

PAR LES PRODUCTEURS  
OPRAH WINFREY ET STEVEN SPIELBERG ET QUINCY JONES

# LA COULEUR POURPRE



WARNER BROS. PICTURES PRÉSENTE  
UNE PRODUCTION HARPO FILMS - UNE PRODUCTION AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT - UNE PRODUCTION SGS PICTURES / UNE PRODUCTION QIP "LA COULEUR POURPRE"  
TARAJI P. HENSON DANIELLE BROOKS COLMAN DOMINGO COREY HAWKINS "H.E.R." HALLE BAILEY AUNJANUE ELLIS TAYLOR ET FANTASIA BARRINO  
PRODUCTEURS DÉLÉGUÉS NICK BAXTER, STEPHEN BRAY, BLITZ BAZAWULE MUSIQUE DE KRIS BOWERS SUPERVISEURS MONTAGE JORDAN CARROLL MORGAN RHODES COSTUME FRANCESCA JAMESON JANCNUCK  
CHORÉGRAPHE FATIMA ROBINSON MONTAGE DE JON POLL DÉCOR DE PAUL DENHAM AUSTERBERRY DIRECTEUR DE DAN LAUSTSEN, ASC, DFF PRODUCTEURS DÉLÉGUÉS ALICE WALKER REBECCA WALKER  
MUSIQUE MACHOSKO KRIEGER CARLA GARDINI MARA JACOBS ADAM FELL COURTENAY VALENTI SHEILA WALCOTT MICHAEL BEGG  
BASE SUR LA PIÈCE THÉÂTRALE MARSHA NORMAN MUSIQUE ET PAROLLES DE BRENDA RUSSELL ALLEE WILLIS STEPHEN BRAY

BASE SUR LE ROMAN DE ALICE WALKER ÉCRIT PAR MARCUS GARDLEY PRODUIT PAR OPRAH WINFREY  
STEVEN SPIELBERG, p.g.a. SCOTT SANDERS, p.g.a. QUINCY JONES, p.g.a.  
RÉALISÉ PAR BLITZ BAZAWULE

HARPO FILMS AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT EXCLUSIVEMENT AU CINÉMA WARNER BROS.

DOSSIER PÉDAGOGIQUE



# PRÉSENTATION

Publié en 1982, *La Couleur pourpre* (*The Color Purple*), roman d'Alice Walker est un des jalons essentiels de l'histoire de la littérature afro-américaine.

Sous la forme épistolaire, le livre raconte l'histoire de deux sœurs en butte à la violence et à l'oppression dans le Sud ségrégué de la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Fortes de leur lien indéfectible, elles trouveront les ressources pour s'émanciper et trouver le bonheur.

Immédiatement salué dès sa publication (il remportera les prestigieux prix Pulitzer et National Book Award en 1983), le roman a été rapidement adapté au cinéma par Steven Spielberg (1985), avant de connaître une nouvelle vie, des années plus tard (2005), sur les planches de Broadway.

Cette nouvelle adaptation cinématographique, réalisée par le cinéaste ghanéen Blitz Bazawule, synthétise cet héritage : co-produit par l'équipe du film de 1985 (Steven Spielberg, Oprah Winfrey, Quincy Jones), elle reprend les chansons et le livret du *musical*. Aussi flamboyante et galvanisante qu'est âpre le chemin de ses héroïnes, cette version rend ainsi un magnifique hommage aux racines de la musique noire américaine, et propose une belle ode à la résilience et à l'émancipation.

## CADRE PÉDAGOGIQUE

DISCIPLINE	NIVEAU	OBJETS D'ÉTUDE
Anglais	Seconde	La création et le rapport aux arts - Le passé dans le présent
	Cycle Terminal	Diversité et inclusion - Territoire et mémoire
LLCER	Première	Diversité et inclusion
	Terminale	Mise en scène de soi
AMC	Première	Représenter le monde et se représenter
	Terminale	Égalités et inégalités

## PLAN DU DOSSIER

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# LA COULEUR POURPRE



## LA COULEUR POURPRE (The Color Purple)

Un film de **BLITZ BAZAWULE**

Avec **FANTASIA BARRINO, TARAJI P. HENSON, DANIELLE BROOKS, COLMAN DOMINGO, HALLE BAILEY, PHYLCIA PEARL MPASI, COREY HAWKINS, HER**

