

The Color Purple Study Questions



Entries 1-21

1. To whom does Celie address her letters?
2. What does Celie's father mean when he says, "You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't"?
3. What does Celie mean when she says she's "big"?
4. How many times has Celie given birth? Who is the father?
5. What does Celie believe has happened to her babies?
6. Who is Mr. ___?
7. Celie's father refuses to let Nettie marry Mr. ___ but says he can marry Celie. How does Celie's father describe her to Mr. ___?
8. Why do both Nettie and Celie work so hard to become educated?
9. What does Celie discover about her daughter? How does she make this discovery?
10. When Mr. ___ tells Celie that Nettie must leave their house, what does Celie give to Nettie? What does Nettie promise Celie she will do?
11. Who is Shug Avery?
12. Who is Sofia, and for what reason does she get pregnant?
13. Harpo's father and Celie advise Harpo to beat his wife. What happens when he does this?
14. Why is Celie jealous of Sofia?

Entries 22-35

1. How does Shug end up staying with Mr. ___ and Sofia?
2. When does Celie realize her husband's first name is Albert?
3. How many children do Shug and Albert have together? Where are their children?
4. What causes Mr. ___ and Celie to feel close to each other when Mr. ___'s father comes to visit?
5. Why does Celie cherish the quilt she and Sofia are making?
6. What strange habit does Harpo suddenly develop?
7. Why does Sofia leave Harpo? Where does she go?
8. What kind of a business does Harpo start, and

where does he open it?

9. Shug sings a song for Celie. What is the song about?
10. Celie tells Shug that Mr. ___ will beat her when she is gone. When Shug asks why, what is Celie's response?
11. Shug asks Celie if it bothers her when Albert and Shug sleep together. Celie tells her she doesn't mind. What are Celie's true feelings toward Shug?

Entries 36-48

1. What does Mr. ___ tell Sofia about his children?
2. Who is Squeak, and how did she lose two of her teeth?
3. Why is Sofia in jail?
4. What is Sofia's job in jail? What is her attitude and mental state?
5. Who takes care of Sofia's children while she is in jail?
6. What is the plan for getting Sofia out of jail?
7. Why is Squeak sent to talk to the warden? What happens while Squeak is with him?
8. For whom does Sofia work when she is released from jail?
9. When Sofia finally gets to see her family after five years, how long does she get to visit with them? Why?
10. What about Shug's Christmas visit surprises Albert and Celie?
11. What happens between Shug and Celie when Albert and Grady take the car for a long drive?
12. What does Shug want Mary Agnes to do?

Entries 49-60

1. What does Shug discover that Albert has been keeping from Celie?
2. What does Celie want to do when she discovers Mr. ___ has been keeping her letters from Nettie all these years?
3. Why didn't Albert marry Shug after she had his three children?
4. How do Celie and Shug get the rest of Nettie's letters without Albert's realizing they have them?
5. Why did Albert keep Nettie's letters from Celie?
6. According to her letter, with whom does Nettie live?
7. Where does Nettie go with the Reverend and his family? Why?
8. Nettie thanks her old school teacher for something. What?
9. What does Celie discover about the two children she had with her father?
10. Why is Nettie so certain that their missionary work will be successful?

11. What surprises Nettie about slavery?
12. Why does Shug suggest making pants for Celie?

Entries 61-68

1. How do the Olinka people first react to Nettie and the other missionaries?
2. What special gift did the Olinka people give to the missionaries at the end of the welcoming ceremony?
3. Why are the Olinka people confused about the relationships among the missionary family?
4. Why does Corrine ask Nettie to stop wearing her clothes and to start addressing her and Samuel as if she were their sister?
5. Why do Tashi's parents come to see Nettie?
6. According to her letters, how long has Nettie been in Africa?
7. Why are the Olinka happy to see there is a road being built to their village? What later upsets them about the road?
8. After her husband dies, Tashi's mother is made an honorary man. What important decision does this empower her to make?
9. What happens to the Olinka people when the government sells the land they own to a rubber factory in England?
10. Who does Corrine believe are Adam and Olivia's birth parents?
11. Why had Samuel urged Nettie to come to Africa?
12. What does Nettie tell Celie about their Pa?

