

AN AMERICAN CLASSIC  
Sep 26 – Oct 21

# THE COLOR PURPLE

THE MUSICAL



## PAPER MILL PLAYHOUSE

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## CREATIVE TEAM

**ALICE WALKER (Novel)** won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for her third novel, *The Color Purple*, which was made into an internationally popular film by Steven Spielberg. Her other best-selling novels, which have been translated into more than two dozen languages, include *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, and *The Temple of My Familiar*. Her most recent novel, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*, was published in 2004. Ms. Walker is also the author of several collections of short stories, essays, and poems as well as children's books. Her work has appeared in numerous national and international journals and magazines. An activist and social visionary, Ms. Walker's advocacy on behalf of the dispossessed has, in the words of her biographer, Evelyn C. White, "spanned the globe."



**MARSHA NORMAN (Book)** won the Pulitzer Prize for her play *Night, Mother* and a Tony Award for her book of the musical *The Secret Garden*. Her other plays include *Getting Out*, *Traveler in the Dark*, *Sarah and Abraham*, *Trudy Blue*, *The Master Butchers Singing Club*, and *Last Dance*. She also has written a novel, *The Fortune Teller*. She has numerous film and TV credits, Grammy and Emmy nominations, and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Fellowship of Southern Writers. Ms. Norman is a native of Kentucky who lives in New York City and Long Island.



**BRENDA RUSSELL (Music & Lyrics)** has a unique musical perspective, intimate voice, and prolific treasure trove of lyrics that prove a truly glowing talent only deepens with time. Composer of the classics "Get Here," "If Only for One Night," and the Grammy-nominated "Piano in the Dark," Brenda possesses songwriting prowess and the ability to shift between musical genres and combine styles, earning ovations in 2005 with the opening of the Tony Award-winning hit musical *The Color Purple*, for which she, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray cowrote the music and lyrics. Brenda and her coauthors were also nominated for a 2007 Grammy Award in the Best Musical Show Album category for the original cast album.



"I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. People think pleasing God is all God cares about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back."

— Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

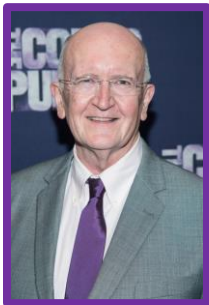
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**ALLEE WILLIS (Music & Lyrics)** is a one-woman creative think tank, a multidisciplinary artist and visionary thinker whose range of imagination and productivity knows no bounds; her success defies categorization. Willis is a Grammy-winning and Emmy- and Tony-nominated composer whose hit songs—including Earth, Wind & Fire's "September" and "Boogie Wonderland," The Pointer Sisters' "Neutron Dance," Pet Shop Boys with Dusty Springfield's "What Have I Done to Deserve This," and The Rembrandts' "I'll Be There for You" (Theme from *Friends*)—have sold over 50 million records. In 2006, Willis's songs were also featured in three of the top grossing films of the year, *Happy Feet*, *Night at the Museum*, and *Babel*.



**STEPHEN BRAY (Music & Lyrics)** made his Broadway debut with *The Color Purple* in 2005. Working with Madonna, he wrote and produced many of her top recordings, including "Angel," "Into the Groove," "Papa Don't Preach," "True Blue," and "Express Yourself." Performing with Breakfast Club, he earned a Grammy nomination for best new artist and a top-ten single. He has composed and produced for multiplatinum artists including The Jets, Gladys Knight, and Kylie Minogue. Film and television projects include *Beverly Hills Cop II*, *Who's That Girl?*, *All About the Benjamins*, and the theme for PBS's *California Connected*. Stephen is developing artists for his Soultone label and looks forward to more musical theater.