Scénario de **MARCUS GARDLEY** d'après l'œuvre de **ALICE WALKER**

**GENRE : COMÉDIE MUSICALE, DRAME**

*L'histoire extraordinaire de trois femmes dans l'Amérique post-esclavage, qui malgré les épreuves les plus terribles resteront toujours unies. Rien ne pourra venir éteindre ni leur lumière, ni leur espoir.*

**AU CINÉMA LE 24 JANVIER 2024**





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## ENTRETIEN AVEC ANNE-MARIE PAQUET-DEYRIS

**Plus de quarante ans après la sortie du roman épistolaire d'Alice Walker, *La Couleur pourpre* revient sur nos écrans dans une version musicale. Pour cette deuxième adaptation cinématographique, le réalisateur Blitz Bazawule s'est inspiré du musical joué pour la première fois à Broadway en 2005. Nous avons demandé à Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris, professeure de cinéma et de littérature américaine à l'Université Paris-Nanterre, de nous éclairer sur le contexte historique et littéraire du roman de Walker.**

**Alice Walker est la première autrice noire à remporter le prix Pulitzer, ainsi que le Prix de la Fiction, en 1983, avec *La Couleur pourpre*. Pouvez-vous la replacer dans l'histoire de la littérature afro-américaine ?**

Alice Walker commence à émerger dans les années 70 mais elle ne se fait vraiment connaître qu'en 1982 avec la publication de *La Couleur pourpre*.

Ce roman est une véritable déflagration dans le paysage littéraire américain. Pour la première fois, une autrice parle de façon directe et crue de la vie d'une jeune femme afro-américaine, une descendante d'esclaves qui devient la bonne d'un mari qui la bat et la violente constamment. Il faut garder en tête que le traumatisme de l'esclavage est alors encore très ancré dans les esprits. *La Couleur pourpre* mêle une dimension historique très directe à une violence domestique réaliste. Quand le livre sort en 1982, il subjugué et choque les lecteurs et lectrices. La même chose se passe quand il est traduit deux ans plus tard en français par Mimi Perrin. Il provoque un véritable choc, notamment dans le milieu universitaire.

Il est difficile de parler de l'ascension d'Alice Walker sans évoquer l'une de ses contemporaines : Toni Morrison. Dès 1971, Morrison publie son premier roman *L'œil le plus bleu*, dans lequel elle traite des mêmes thématiques. Elle y raconte l'histoire d'une famille afro-américaine pauvre, au sein de laquelle grandit une petite fille victime d'inceste. Les carrières de Walker et Morrison se développent en miroir, mais Walker est la première à être reconnue officiellement et à recevoir des prix prestigieux dans le milieu littéraire américain.




**L'histoire se déroule sur plus d'une trentaine d'années, mais il n'est quasiment pas fait allusion aux événements historiques qui secouent l'Amérique. La communauté noire rurale de Georgie, dépeinte dans le livre, semble vivre séparée de la société blanche. À quel moment de l'histoire des Afro-américains la réalité décrite par le film correspond-elle ?**

Le roman commence en 1909 et l'essentiel de l'action se déroule dans les années 1930. Les effets du krach boursier d'octobre 1929 durent pendant une décennie. La machine économique s'enraye, les gens n'arrivent plus à survivre. Les communautés afro-américaines sont touchées encore plus violemment que le reste de la population. Il faut attendre Rosa Parks et les années 50 pour voir émerger le mouvement des droits civiques. *La Couleur pourpre* se déroule bien en amont, à un moment où, dans le sud des États-Unis, les communautés sont strictement séparées. On le voit dans le roman au moment où Miss Millie, la femme du maire, se permet de demander à Sophia de devenir sa bonne. Cette dernière refuse. Elle est rouée de coups et jetée en prison pour cet acte de résistance. À cette époque, on assiste tout de même à un début d'émancipation avec le mouvement artistique de la Renaissance de Harlem qui propose des créations vibrantes, éblouissantes dans des domaines aussi divers que la littérature, la musique, la danse ou la peinture. Mais nous sommes loin de la résistance de masse.