Entries 69-75

1. How does Celie's old house look when Shug takes her to visit her Pa there?
2. Celie's Pa explains that he has been more successful with running a business and becoming a wealthy black man than her real father. What has he done differently to avoid the lynching her real father got after finding success?
3. How does Nettie finally convince Corrine that Celie is the mother of Adam and Olivia, and that the two of them had met once a long time ago?
4. What happens to Corrine?
5. Why doesn't Celie write to God anymore?
6. What does Shug teach Celie about God?
7. How does Mr. ___ react when he learns Shug is leaving and is planning to take Celie with her?
8. What does Celie do that surprises everyone at the

dinner table?

9. Who is leaving with Shug to go to Tennessee?
10. Who offers to take care of Suzie Q (Squeak and Harpo's little girl) while Squeak goes north to sing?
11. What does Mr. ___ say to Celie as she is leaving for Tennessee?
12. What does Celie do to Albert as she is leaving for Tennessee?

Entries 76-81

1. After moving to Memphis, what type of business does Celie start? What is the name of the business?
2. Celie comes to visit Sofia and Harpo when Sofia's mother dies. What are Sofia and Harpo arguing about when Celie arrives?
3. What is Celie's explanation when Harpo says Mary Agnes is different?
4. What does Celie learn about Mr. ___ and how he's been living since she moved away?
5. What happens to make Sofia have feelings for Harpo once again?
6. Sofia tells Celie Mr. ___ was in bad shape after Celie left him. What happened to turn Mr. ___'s life around?
7. What happens to Nettie and Samuel's relationship when they travel to England?
8. How are the Olinka people treated after the rubber factory is built?
9. What does Tashi do that upsets Adam?

Entries 82-90

1. What does Celie inherit when her stepfather dies?
2. What crushing news does Shug give Celie when she goes back to Memphis?
3. Why does Henrietta eat yams, even though she hates the taste?
4. What is the only piece of mail Mr. ___ puts directly into Celie's hands?
5. Who is Miss Eleanor Jane, and what type of relationship does Sofia have with her?
6. What reasons does Tashi give for refusing to marry Adam?
7. What does Adam do to prove his love and devotion to Tashi?
8. What does Albert ask Celie? What is her response?
9. With whom is Celie reunited with at the end of the novel?

The Color Purple Vocabulary

Entries 1-22

1. I tell Nettie to keep at her books. It be more then a notion taking care of children ain't even yourn.
2. My little girl she look up and sort of frown. She fretting over something.
3. Well, just look at her, she say sort of impish, turning to look at the child, don't she look like a Olivia to you?
4. I see a wagon and a great big man in black holding a whip. We sure do thank you for your hospitality.
5. You're a trifling nigger, she say. You git that bucket and bring it back full.
6. It more like patting another piece of wood. Not a living tree, but a table, a chifferobe.
7. He say, Oh, me and that mule. She fractious, you know. She went crazy in the field the other day.
8. I don't know how long this been going on. I don't know when they spect to conclude.

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| ___ 1. NOTION | A. Mischievous |
| ___ 2. FRETTING | B. Idea |
| ___ 3. IMPISH | C. Of very little importance; trivial; insignificant |
| ___ 4. HOSPITALITY | D. Worrying |
| ___ 5. TRIFLING | E. Type of furniture having both drawers and space for hanging clothes |
| ___ 6. CHIFFEROBE | F. Inclined to make trouble |
| ___ 7. FRACTIOUS | G. The treatment of guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way |
| ___ 8. CONCLUDE | H. Bring to an end; finish |

Entries 22-35

1. I scurry bout, doing this, doing that. Mr. ___ sit back by the door gazing here and there.
2. He talk bout a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin. Singing for money and taking other women mens.
3. Harpo and Sofia in the yard now, looking inside the wagon. They faces grim. Who this? Harpo ast. The woman should have been your mammy, he say.
4. She look me over from head to foot. Then she cackle. Sound like a death rattle.
5. Well, say Mr. ___ and turn full face on his daddy, All Shug Avery children got the same daddy. I vouch for that.
6. Course some folks eat cause food taste good to 'em. Then some is gluttons. They love to feel they mouth work.
7. He rummage through the drawer for a spoon to eat the clabber with.
8. She not mean, she not spiteful. She don't hold a grudge.
9. He making a net for seining fish. He look out toward the creek every once in a while and whistle a little tune.
10. He make right smart money off of her, and she make some too. Plus she gitting strong again and stout.

