave Mister. And I've always thought about the fear of leaving Mister—that he would try to do something to me or hurt me, which is why I can't leave. That is what my motivation was. Today, for some reason, it came to me that if I leave, I might miss Nettie coming back. And I thought, wow, hey, that's more specific for me and that's more active for me. I'd never thought of that before. And I've been with this play for a year. So, there you go. (Laughs)

Interview with Donald Byrd, choreographer of *The Color Purple*



Donald Byrd started his company DONALD BYRD/THE GROUP, in Los Angeles, California, in

1978, moving it to New York City in 1983. Prior to that time, Mr. Byrd studied at Tufts and Yale Universities, the Cambridge School of Ballet, the London School of Contemporary Dance, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, and with Mia Slavenska. He danced with Twyla Tharp, Karole Armitage, and Gus Solomons Jr. Since 1976, Mr. Byrd has created over eighty works for his own company as well as for major black

modern-dance companies including the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Philadelphia Dance Company (Philadanco), Cleo Parker Robinson, Dallas Black Dance Theater, and Phoenix Dance in Leeds, England. He has also choreographed for classical companies including Pacific Northwest Ballet, Concordance, Aterballetto, MaggioDanza di Firenze, and Oregon Ballet Theater, to name a few. Mr. Byrd has also choreographed for numerous stage productions.

Mr. Byrd is the recipient of fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, Metropolitan Life Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

STAGENOTES: What was your experience in high school?

DONALD BYRD: I did artsy things in high school. I played classical music, played in the marching band, I did the drama club. And then I started going out to see things by professional dance companies and professional theater companies when I was about sixteen years old. I didn't think that I wanted to have a life in the performing arts, but it was something that kind of stayed with me and spoke to me. By the time I got to college, it started to kind of take over my life. That's when I knew that's what I wanted to do.

STAGENOTES: How did you come to be involved with *The Color Purple*?

DONALD BYRD: Actually, it's interesting, I heard that they were doing a musical. I actually thought I was a good fit. But I wasn't hired. And I said, I could do that show. Without having heard the music or anything, I just thought it was a good fit in terms of content and subject matter. When I went to see the show in Atlanta at the Alliance Theater, they were looking for

Behavioral Studies

Exercises

Discuss: An actress playing the role of Celie has to portray the character from age fourteen up through age fifty. How would someone playing a young character speak and move differently from when they are playing an older character? What other clues do we get about someone's age when we observe them?

Write: LaChanze says she "spent a lot of time just fantasizing about what Celie would think about, dream about, wish for, hope for, desire, what she's afraid of, what she likes." Imagine you are playing a role in a stage adaptation of one of your favorite books. Choose the character that you are playing, and write a journal entry as that character. What do you think about? Dream about? Wish for? Hope for? Desire? What are you afraid of? What do you like?

Explore: Some of the "animal dances" of the 1920s that were popular in juke joints were the "snake hips," the "buzzard lope," and the "fish tail." Invent your own animal dance: observe an animal, ideally in real life (at home, in the park, or at a zoo); find a television program or a video about animals if you can't find one to observe live. (You may also be able to find video footage of animals online.) Watch the animal's movements, and try to recreate them with your body. Choose a few of the animal's moves and make a short dance out of it.

Find a piece of music which reminds you of the animal you've chosen; see if you can adapt your dance steps to fit the music.

Teach the class how to do the steps you've invented; see if they can guess what animal you based it on.

a new choreographer. Then I said, yes, I think I have something to contribute. I didn't say, "I'm the person that you should hire," but I certainly had a lot to say about it.

STAGENOTES: What kind of preparation did you do?

DONALD BYRD: The preparation for this really has been the work that I've done all my life, before I actually came to this project. I think that's really the biggest preparation, a kind of preparedness in terms of life experience.

One of the things that we've decided is that a lot of the movement is based in African-American popular dance. That seems really appropriate for this, and that is something I have a special interest in. In some of my earlier work, what I tried to do is combine vernacular dance (the standard style and vocabulary from authentic popular and folk dance) with concert dance.

STAGENOTES: What is the working process like with the creative team?

DONALD BYRD: There are a couple of things that are striking about this process. You feel that you have an equal voice in terms of your input into the process. If something is working or not working, everybody has an opinion about it, and you take all those opinions into consideration. I think that's kind of unique in many ways.

There has been a lot of interest in terms of how to make the movement aspect of the story more present—how to enrich the production with movement elements that had not been there before. So before, the thinking had been that it was driven by the book and by the music. But when I came on board, we thought, well, maybe this is a movement scene. Maybe this will tell the story a little bit differently, or change how we experience the story, if it's done through dance. For example, I spent three days just working with the composers to figure out what the Africa scene might look like

and feel like and sound like.