Mais le vrai cadrage historique du roman s'inscrit plutôt sur la page avec Nettie, la sœur de Celie, qui devient missionnaire et part avec un couple de religieux en Afrique. Walker retrace ainsi l'histoire du Liberia, un pays particulièrement symbolique puisqu'il a été fondé au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle par d'anciens esclaves américains qui ont choisi de revenir habiter leur terre d'origine sur le vieux continent. Elle évoque à travers la trajectoire de Nettie ce mouvement de retour vers la mère patrie, ainsi que l'effort d'établissement d'églises protestantes et l'évangélisation des Libériens au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

**Pouvez-vous expliciter le titre, très métaphorique, du roman ?**

Plusieurs interprétations sont possibles. Celie et Nettie font plusieurs fois allusion à cette couleur quand elles sont enfants, elles expliquent alors que le pourpre est une couleur profonde qui évoque à la fois la vie et l'espoir. Cette teinte est aussi un symbole de protection divine. Mais le pourpre ou violet a pris plus tard une interprétation différente, puisqu'il s'agit de la couleur des mouvements lesbiens. Est-ce quelque chose qu'Alice Walker avait voulu insérer en filigrane dans les années 80 ? On peut se poser la question. Quand elle publie le roman, en 1982, nous sommes en plein mouvement féministe et de revendication des droits LGBT. Alice Walker ne pouvait donc pas ignorer la symbolique de cette couleur. Il y a probablement là un syncrétisme entre plusieurs significations.



**“L’HISTOIRE SE SITUE À UNE ÉPOQUE OÙ LES COMMUNAUTÉS NOIRES ET BLANCHES SONT STRICTEMENT SÉPARÉES DANS LE SUD DES ÉTATS-UNIS.”**



**“CELIE EST OPPRIMÉE PAR LES BLANCS PARCE QU’ELLE EST NOIRE, PAR LES HOMMES PARCE QU’ELLE EST UNE FEMME ET PAR SON PÈRE PARCE QU’ELLE EST UNE JEUNE PROIE FACILE.”**



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**La Couleur pourpre est la cible de la censure dès sa sortie notamment à cause de sa violence et de ses représentations de l'homosexualité féminine. Pourquoi le roman choque-t-il autant à l'époque ? Est-il aujourd'hui la cible des mouvements conservateurs ?**

Au moment de la publication du roman au début des années 80, l'Amérique est secouée par le SIDA. Il y a un retour de bâton terrible contre les communautés homosexuelles, qui va contribuer à la censure du roman. J'étais étonnée de ne pas voir *La Couleur pourpre* dans les listes de livres qui sont aujourd'hui interdits dans les collèges et lycées de certains états américains, puisqu'on y trouve des romans de Toni Morrison comme *L'Œil le plus bleu*. Ces listes sont établies localement au niveau de chaque *school board*. Ce sont les parents qui font partie de ces conseils d'école, qui influencent en grande partie ce que les élèves peuvent ou ne peuvent pas lire. Je ne serais pas surprise qu'il y figure un jour, puisqu'il traite frontalement de nombre de sujets sensibles.

**Le livre dénonce à la fois le racisme des blancs et la violence des hommes noirs. Quelles controverses entraîne-t-il au sein des communautés afro-américaines ?**

L'absence et/ou la violence de l'homme noir, et du père en particulier, sont des thématiques délicates qui posent problème dans la culture afro-américaine, notamment parce qu'elles sont

devenues des clichés qui ne correspondent pas à la réalité de la plupart des foyers afro-américains, clichés contre lesquels se battent de nombreux auteurs noirs. Dans *La Couleur pourpre*, Alice Walker décrit cette violence de façon extrêmement crue, ce qui est très novateur et osé à l'époque. Quand elle raconte les violences faites aux femmes au sein du foyer et au niveau plus large de la communauté afro-américaine, elle brise un tabou qui divise. Pour certains, ce tabou devait être dénoncé, pour d'autres, il devait être passé sous silence.