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| ___ 1. SCURRY | A. Desiring to harm, annoy, frustrate, or humiliate another person |
| ___ 2. STRUMPET | B. People who eat or consumes immoderate amounts of food |
| ___ 3. GRIM | C. Laugh in a shrill, broken manner |
| ___ 4. CACKLE | D. Fishing with a <i>seine</i> , a fishing net made to hang vertically in the water by weights at the lower edge and floats at the top |
| ___ 5. VOUCH | E. Move quickly or in haste; scamper |
| ___ 6. GLUTTONS | F. Guarantee; certify; attest to |
| ___ 7. RUMMAGE | G. Bulky in figure; heavily built |
| ___ 8. SPITEFUL | H. Uninviting; stern; harsh |
| ___ 9. SEINING | I. Search thoroughly by handling, turning over, or disarranging contents |
| ___ 10. STOUT | J. Prostitute |

Entries 36-48

1. Bub in and out of jail. If his granddaddy wasn't the colored uncle of the sheriff who look just like Bub, Bub be lynch by now.
2. Harpo little yellowish girlfriend sulk, hanging over the bar.
3. She look a little haggard with all Sofia and Harpo children sprung on her at once, but she carry on. Hair a little stringy, slip show, but she carry on.
4. 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.
5. Mr. ___ rear back in his chair, give Squeak a good look from head to foot. Squeak push her greasy brown hair back from her face. Yeah, say Mr. ___. I see the resemblance.

6. I spent fifteen minutes with my children. And she been going on for months bout how ungrateful I is. White folks is a miracle of affliction, say Sofia.

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| ___ 1. LYNCH | A. Remain silent or hold oneself aloof in an ill-humored or offended mood |
| ___ 2. SULK | B. A condition of pain, suffering, or distress |
| ___ 3. HAGGARD | C. People or animals with abnormally pale skin and hair |
| ___ 4. ALBINOS | D. Similarity in appearance |
| ___ 5. RESEMBLANCE | E. Put to death by hanging, by mob action, and without legal authority |
| ___ 6. AFFLICTION | F. Appearing worn and exhausted |

Entries 49-60

1. I had every one of my babies at home, too. Midwife come, preacher come, a bunch of the good ladies from the church. Just when I hurt so much I don't know my own name, they think a good time to talk bout repent.
2. They are sanctified religious and very good to me. They live in a nice house next to the church where Samuel preaches, and we spend a lot of time on church business.
3. But they know a lot more about it than Miss Beasley or any of our other teachers, and besides, they spoke of all the good things they could do for the downtrodden people from whom they sprang.
4. And now "God" has sent me to watch over them, to protect and cherish them. To lavish all the love I feel for you on them. It is a miracle, isn't it?
5. They live in such beauty and dignity, Celie. And they give and give and then reach down and give some more, when the name "Africa" is mentioned.
6. Until you see his eyes you think he's somber, even mean, but he has the most thoughtful and gentle brown eyes.
7. I studied England on a map, so neat and serene, and I became hopeful in spite of myself that much good for Africa is possible, given hard work and the right frame of mind.
8. Because the black is so black the eye is simply dazzled, and then there is the shining that seems to come, really, from moonlight, it is so luminous, but their skin glows even in the sun.
9. Somehow I had not expected to see any white people in Africa, but they are here in droves.
10. We watched the weary families come home from work, still carrying their cocoa seed buckets in their hands (these double as lunch buckets next day), and sometimes--if they are women--their children on their backs.