Collaboration is a really important part of this process. It's probably the most important part.

STAGENOTES: How do you personally evaluate the work you're creating?

DONALD BYRD: In terms of evaluating success, in Broadway productions it's always "story." That's the catch phrase, tell the audience the story. There's a reluctance sometimes to appreciate something purely for its aesthetic value.

I think that's part of what the process is: giving your collaborators the language to talk about elements of the production which they may not have a vocabulary or language for. So, for example, the music team may have a language for talking about music, but they may not have a language for talking about dance. I have to help them talk about it, so that I can understand what it is that they're really trying to say.

STAGENOTES: Are there existing dances you are using in the show?

DONALD BYRD: Often I will try to use some period dance as a starting place, so there's a dance that they do in the show called the huckabuck. The huckabuck was a very popular dance, particularly among country people. It was easy to do. The dances that would have been popular at that time would have been the animal dances from the period, which were these very close gripping dances that people did. Those are kind of the source material for the dance, even though I'm not doing authentic dancing.

We're not doing a historical drama—it's all interpretation. It's filtered through your personal sensibility, and your personal sensibility is shaped by your personal history and your experience.

Overture to Life Skills

Summary of Standards for LIFE SKILLS

Thinking and Reasoning

- Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument
- Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning
- Effectively uses mental processes that are based in identifying similarities and differences (compares, contrasts, classifies)
- Understands and applies basic principles of hypothesis testing and scientific inquiry
- Applies basic trouble-shooting and problem-solving techniques
- Applies decision-making techniques

Working With Others

- Contributes to the overall effort of a group
- Uses conflict-resolution techniques
- Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations
- Displays effective interpersonal communication skills
- Demonstrates leadership skills

Self-Regulation

- Sets and manages goals
- Performs self-appraisal
- Considers risks
- Demonstrates perseverance
- Maintains a healthy self-concept
- Restrains impulsivity

Life Work

- Makes effective use of basic tools
- Uses various information sources, including those of a technical nature, to accomplish specific tasks
- Manages money effectively
- Pursues specific jobs
- Makes general preparation for entering the work force
- Makes effective use of basic life skills
- Displays reliability and a basic work ethic
- Operates effectively within organizations

Interview with Gary Griffin, director of *The Color Purple*



Associate Artistic Director of Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Gary Griffin has directed numerous award-winning productions, including *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Short Shakespeare! Romeo and Juliet*, *Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Herbal Bed*.

He directed Chicago Shakespeare's remount of *Pacific Overtures* at the Donmar Warehouse in London. His production of *Beautiful Thing* transferred to New York's Cherry Lane Theatre; He also recently directed *The New Moon* for Encores! in New York.

STAGENOTES: What was your experience in high school?

GARY GRIFFIN: I didn't get into theater until I was a senior, for various reasons. I wasn't really interested as an actor. Probably that had something to do with my eventually ending up being a director. I was just fascinated by the whole process, and what it took, how many people were involved, and all of that. The energy that goes into a musical was really appealing, but that was it.

But I did go to see theater in high school, there was great theater in my town that did surprisingly adventurous work, very up to the minute plays. And then as a kid, I would go into Chicago and see stuff. I saw *A Chorus Line* when I was in high school. That was one of those change-my-life shows. Because that's when I figured out that theater could do something nothing else could do.

STAGENOTES: Did you study theater in college?

GARY GRIFFIN: I intended to be a journalist. I thought journalists were the heroes. I thought they were the ones who were really taking care of people, in terms of unearthing the truth. I loved that idea. But as I got into college, and started wandering back into the theater, I started to see the relationship between the two things: the storytelling, finding the angle on the story that engages people in a fresh way. They're kind of similar pursuits, really.

In the theater, you do it with actors, and lights and a story, but at its heart you're trying to deal with something that's vital. It's funny, because my journalism roots have stayed with me.

Toward the end of my college time I started directing. I had a fantastic teacher. It really opened a door. He was very smart, because fairly early on, I wanted to direct something. And he said to me, wait. Take this class, this class, this class. When you know that, then direct. And I said, everybody else doesn't have to do this. And he said, if you really want to be a director, then do this. And it was the smartest advice I'd had.

STAGENOTES: You've directed both plays and musicals.

GARY GRIFFIN: It's funny, because Illinois State where I went to school was not training anyone in musical theater. It was a much more visceral, naturalistic form of theater. Although we worked in different styles, there was a kind of soul that they developed in you that wasn't what you typically think of as music theater. But music theater is a strange thing: if you can do it, it's a specialty that's very helpful. For me, many times a theater would hire me to do a musical. And after working with me, they would say, oh, you do plays?