**Par son approche, qu'on appellerait aujourd'hui « intersectionnelle » (Celie est opprimée en tant que femme et en tant que noire), par sa réflexion sur les stéréotypes de genre, *La Couleur pourpre* apparaît très moderne. Peut-on dire que le roman était en avance sur son temps ?**

C'est indéniable, cela explique d'ailleurs pourquoi le roman a tant dérangé au moment de sa publication et pourquoi il continue à déranger aujourd'hui. Cette théorie de l'intersectionnalité, qui apparaît en 1989 avec les écrits de la Professeure de Droit et féministe africaine américaine Kimberlé Crenshaw, est déjà clairement présente dans *La Couleur pourpre*. Walker montre une triple oppression. Celie est opprimée par la communauté blanche parce qu'elle est noire, elle est opprimée par les hommes parce qu'elle est une femme et elle



est opprimée par son propre père parce qu'elle est une jeune proie facile. L'inceste est montré très clairement. Ces trois aspects sont extrêmement bien documentés, montrés sans détour. La forme épistolaire du roman est d'ailleurs intéressante en ce qu'elle permet un décalage temporel et une mise à distance. Comme les événements sont racontés à une destinataire physiquement et temporellement éloignée, chaque micro-récit et chaque acte violent sont concentrés, comme dans un haïku japonais. Je me demande (il s'agit là d'une hypothèse de ma part), si Alice Walker n'a pas choisi cette forme pour essayer de déjouer la censure. Elle savait que le contenu de son livre était explosif, qu'il allait révolutionner le milieu littéraire et avoir un impact significatif sur la communauté noire. Cette forme épistolaire a pu atténuer la frontalité du roman en la décalant...

**La comédie musicale tirée du livre est créée à Broadway une première fois en 2005, puis en 2015, avant d'être adaptée au cinéma aujourd'hui. Qu'est-ce que la musique (déjà assez présente dans le roman, à travers le personnage de Shug) apporte d'après vous à l'adaptation du roman ?**

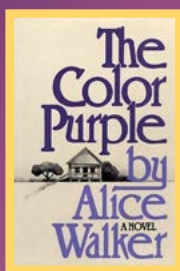
De grands pans du roman sont déjà consacrés à la musique et au personnage de Shug Avery, qui agit comme une force libératrice dans la vie de Célie. Quand on lit les lettres de cette dernière, il est évident que la musique l'a portée vers un certain type de liberté et lui a permis de s'émanciper. Dans le roman de Walker, des passages entiers des lettres sonnent comme des poèmes ou des chansons. On peut ajouter bien sûr que le roman vient s'inscrire dans l'histoire du jazz, un style musical qui explose dans les années 20 au moment des grandes migrations. Beaucoup d'Afro-Américains quittent alors l'ancien Sud esclavagiste pour aller tenter leur chance à New York, Boston ou encore Chicago et apportent avec eux le jazz. La musique tient aussi une partie importante dans le film de Spielberg, avec les scènes qui se passent dans le bastringue de la section noire de la ville.

**Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris est professeure Professeur d'Etudes Filmiques et Sérielles Anglophones et de Littérature Américaine à l'Université Paris Nanterre. Dans ses recherches, elle s'intéresse notamment aux voix de femmes dans la littérature afro-américaine.**



**“DANS LE ROMAN D'ALICE WALKER, DES PASSAGES ENTIERS DES LETTRES SONNENT COMME DES POÈMES OU DES CHANSONS, ET LE ROMAN VIENT S'INSCRIRE DANS L'HISTOIRE DU JAZZ.”**

# LA « TIME-LINE » DE LA COULEUR POURPRE



**1982**

Parution du **roman d'Alice Walker**  
Prix Pulitzer de la fiction et National Book Award for fiction en 1983



**1985**

Sortie au cinéma de l'**adaptation réalisée par Steven Spielberg**, avec Whoopi Goldberg et Danny Glover dans les rôles principaux  
11 nominations aux Oscars



**2005**

Création à Broadway de la **comédie musicale**  
11 nominations aux Tony Awards en 2006



**2015**

Nouvelle production de la **comédie musicale**.  
"Best revival for a musical" aux Tony Award 2017



**2024**

Sortie au cinéma de l'**adaptation de la comédie musicale** réalisée par Blitz Bazawule



# ACTIVITÉS PÉDAGOGIQUES



# I ) BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

## Task 1

### 1. Match a film genre and its definition.

- |                 |      |
|-----------------|------|
| 1/ thriller     | - a/ |
| 2/ period drama | - b/ |
| 3/ musical      | - c/ |

a/ a television or film production set in a particular historical period and characterized by the use of costumes, sets, and props that are typical or evocative of the era.

b/ a novel, play, or film with an exciting plot, typically involving crime or espionage.

c/ a play or film in which singing and dancing play an essential part.