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| ___ 1. REPENT | A. Quality of being worthy of respect |
| ___ 2. SANCTIFIED | B. Made holy |
| ___ 3. DOWNTRODDEN | C. Feel such sorrow for sin or fault as to change one's life for the better |
| ___ 4. LAVISH | D. Large crowds of human beings |
| ___ 5. DIGNITY | E. Give or bestow in abundance; shower |
| ___ 6. SOMBER | F. Oppressed; trampled upon |
| ___ 7. SERENE | G. Tired |
| ___ 8. LUMINOUS | H. Calm, peaceful, or tranquil |
| ___ 9. DROVES | I. Gloomy, dark, depressing, extremely serious |
| ___ 10. WEARY | J. Radiating or reflecting light; shining; bright |

Entries 61-68

1. As his greed increased he also began to cultivate the land on which the roofleaf grew.
2. Nobody could remember a time when roofleaf did not exist in overabundant amounts.
3. The women of the village take turns cooking for us, and some are cleaner and more conscientious than others. Olivia gets sick from the food prepared by any of the chief's wives.
4. 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. They look instead at his feet or his knees.
5. Adam and Olivia are nearly as tall as me and doing very well in all their studies. Adam has a special aptitude for figures and it worries Samuel that soon he will have nothing more to teach him in this field, having exhausted his own knowledge.
6. He fell ill with malaria and nothing the healer concocted saved him.
7. She is the most industrious of all Tashi's father's widows, and her fields are praised for their cleanliness, productivity and general attractiveness.
8. Their lives always center around work and their children and other women (since a woman cannot really have a man for a friend without the worse kind of ostracism and gossip).

9. Of course no one in Olinka owns a bicycle, but one of the roadbuilders has one, and all the Olinka men covet it and talk of someday soon purchasing their own.

10. Immediately after understanding the roadbuilders' intentions, the chief set off toward the coast, seeking explanations and reparations.

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| ___ 1. CULTIVATE | A. Prepare land for raising crops |
| ___ 2. OVERABUNDANT | B. The act of banishing or excluding |
| ___ 3. CONSCIENTIOUS | C. Amends for wrong or injury done |
| ___ 4. BRAZEN | D. Capability; ability |
| ___ 5. APTITUDE | E. Hard-working |
| ___ 6. CONCOCTED | F. Prepared by mixing ingredients |
| ___ 7. INDUSTRIOUS | G. Defiant; shameless |
| ___ 8. OSTRACISM | H. Meticulously careful; dutiful |
| ___ 9. COVET | I. More than is needed |
| ___ 10. REPARATIONS | J. Wish for longingly |

Entries 69-75

1. All of her sweet ways went with her. All of her education and a heart intent on doing good. She taught me so much!

2. They knew she was very sick, but death is not something they think about in relation to their parents or themselves. It was a strange little procession. All of us in our white robes and with our faces painted white.

3. Only the sky above us do we hold in common. I look at it often as if, somehow, reflected from its immensities, I will one day find myself gazing into your eyes.

4 & 5. Two white men came yesterday and spent a couple of hours strolling about the village, mainly looking at the wells. Such is the innate politeness of the Olinka that they rushed about preparing food for them, though precious little is left, since many of the gardens that flourish at this time of the year have been destroyed.

6. She say, Miss Celie, You better hush. God might hear you She talk and she talk, trying to budge me way from blasphemy.

7. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for.

8. Well, us talk and talk bout God, but I'm still adrift.

9. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to git lost, say Shug. Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock.

10. Her bigger children married and gone, and her littlest children mad at her, don't know who she is. Think she act funny, look old and dote on that little white gal she raise.

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| ___ 1. INTENT | A. Show excessive fondness or love |
| ___ 2. PROCESSION | B. A group of persons, vehicles, or objects moving along in an orderly, formal manner |
| ___ 3. IMMENSITIES | C. Having the attention sharply focused or fixed on something |
| ___ 4. INNATE | D. Inborn; existing from birth |
| ___ 5. FLOURISH | E. Bring to mind; recall |
| ___ 6. BLASPHEMY | F. Thrive; grow or do well |
| ___ 7. MANIFEST | G. Vastness, boundlessness |
| ___ 8. ADRIFT | H. Without direction or purpose |
| ___ 9. CONJURE | I. Show or demonstrate plainly; reveal |
| ___ 10. DOTE | J. An act of cursing or speaking against God |

Entries 76-81

1. And as they struggled to put up roofs of this cold, hard, glittery, ugly metal the women raised a deafening ululation of sorrow that echoed off the cavern walls for miles around.