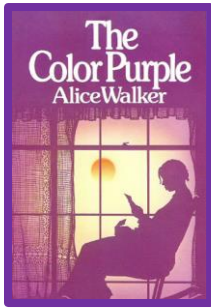
**JOHN DOYLE (Direction, Scenic Design)**. Broadway: *Sweeney Todd* (Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Director), *Company* (Tony Award for Best Revival), *A Catered Affair* (Drama League Award for Distinguished Production of a Musical), *The Visit* (Tony nomination, best musical), *The Color Purple* (Tony Award for Best Revival, Drama Desk Award for Best Director). Off Broadway: *Wings* (Second Stage); *Road Show* (Public); *Where's Charley?*, *Irma La Douce* (City Center Encores!). Regional: *Kiss Me, Kate!* (Stratford Festival); *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (A.C.T.); *Merrily We Roll Along*, *The Three Sisters* (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park); *Ten Cents a Dance* (Williamstown Theatre Festival); *The Exorcist* (Geffen Playhouse). In the U.K., John has been artistic director of four regional theaters; numerous credits include *The Gondoliers*, *Mack and Mabel* (West End), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Oklahoma!*, and *Amadeus*. Opera includes *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Sydney), *Peter Grimes* (Met), *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany* (Los Angeles). He is artistic director of CSC in New York City, where his productions include *Passion*, *Allegro*, *Peer Gynt*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Fire and Air*, and most recently *Carmen Jones*.

"And I'm thankful for every day that I'm given. Both the easy and hard ones I'm livin'. But most of all, I'm thankful for, Lovin' who I really am. I'm beautiful. Yes, I'm beautiful. And I'm here."

~ Lyrics from "I'm Here" from THE COLOR PURPLE musical ~

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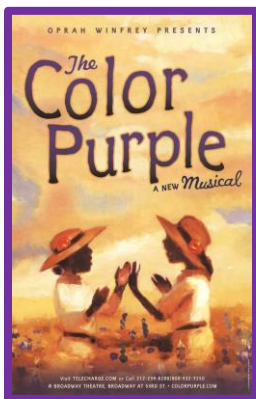
## THE COLOR PURPLE - PRODUCTION HISTORY



*The Color Purple* began as a novel, initially published in 1982. The book made an immediate impact and won numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize.

Within two years, the book was adapted as a film, premiering in 1985. Directed by Stephen Spielberg and starring Whoopi Goldberg, Danny Glover and Oprah

Winfrey, the film went onto stay in movie theatres for 21 weeks and was the fourth highest grossing film of that year. Even more impressive, it received 11 Academy Award nominations including Best Picture, and four Golden Globe nominations, including a win for Best Actress (Whoopi Goldberg).



After much convincing, producer Scott Sanders was able to secure the rights from Alice Walker to a stage musical of in the late 1990s. It had its world premiere at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta in September 2004. One year later, the musical opened on Broadway at the Broadway Theatre to great acclaim. The original cast included LaChanze and Brandon Victor Dixon and was directed by Gary Griffin. The original production ran for 940 performances, grossed over \$100 million at the box office and was nominated for 11 Tony Awards, winning one for Best Actress (LaChanze). Following the Broadway production, the musical was seen on a national tour and various other productions.

One of the most notable productions was at London's famed Menier Chocolate Factory in July 2013. This production was scaled down considering the size of the theatre and was directed by John Doyle. The production received immediate acclaim and two years later, the same producers of the original production transferred this revival to Broadway. The production featured Cynthia Erivo, the breakout star from the Menier Production, Danielle Brooks and Jennifer Hudson. The production was nominated for four Tony Awards, winning two for Best Revival of a Musical and Best Actress (Cynthia Erivo). The production ran 483 performances on Broadway prior to going out on another national tour. Many of the production elements from this revival have found a home here at Paper Mill Playhouse for our production!



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## ALICE WALKER

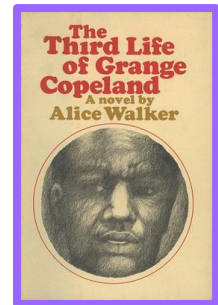


Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, the eighth and youngest child of sharecroppers Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker. She faced an early injustice as an eight-year-old child, when one of her older brothers accidentally shot her in the eye with a BB gun. When her family attempted to get help, a white man who refused to help them drove the only car that passed by. The family treated her as best as possible but eventually she

lost sight in her right eye.

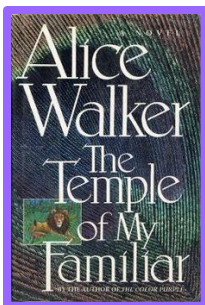
Her family eventually raised enough money for her to have an eye operation in Boston. Although she was still self-conscious about her appearance, Ms. Walker was popular in high school, valedictorian of her class, and earned a scholarship to Spelman College. After spending two years at Spelman, Ms. Walker transferred to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and during her junior year traveled to Africa as an exchange student.

She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in 1966 and one year later 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*.



Her career exploded in 1982 with the release of her novel *The Color Purple*.