## Task 2

### 1. Watch the official trailer of the 2024 *Color Purple* film which was released by Warner Bros.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPwzBUui1GA>

**The class can be divided into four groups of students. Each group will focus on one of these four different elements and will report its findings to the class:**

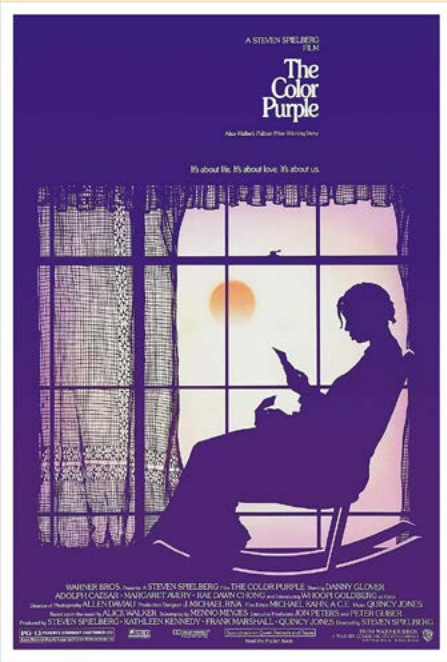
- the sound and the music
- the camera and the camera shots (long shots, mid-shots or close-ups, the angles, the movements, the points of view and the characters we sympathise with)
- the mise en scène (the costumes, the lighting and the locations)
- and the performance (the cast, the emotions and body language)

You will also have to decide which genre(s) the film *The Color Purple* belongs to.



# Task 3

Match a poster with its description:

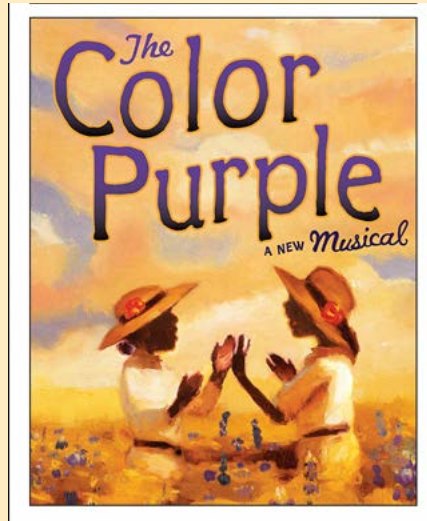


POSTER 1



A

The 2024 *Color Purple* film adaptation of the musical



POSTER 2



B

Steven Spielberg's 1985 film, *The Color Purple*, an adaptation of Alice Walker's novel



POSTER 3



C

The *Color Purple* musical that opened on Broadway in 2005

## Describe and compare these three posters.

Make sure you comment on the cast, the women's poses and the colours.

What do you make of the statement 'a bold new take on the beloved classic' in poster 3? What influence is recognised? What is different?



## Task 4

1. Here is some further information about the 2024 *Color Purple* film. Read it and make sure to use full sentences.



US poster

*Distributed by Warner Bros*

*Cast: Taraji P. Henson, Danielle Brooks, Colman Domingo, Corey Hawkins, H.E.R., Halle Bailey, Phylicia Pearl Mpasi, and Fantasia Barrino*

*Music by Kris Bowers*

*Produced by Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg, Quincy Jones and Scott Sanders*

*Based on the novel by Alice Walker*

*Screenplay by Marcus Gardley*

*Directed by Blitz Bazawule*

2. What do you notice about the cast, the ethnicity of the people mentioned, or the choice of the production team etc?

3. Who has already been involved in the 1985 film or the 2005 Broadway musical?

4. Would you say this 2024 film is risky business or a safe bet?

5. In your opinion, should a movie be a faithful adaptation to a book or should it tell a story differently?

6. The 1985 *Color Purple* film was a blockbuster. Do you think that the 2024 film should show nostalgia for the 1985 film and be self-referential? (Note: A self-referential book refers to itself, its writer, or other work by that writer).

## Task 5

### About the writer Alice Walker (Adapted from Poetry foundation.org)

Poet, essayist, and novelist Alice Walker was born in 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, to sharecroppers Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker. She earned a BA from Sarah Lawrence College. The author of numerous books, she “is one of the country’s best-selling writers of literary fiction,” according to Renee Tawa in the *Los Angeles Times*. Walker is a feminist and vocal advocate for human rights, and she has earned critical and popular acclaim as a major American novelist and intellectual. Her literary reputation was secured with her Pulitzer Prize-winning third novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), which Steven Spielberg adapted into a popular film.