STAGENOTES: How do you approach directing *The Color Purple*?

GARY GRIFFIN: This show is interestingly character-driven in a way that is not obvious. There's not a plot—there's plotting, but there's not one plot that drives every scene. It's not like, you know, *Fiddler on the Roof*. There's one clear thing about Tevye and his daughters—Tevye's daughters getting married, and the faith challenges that he faces. It's very clear: first daughter, second daughter, third daughter. It's really simple on that level.

This show isn't like that. Yes, it's Celie's faith journey, but that's more of a thematic

STAGENOTES: What do you think students might get out of seeing *The Color Purple*?

GARY GRIFFIN: I was saying this to Alice last night, I hope high schools see this show a lot, because I think, if you're in high school, you live Celie's experience powerfully and profoundly. I think everyone feels like Celie in high school.

When you're in high school, you're dealing with all the people who seem to have it all together, and seem stronger than you. You feel like you're the weak one. It's so great for people to realize that "weak" character is actually the strongest character in the story. Because the thing about Celie is,

“ I saw *A Chorus Line* when I was in high school. That was one of those change-my-life shows. **Because that's when I figured out that theater could do something nothing else could do.** ”

But working on plays and musicals, there are advantages to doing both. The attention to detail and structure, which you would do in a play, doing that in a musical is helpful. By the same notion, it's valuable to infuse some things with more theatricality. I always say Shakespeare and musical theater to me are the same thing. They require the same skills. Heightened rhythms. Being comfortable with making things that are not in naturalistic speech sound natural. Making the false true. Finding the world of the piece and living it. It's the same skill.

thing. So, it's about the people she both is challenged by and is embraced by. The character force in the piece has to be incredibly dynamic.

STAGENOTES: What makes *The Color Purple* work as a musical?

GARY GRIFFIN: I really do believe that you can't make something musical. It either is a musical or isn't. Your job is harnessing the musical. Like sculpting. I think *The Color Purple* is a naturally musical story. It lends itself to music theater without great effort. I mean, doing it well is a different story. So the process is more about getting out of the way. So much about music theater is not forcing.

she never loses her mission. She never compromises her mission. Every other character compromises their mission at some point. And Celie never does that. Ever. The story tells you, you'll end up on the other side, and you'll be the strongest person. And that's pretty much the way you survive.

“I got my start by giving myself a start”

Madame C.J. Walker

ENTREPRENEUR

In *The Color Purple*, Celie eventually goes into business for herself, creating one-size-fits-all pants. A business owner who owns and operates her own company is called an “entrepreneur”—especially if that company offers something innovative or unique.

Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker, better known as Madame C. J.

Walker, became one of the most successful African-American entrepreneurs of the twentieth century, by revolutionizing the hair-care industry for African-American women.

Sarah was born in rural Louisiana on December 23, 1867, to Owen and Minerva Breedlove, former slaves who worked as sharecroppers. Sarah was orphaned at age seven, and went to work in the cotton fields with her sister. At age fourteen, she ran away from her sister’s home and married Moses McWilliams. Two years later Moses was killed by a lynch mob. Sarah headed for St. Louis, taking her young daughter A’Leia with her.

In St. Louis, Sarah worked as a cook, laundress, and housecleaner while living with her brothers, who worked as barbers. She was afflicted with a scalp condition that caused her hair to fall out. She tried many products that promised to help, but none were effective. She then had a dream, in which a man appeared and told her which ingredients to use to make a hair restorer. The formula soon had her hair regrowing.

Sarah moved to Denver, where she met and married newspaperman Charles Joseph “C. J.” Walker. Sarah became known as “Madame” C. J. Walker. She and her new husband began selling “Madam Walker’s Wonderful Hair Grower.” Walker contributed many marketing ideas to his wife’s business; at his urging, she set out on a long door-to-door sales trip through



the South. Her products were very popular. Madame Walker began planning the expansion of the “Walker System,” which included several “Walker Schools” of cosmetology, and a network of “Walker Agents” who were licensed to sell her cosmetics. Her company grew to the point where she employed over 3,000 people. She was the first African-American woman to become a

self-made millionaire, a fortune she built in just fifteen years. She died of a heart attack at age fifty-two.

Madame Walker’s entrepreneurial spirit lived on, however, when one of her employees, Marjorie Joyner, patented a device for putting a permanent-wave curl in hair in 1928. It became very popular among women both black and white.

Madame C. J. Walker was always frank about the work that it took to achieve her success:

“I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. From there I was promoted to the washtub. From there I was promoted to the cook kitchen. And from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. I have built my own factory on my own ground.”

When people asked her what the secret of her success might be, she replied:

“There is no royal flower-strewn path to success. And if there is, I have not found it for if I have accomplished anything in life it is because I have been willing to work hard.”