She received numerous awards for the book, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Lillian Smith Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rosenthal Award from the National Institute of Arts & Letters, a Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, a Merrill Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.



Walker continued to write many important novels, including a few that featured characters from *The Color Purple*, which were *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Other novels and essays include *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, *The Way Forward Is With A Broken Heart*, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart*. Over 36 years later, *The Color Purple* is still controversial and has stayed near the top of the Banned and Challenged Books list.

Throughout her life, she has been active in the civil rights movement. She has spoken for the women's movement, the antiapartheid movement, the antinuclear movement, and against female genital mutilation. She is now 74 years old and continues to write and speak out as an activist.

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## THE COLOR PUPLE – SLAVERY IN GEORGIA

*The Color Purple* takes place in a rural Georgia community near the town of Eatonton, where Alice Walker was born. In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, known as Emancipation, which prohibited slavery.



In Georgia, where 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 (see picture on left, *Freedmen's School, GA*) or established churches.

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, as 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 to own. 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 (see picture on right, *Sharecropping during the Restoration Era*.) Black farmers 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,



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and 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 decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 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, meaning that the races could be separated if 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. (See picture on right, signs on restrooms and trains in 1896.)



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 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, where African Americans had to deal with discrimination from many groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, some black citizens found it easier to establish all black communities. 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.

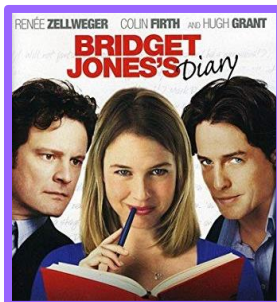
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By the 1940s, the end of the time covered by *The Color Purple*, the Georgia economy began to recover, along with the rest of the country, as production geared up for the beginning of World War II. In *The Color Purple*, Mister and his family would 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.

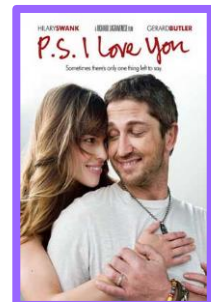
## THE COLOR PURPLE – AN EPISTOLARY NOVEL

*The Color Purple* has a unique storytelling device that makes the audience feel as if they are listening to an oral history. The term used to describe this oral history style is an epistolary novel. This style of novel is written as a series of documents, which can include letters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, recordings, and other primary source materials. This tradition of storytelling is a way of passing on traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, through the generations by word of mouth.

One of the advantages of writing a novel in the epistolary form is that the reader experiences the voices of the characters directly, reading their thoughts in their own words. In *The Color Purple*, we read letters written to Celie by her sister Nettie in Africa, and letters written by Celie directly to God. This style can also give a sense of mystery to the story, 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 lends itself to the musical theatre as songs in musicals typically give the audience a private view into a character in the moment.



The epistolary style has a long history, reaching all the way back to the Bible. Some recent examples include Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *P.S. I Love You* by Cecelia Ahern, both of which were made into films.



**"Dear God, dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, Dear peoples, dear everything. Dear God. God is inside me and everyone else. That was or ever will be. I came into this world with God. And when I finally looked inside, I found it. Just as close as my breath is to me."**  
~ Lyrics from *The Color Purple* (Reprise) from **THE COLOR PURPLE** musical ~



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## THE COLOR PURPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After you see the show and read this study guide, use these prompts to start a discussion with your students and peers.

- 1) *The Color Purple* is a novel, movie, and a musical. If you have seen read or seen the movie version, how do they compare to the musical? Are there elements that work better on screen rather than on stage or vice versa?
- 2) Have you seen other movies, musicals, or plays that have been based on books? Did you like one version of the story more than the other? Why?
- 3) An actress playing the role of Celie must portray the character from age 14 up to age 50. How does Celie change physically and emotionally throughout the musical?
- 4) By the end of the musical, Celie is an entrepreneur and has started her own business. Discuss why this feat is impressive in this era and location in the musical.
- 5) What role does prayer play in Celie's life? Would you say this a religious musical? Does it promote a moral message? Can one have morality without religion? Explain.



The Adopt-A-School Project is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Additional support is provided by C.R. Bard Foundation, The Mall at Short Hills, MetLife Foundation, Nordstrom, PNC Foundation, and the George A. Ohl, Jr. Trust.

With special appreciation to PSEG Foundation.

Audience Guide content written by Andrew Lowy.



Made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