Walker’s writing reflects her roots in Georgia, where Black vernacular was prominent and the stamp of slavery and oppression were still present. When she was eight, Walker was accidentally shot in the eye by a brother playing with his BB gun. Her parents, who were too poor to afford a car, could not take her to a doctor for several days. By that time, her wound was so bad that she had lost the use of her right eye. This handicap influenced her writer’s voice; she withdrew from others and became a meticulous observer of human relationships and interaction. An excellent student, Walker was awarded a scholarship to Spelman College in 1961. The civil rights movement attracted her, and she became an activist. In 1963, she decided to continue her education at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. After graduation, she moved to Mississippi to teach and continue to engage in social activism, and she met and married Melvyn Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights lawyer. The two became the only legally married interracial couple living in Jackson, Mississippi. After their divorce in 1976, Walker’s literary output increased. Walker coined the term “Womanist” to describe her philosophical stance on the issue of gender. As a Womanist, she sees herself as someone who appreciates women’s culture and femininity. Her work often reflects this stance, as well as the universality of human experience. Walker’s central characters are almost always Black women; Walker, according to Steinem, “comes at universality through the path of an American black woman’s experience.”

Walker is deeply invested in revealing the experiences of Black women. Thadious M. Davis, in his *Dictionary of Literary Biography* essay, commented: “Walker writes best of the social and personal drama in the lives of familiar people who struggle for survival of self in hostile environments. She has expressed a special concern with exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women.” Some reviewers criticize Walker’s fiction for portraying an overly negative view of Black men. Charles Larson, in his *Detroit News* review of *The Color Purple*, remarked, “I wouldn’t go as far as to say that all the male characters [in the novel] are villains, but the truth is fairly close to that.” However, Larson did not feel that this is a major fault in the novel, and he noted that by the end of the novel, “several of [Walker’s] masculine characters have reformed.” This idea of reformation, this sense of hope even in despair, is at the core of Walker’s vision. Davis referred to Walker’s “vision of survival” and offered a summary of its significance in Walker’s work. “At whatever cost, human beings have the capacity to live in spiritual health and beauty; they may be poor, black, and uneducated, but their inner selves can blossom.”



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1. Who is Alice Walker?
2. Where did she grow up and live?
3. What hardships did she endure in her life?
4. What themes does she explore in her writings?
5. What are her works praised for or criticised for?



# Task 6

Guess who is who.



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**A**



**Oprah Winfrey**

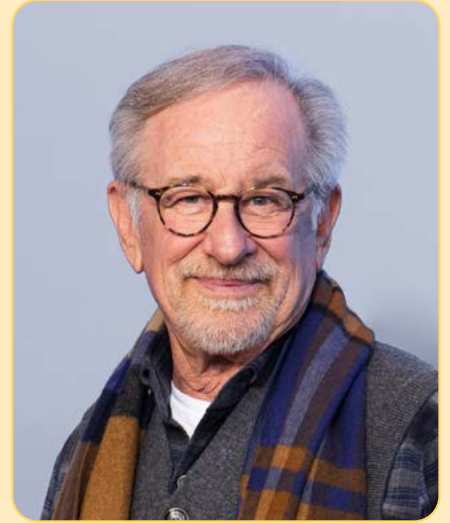


© INTX: The Internet & Television Expo CC

**B**



**Steven Spielberg**



© Martin Kraft CC BY-SA 4.0

**C**



**Blitz Bazawule**

## Who is who? Who fits the descriptions: Blitz Bazawule, Steven Spielberg or Oprah Winfrey?

a/ He is a veteran blockbuster director. He is an undisputed giant of cinema. He has delivered milestone films every decade he has been directing: in the 1970s, *Jaws* and *Close Encounters*; in the 80s, *The Color Purple*, the Indiana Jones trilogy, and *E.T.*; in the 90s, *Jurassic Park*, *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*; in the 2000s, *Catch Me if You Can* and *Minority Report*; in the 2010s, *The Adventures of Tintin* and *Lincoln*, among many more films. He has also kept working at a breakneck pace. He has also worked as a producer and screenwriter. He is one of the producers of the 2024 *Color Purple*. Who is he?

