

Discussion Questions for *The Color Purple*

Directions: *Prepare your answers to these discussion questions on paper. Informal notes or formal responses in paragraph form are both acceptable. Write your responses on a separate sheet of paper.*

1. How is marriage depicted in *The Color Purple*? What effects does marriage have on individuals? Discuss specific examples.
2. How does friendship compare to marriage as a social bond in *The Color Purple*?
3. Select a character that changes in the novel. Discuss the ways in which the character changes and what drives those changes.
4. Discuss an example of symbolism from *The Color Purple*.
5. Identify a theme from the novel and **cite two examples** of this theme occurring in the text. Citations should include a summary of the moment, episode, or symbol in the text as well as page numbers. Explain the connection between the cited examples and the theme you have identified.

Discussion Questions for *The Color Purple*

Note to teacher: These discussion questions can be used at your discretion, but are designed with group discussion in mind. The intention for these questions is that they should be used as the basis for small group discussion, class discussion or small group presentations.

In the case of small group presentations, students should be given the discussion questions and asked to informally write out their responses. Students should then be placed in groups of two, three or four. Groups should be assigned a single question and asked to prepare a brief presentation on that question (by simply combining ideas and notes and sharing those with the class).

1. How is marriage depicted in *The Color Purple*? What effects does marriage have on individuals? Discuss specific examples.

Answers may discuss the idea that marriage is universally negative in the novel. The marriages of Celie and Mr. _____, Harpo and Sofia, and Shug and Grady all lead to abuse, infidelity or both. All end in divorce or dissolution.

2. How does friendship compare to marriage as a social bond in *The Color Purple*?

Answers may discuss the relative strength of friendship compared to marriage in the novel. Friendships help to build characters up, emotionally and professionally, while marriages tend to damage characters. Examples of the positive effect of friendship can be seen even in the couples that have been married and separated. When Celie's marriage to Mr. _____ has become a friendship, the two are able to learn from one another. The same pattern is true for Sofia and Harpo.

3. Select a character that changes in the novel. Discuss the ways in which the character changes and what drives those changes.

*Answers to this question will vary but should recognize that these ideas drive characters to change and grow: **friendship, age, and overcoming hardship**. Almost every character in the novel changes considerably including Celie, Shug, Harpo, Squeak, and Mr. Albert _____.*

4. Discuss an example of symbolism from *The Color Purple*.

Answers may include a discussion of the novel's title, relating the title to the notion of learning to appreciate beauty and the value of self. Other salient symbols in the novel include letters, singing, the choice to render Mr. _____'s name with a blank, and houses. Houses signify an attempt to build relationships. Letters symbolize hope. Singing relates to ideas of adventure and restlessness. The grammar of Mr. _____'s name symbolizes avoidance on Celie's part as well as an attempt at garnering some semblance of power over the man.

5. Identify a theme from the novel and **cite two examples** of this theme occurring in the text. Citations should include a summary of the moment, episode, or symbol in the text as well as page numbers. Explain the connection between the cited examples and the theme you have identified.

Major themes from the novel include ideas of...

- personal growth
- learning to forgive
- learning to accept and love oneself
- self-expression as a form of personal freedom
- alienation
- the love of friends
- the appreciation of beauty in various forms