Life Skills

Exercises

Discuss: What qualities does it take to start a business and become a successful entrepreneur? Imagine Celie’s obstacles to starting a business: why did she start so late in life? What obstacles do others face in starting their own businesses?

Write: Dream up an idea for a new product, an invention that will change the lives of anyone who buys it. Write a sales pitch that describes all the things you promise that your product does. Be as convincing as you can. Perform your sales pitch for the class, and see how many are persuaded to buy your invention.

Explore: Almost every major invention has an interesting story behind it. Many modern inventions were discovered by accident: for example, the glue on sticky notes, the microwave. Choose something that was invented in the last twenty years, and research who was behind it. How did he or she come up with the invention? What obstacles did he or she face? Share what you’ve found with the class.

Have the interviews in this study guide inspired you to dream about creating your own music, play or song? Or to one day write your own novel, or start your own business? Here is some advice from the creative team of *The Color Purple*.



Learn to enjoy, respect, and honor the nourishment that is provided by silence. And do not fear solitude. At times we all feel lonely, but alone-ness is very rich and very good for creation. I think in high school, because there's so much going on, and now students are expected to be part of so many organizations and clubs, and you know, whatever they're doing, it seems like a lot to me. And many students feel that they have to keep up. But it's always better, in my opinion, to respect your own inner need. And to hear that, to actually hear that, you have to sometimes turn off the sound. Just believe in it. Silence is a gift and a help.

— ALICE WALKER



It's important that you actually prepare. Talent isn't enough. It's like a seed. But it needs to be planted and nurtured and watered and all that stuff. If you have a talent or you have a desire or you have a passion, then you need to prepare, you need to nurture that talent so that it's able to develop, so that it becomes a real expression of who you are.

And also I would say to look at it beyond the personal. That, in fact, what you are doing is like a service. If I have a gift, my job is to use that gift to open doors for other people so that they are able to have insight into our shared humanity.

— DONALD BYRD

Listen to

Silence



The first thing that jumps to mind for me is, I'm completely embarrassed about singing. And as a composer, writer, lyricist, one thing I've learned is, don't even worry about it. First of all, it doesn't matter, because composers aren't supposed to be able to sing (laughs). But I just know it held me back for a long, long time. Some people confuse performing with writing. And I would say that if you enjoy writing and you have certain limitations as a performer, it shouldn't hold you back at all.

— STEPHEN BRAY



Observe and remember



Stay away from imitation. Try as much as possible to develop your own identity. Trust your instincts. Speak from your own voice. Each one of us has a unique creative gift that there is room for. And there are never too many flowers on the planet. If I were to use an analogy, a rose can't be a daisy, and a daisy can't be a rose. You have to be

who you are. And it's not hard to be who you are. When you find that you're working really hard...nine times out of ten you're not being truthful to your own gift.

"Do you," as my friends would say, "Do you." I love that saying. "Do you."

— LACHANZE



Listen to yourself. If someone tells you you don't have it in you to do it? If this is what you want to do, do it. Believe in yourself and keep your eyes and ears open. And write real stuff. Don't copy, because those

people are doing it better than you. They created it. Do something that you authentically create.

— ALLEE WILLIS

Well, I think that there's no substitute for reading. There's also no substitute for gathering the stories and the songs from your family. People's best writing comes out of their own experience, or the experience of people in their family. Our job as writers is to say what it has felt like to be alive in our time. To do that, we don't need to tell the great, grand stories that we read in the newspapers, because that's the newspaper's business. We need to tell the stories that, if we don't tell them, they won't get told.

We need to talk to the grandparents, notice the crazy uncles, look at the people next door, look at the relationship between our parents, and our sisters and brothers. And remember those. Just observe and remember.

— MARSHA NORMAN



I think the most important thing is to know why you're interested. I know that sounds funny. What I have learned over the years is that people who stay in theater stay

because there's something about them that can only come alive when they're working in theater. You want to keep telling stories, and you want to keep making the contact with the audience, or you want to keep designing the world of the play because you know that you are in your place, you know you are what you're supposed to be when you're doing that.

Satisfying your need to connect is why you get up and do it. The rest of it falls in place.

— GARY GRIFFIN



First of all, if you have that desire, and it's not only you that thinks that you're good – and not just your family that loves you -- but if other people have given you an indication that you might have some talent, then you have to stick with it.

When you're creating music, you heal people, music is a healer. I think that's how music started, with people way back in the dark ages, making sounds. The mothers making sounds to their children.

Don't try to copy anybody else. Try to be true to that gift that you have, the gift that was given to you. Be true to that, and you'll make it through.

— BRENDA RUSSELL



Music is a healer

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