He is \_\_\_\_\_

b/American television personality, actress, and entrepreneur whose syndicated daily talk show was among the most popular of the genre. She became one of the richest and most influential women in the United States. In 1985 she made her acting debut as Sofia in Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Alice Walker's 1982 novel *The Color Purple*. Her critically acclaimed performance led to other roles. She formed her own television production company, Harpo Productions, Inc., in 1986, and a film production company, Harpo Films, in 1990. She produced the Broadway *Color Purple* musical and the 2024 *Color Purple* film. Who is she?

She is \_\_\_\_\_

c/ He is a Ghanaian filmmaker, author, visual artist, rapper, singer-songwriter, and record producer. He co-directed 'Beyoncé's visual album, *Black is King*, which aimed to promote 'the beauty of tradition and back experience.'

He is \_\_\_\_\_

# Food for thought

Read these comments on *The Color Purple*.

## 1. Blitz Bazawule on *The Color Purple*



"First of all, it is seeing beauty within and around you. I think that's a big challenge that certainly black, brown, indigenous people face is that we're not taught that our environments, our personhood, our peoplehood, our worlds are beautiful. And I'm talking about beautiful. (...) I've always grown knowing that we are beautiful people, in all our complexities, in all our inconsistencies, we are beautiful people. And my job is to turn the camera on that beauty and find that beauty. And once I was able to capture that, bro you couldn't stop me."

PBS, *A Conversation with Blitz Bazawule* (45mn22)

**Question: What is the key idea behind Blitz Bazawule's work ?**

## 2. Alice Walker on her book *The Color Purple*

"It was said that I hated men, black men in particular; that my work was injurious to black male and female relationships; that my ideas of equality and tolerance were harmful, even destructive to the black community."



**Question: Did the book receive only positive reviews?**

## 3. Oprah Winfrey spoke openly about being raped at 14.



"*The Color Purple* changed my life. In 1984, I never wanted anything more in my life than to be in *The Color Purple*. (...) From the beginning, from the very first time I read *The Color Purple*, it was a blessing in my life, because until that time, I did not know that there was language for what had happened to me. And the first line of the book is, 'Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Please help me know what is happening to me.' And I had been raped and had a child at 14 who later died and I did not have any language to explain what that was. And that book was the first time that there was a story about me. And so to come full circle and then to be discovered by Quincy Jones and be in the movie, I literally prayed on my knees every night to be in that movie, I never wanted anything more, and then when it happened, it changed my life, it changed everything for me. And to now be in a position to come so full circle that I am producing with Scott Sanders and producing with Steven Spielberg. (...) You can't come to this movie and not be healed. There's something really powerful going on with the spirit of it and the energy of it."

Source: *The Color Purple* (2024), Q&A.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTSYwal8\\_\\_28](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTSYwal8__28)

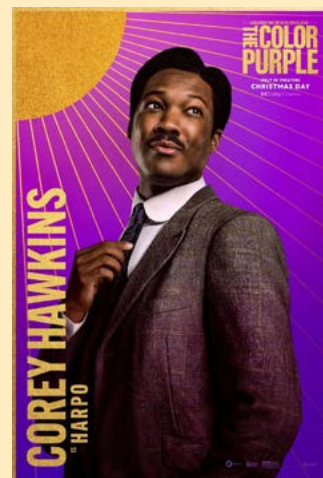
**Question: Why did *The Color Purple* change Oprah Winfrey's life and why did it resonate in her? According to Oprah Winfrey, what power does the movie have?**



# II ) AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

## Task 1

Who's who? Look at the pictures below and say who is who.



- Who is the main heroine in the film? .....
- Who is Celie's younger sister? She exchanges letters with Celie, goes to live in Africa and is reunited with Celie at the end of the film. She is played by Halle Bailey when she is young and by Ciara when she is an adult. ....
- Who is Celie's friend and Harpo's wife? She is a very strong and assertive woman who is even imprisoned for standing up for her rights. ....
- Who is Celie's abusive husband who emotionally and physically abuses Celie? He hides Nettie's letters to Celie and he has an affair with Shug. ....
- Who is Sofia's husband? He builds a jukejoint bar. He is not as strong as Sofia.  
.....
- Who is a blues singer? She is bisexual and wears sexy and outrageous clothes. Both Mister and Celie love her. ....
- Who has a minor role and is also called Mary-Agnes? She becomes Harpo's girlfriend after Harpo's wife has left him. ....