2. It seems the notion of becoming a missionary struck her one evening she was getting ready for yet another tedious date, and lay in the tub thinking a convent would be better than the castle in which she lived.

3. And so she cultivated a pious interest in heathens. Fooled her parents. Fooled the Missionary Society, who were so taken with her quick command of languages they sent her to Africa (worst luck!) where she began writing novels about everything under the sun.

4. My pen name is Jared Hint, she said. In England and even in America, I'm a run-away success. Rich, famous. An eccentric recluse who spends most of his time shooting wild game.
5. Anyway, she said. When I get to England I'll put a stop to their bloody encroachments. I'll tell them what to do with their bloody road and their bloody rubber plantations and their bloody sunburned but still bloody boring English planters and engineers.
6. He seemed fond of his grandmother and used to her, but her verbosity produced in him a kind of soberly observant speechlessness.
7. We made fun of them, but we were riveted on their adventures, and on the ladies' telling of them.
8. As Aunt Theodosia got closer to the part about her surprise and joy over receiving this medal--which validated her service as an exemplary missionary in the King's colony--DuBoyce's foot began to pat the floor rapidly and uncontrollably.
9. She and Olivia hugged. But it was a quiet, heavy embrace. Nothing like the boisterous, giggling behavior I expect from them.
10. Our days are fuller than ever, our sojourn in England already a dream. But all things look brighter because I have a loving soul to share them with.

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| ___ 1. ULULATION | A. Engrossed; had one's attention held |
| ___ 2. TEDIOUS | B. A person who lives in seclusion or apart from society |
| ___ 3. PIOUS | C. Taking another's possessions or rights gradually or stealthily |
| ___ 4. RECLUSE | D. Wordiness |
| ___ 5. ENCROACHMENTS | E. A temporary stay |
| ___ 6. VERBOSITY | F. Worthy of imitation as a good example |
| ___ 7. RIVETED | G. Tiresome by reason of length, slowness, or dullness |
| ___ 8. EXEMPLARY | H. Loud howling, wailing, or lamenting |
| ___ 9. BOISTEROUS | I. Having or exhibiting religious reverence; devout |
| ___ 10. SOJOURN | J. Rough and noisy; noisily jolly or rowdy |

Entries 82-90 .

1. But I think she just so glad to see me. So I preen and pose for her and stuff myself with wonton soup and friend rice.
2. When I think of them in America I see them as much younger than they appear here. Much more naive.
- 3 & 4. The worst we have had to endure here is indifference and a certain understandable shallowness in our personal relationships--excluding our relationship with Catherine and Tashi. After all, the Olinka know we can leave, they must stay.
5. And there are male and female warriors who do indeed go on missions of sabotage against the white plantations.
- 6 & 7. And then, in that honest, forthright way of hers, she gave her reasons. Paramount among them that, because of the scarification marks on her cheeks Americans would look down on her as a savage and shun her, and whatever children she and Adam might have.
8. He asked Tashi to forgive his initial stupid response to the scarification. And to forgive the repugnance he'd felt about the female initiation ceremony.
9. He assured Tashi that it was she he loved and that in America she would have country, people, parents, sister, husband, brother and lover, and that whatever befell her in America would also be his own choice and his own lot.
10. All the people down by the drive look up at us. They look at the house. The yard. Shug and Albert's cars. They look round at the fields. Then they commence to walk real slow up the walk to the house.

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| ___ 1. PREEN | A. Direct and straightforward |
| ___ 2. NAIVE | B. Take pride or satisfaction in oneself; gloat |
| ___ 3. ENDURE | C. Happened or occurred |
| ___ 4. INDIFFERENCE | D. Of chief concern or importance |
| ___ 5. SABOTAGE | E. Begin; start |
| ___ 6. FORTHRIGHT | F. Lacking worldly experience and understanding; lacking sophistication |
| ___ 7. PARAMOUNT | G. Attitude of not caring one way or another |
| ___ 8. REPUGNANCE | H. Carry on despite hardships |
| ___ 9. BEFELL | I. Underhanded interference |
| ___ 10. COMMENCE | J. Strong distaste or objection |