

✕ Refers to links on www.crossref-it.info

The Color Purple: (e) Female bonds

- ❖ **Lesson focus:** To explore the development of the relationships between the female characters, and to consider Walker's purposes in the presentation of these relationships.
- ❖ **Opening exercise:** Using **Student handout e)i Female bonds character web**, create a character web, using arrows and explanations to describe the relationships between the female characters. Then discuss:
 - Why are the bonds between female characters so pivotal to the plot and the society depicted in the novel?
 - Which are the strongest bonds and why?
 - Why are the examples of betrayal between women so disturbing?
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Themes > Men, women and gender roles](#)
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Characterisation > Key relationships](#)
- ❖ **Textual examination:** Using **Student handout e)ii Female bonds table**, revisit the relationship between Celie and Nettie by skimming **Letters 3, 7, 11, 52, 54, 85, 90**. Discuss the development of their relationship:
 - Celie as protector
 - The long absence
 - Nettie as educator / lifeline / emotional outpouring
 - The twist at the end where Celie fears Nettie is dead again
 - The emotional reunion.Then consider the significance of their relationship to the plot and Walker's message (e.g. their relationship forms the basis of the epistolary style of the novel, the endurance of their relationship over thirty years shows the strength of female solidarity, etc.)
 - Allocate remaining female-female relationships and key letters to (pairs of) students to look up. Ask students to:
 - Feed back to the class on the depiction and development of the relationship
 - Consider the significance of the relationship and try to make links to Walker's messages and womanist agenda.
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Characterisation](#)
- ❖ **Discussion ideas:** Create a class mind-map about the significance of female bonds in the story, perhaps using the following questions as prompts for discussion and notes.
 - Which of the female relationships are most important in driving forward the plot?
 - Which of the female relationships are positive/negative forces and why?
 - Find examples of how female relationships strengthen/help the female characters
 - What is Walker's message about female solidarity?
 - What is Walker's message about female sexuality?
 - In what sense can the female relationships be said to threaten male superiority?
 - When do male characters seek to break female bonds?
 - Do you think the story focuses more on male-female relationships or female-female relationships?
 - In what sense is this untraditional?
 - Try to sum up Walker's message about female relationships into a sentence.
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Themes > Men, women, and gender roles](#)
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Characterisation > Key relationships](#)

✕ Refers to links on www.crossref-it.info

The Color Purple: (e) Female bonds

- ❖ **Recreative task:** The reader learns far more about Celie's feelings towards Shug than Shug's feelings towards Celie.
 - Choose a particular point in the story, and write a letter from Shug to Celie, expressing what Celie means to her.
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Themes > Men, women and gender roles](#)
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Characterisation > Key relationships; Shug](#)

- ❖ **Critical task:** Assess the significance of the role of Shug in the process of Celie's development and liberation.
 - ✕ [The Color Purple > Characterisation > Key relationships](#)

- ❖ **Extension task:** Research/read other books written by Walker, and consider the importance of female relationships in these stories e.g. *You can't keep a Good Woman Down*, *By the Light of my Father's Smile*.