Themes Of The Color Purple By Alice Walker Essay, Research Paper

The Color Purple By Alice Walker

The Color Purple is a story that is told openly and sincerely by a black woman named Celie. Throughout the course of the story, we are shown Celie’s struggle to find herself, love, confidence, independence, and the courage to fight and fend for herself. The novel is written in first person by Celie through letters that she wrote to both God and her sister Nettie, as well as letters written by Nettie to Celie. Through their letters, we become familiar with their emotions, thoughts, and sense of their reality in an honest and genuine manner. In addition to knowing Celie and Nettie, we become acquainted with their family, friends, and way of life. By the time we reach the end of the novel, we are aware of the many different themes like independence, gender issues, and race relations.

A struggle for or possession of independence of mind, body, and soul, especially for women, is widely seen throughout the book. We see a transition in Celie from being a timid, young girl with little self worth to a strong, independent woman. She once was a slave to her step-father and later on her husband, but eventually found her own freedom and peace of mind through Shug Avery and other influential women was a fiercely independent woman from the start. She made her own decisions, spoke her mind, and let no one, especially any man, take advantage of her. In a crucial moment for Celie, Shug stood up and made a decision, she said “That’s it. Pack your stuff. You coming back to Tennessee with me.” She acts on her own terms and does what she feels, no questions asked. Another example of this theme was the way Sofia, Celie’s daughter-in-law, carried herself. She wasn’t hesitant in the least bit to fight, physically and verbally, for herself or her cause. She offers her advice loud and clear, as blunt and aggressive as it is. She once said “You ought to bash Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ head (Albert, Celie’s husband) open. Think about heaven later,” in response to hearing about Albert pushing Celie around. Through these women, we see both universal and personal themes of independence, personal growth and self-respect. Walker is clearly stating the need for women to have their freedom.

The gender issues in this book are very prevalent, in both America and Africa. Many of these issues deal with men versus women, mostly men domineering over their wives or other women in general. In the very beginning, Celie is victimized by not only her own step-father (Fonso), but her husband. Many men in this novel try to treat women like slaves, or like they are of little importance. Fonso and Albert talk about her like she’s an animal, when talking about the possibility of Albert’s and Celie’s marriage. Fonso told Albert, “She ugly. Don’t even look like she kin to Nettie. But she’ll make the better wife. She ain’t smart either, and I’ll just be fair, you have to watch her or she’ll give away everything you own. But she can work like a man.” They present her as less than human, like she was an “it”. It is only the exceptionally strong woman like Shug and Sofia that stand up to the men. When Harpo, Sofia’s husband, tries to physically domineer over Sofia, she defends herself aggressively and successfully. Like the black men in America, the black men in Africa treat as if they were lesser human beings. The women are not educated, and have strictly determined roles. Nettie stated in her letter: “There is a way that the men speak to women . . . They listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don’t even look at women when women are speaking . . . The women also do not “look in a man’s face” as they say. To “look in a man’s face” is a brazen thing to do.” The men in this novel all seemed to have the idea that women were inferior, which Walker continually points out and condemns by showing the women prevailing.

The race relations regarding the white and black people were another main theme in the story. Walker evenly distributes racism incidents throughout the novel, always reminding the reader of the time period and the hardships the black people suffered. Even Celie’s concepts of God are clouded from the oppression by the white people, in which she never gave a second thought to God being anything other than white (”Angels all in white, white hair and white eyes, look like albinos. God all white too, looking like some stout white man work at the bank”). Young children also took part, following in the ways of the parents, continuing the cycle. At the house in which Sofia worked for a white family the young boy attempted to order her in a condescending manner, and when she refused to obey he tried to attack her. Each occurrence, regardless the magnitude of it’s size, gave more insight into what the black people endured. Walker gives us this information to further clarify each individual’s situation, showing us why they feel, act, and live the way that they do.

The Color Purple is a story of many themes, each presented in, at times, a brutally honest manner. In the very first letter, we are faced head-on with sexual violence. Walker wastes no time sugarcoating anything, giving us a taste of reality. Through the heartfelt, frank words of both Celie and Nettie, we are exposed to a world that seems so far away yet in actuality is not. We watch a girl’s struggle through racism, sexism, and anguish from being cut off from life and family, to becoming a self-confident, happy, independent, and strong woman. Through her strife we not only perceive her inner world, but everything around her, all gathered by her intuitive sense. The Color Purple is a story with various meanings, but most of all it is all that comes from the strength and endurance of love.

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