## Task 2

Tick the right answer(s). Sometimes, several answers are possible.

### 1. The story is mainly set in

**A** - in America's rural South   **B** - in American's urban North  
**C** - in Georgia, in the Deep South   **D** - in New York city.

### 2. The film also takes us to

**A** - Africa   **B** - Asia where Celie's sister Nettie and children live.

### 3. Africa is depicted as

**A** - a desolate place   **B** - a land of great beauty and riches.

### 4. When the film opens, it is

**A** - 1909   **B** - 1959.

### 5. The film spans

**A** - about half a century (four decades)   **B** - a century

### 6. The film focuses on

**A** - family dynamics   **B** - violence   **C** - guilt   **D** - survival

### 7. The novel from which the film is adapted is composed entirely of letters and it is told from Celie's point of view. It has been identified as

**A** - the first African-American epistolary novel   **B** - the first African-American epic novel.

### 8. According to you, who is/are the heroine(s)/ main characters of the film? Justify your answer.

**A** - Celie   **B** - Celie's husband   **C** - Harpo   **D** - Sofia   **E** - Nettie   **F** - Shug

### 9. The score (=music of the film) is mainly

**A** - joyous (=full of joy)   **B** - bleak (=sad)

### 10. You can hear specific African American songs:

**A** - blues   **B** - country music   **C** - gospel   **D** - jazz   **E** - rock   **F** - spirituals



# Task 3

## Answer these questions.

1. Spielberg said in an interview about the making of the 1985 film that for him, 'the mailbox was always the 8<sup>th</sup> character in *The Color Purple*. It was the 8<sup>th</sup> actor, the 8<sup>th</sup> major player because that mailbox was empty. (...) That mailbox was either going to deliver good or to deliver emptiness into her life. So the mailbox is also a conduit for transitions from spring to winter. It was a very important character.'

**In your opinion, is the mailbox such an essential feature in the 2024 film? How do the mailbox shots give a sense of the passage of time?**

2. There is a very poignant scene in the 2024 film, the shaving scene, where we can see Celie shaving her husband with a razor blade. Mister's jugular is saved in the nick of time. **Do you remember what saves him?**

3. When Shug is able to find Nettie's letters for Celie and to show them to Celie, that's a turning point in the story. **That's Celie's turning-point. How does Celie's attitude change from then on?**

4. At one point, Celie says to her husband, 'I've had enough of you'. She adds that it is 'time I be free of you.' **What do these words show about her relationship with her husband and her new self?**

**Now use these adjectives to describe Celie's progress. Make sure you use them in the right order:**

**TIMID – RESILIENT – FEARFUL – FEARLESS**

a) Celie is called 'ugly' in the film by her husband Albert. Celie replies that she 'may be black', she 'may be poor', she 'may even be ugly' but she's 'here'. **What do you make of Celie's response?**

b) In a letter from the novel *The Color Purple*, Celie wrote 'I'm poor, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening but I'm here.' In contrast, during the film, Celie does not write it but she says it directly to her husband's face.

**In your opinion, why was the writing of a letter changed into a powerful scene in the film? What does the fact that Celie asserts herself and dares to defy her husband show?**

c) There is a song in the film which echoes these words: *I'm here*.  
The lyrics of the film are:

*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.'*

[https://youtu.be/Y\\_ze4tS7U8c?si=45rcRByR8TIB0KZs](https://youtu.be/Y_ze4tS7U8c?si=45rcRByR8TIB0KZs)

**Explain why there is such a striking contrast between the lyrics of this song and the words 'ugly', 'black' and 'poor' that were uttered by Celie's husband or Celie herself to describe Celie. What does the song show about acceptance?**

5. Alice Walker's book *The Color Purple* and the 1985 Spielberg film *The Color Purple* were both widely acclaimed but also received much criticism because some critics or Americans felt that the author and the film director had caused harm to the black male community. **Do you think that this criticism is fair or do you think that Alice Walker is right when she said that African-American men could respond to that?**

6. During the making of the 1985 *Color Purple* film, leaders in the lesbian community protested on learning that the physical relationship between Celie and Shug would be only hinted at, by a single kiss, and not developed, contrary to the book in which the two women's queer sexual intimacy is made clear. **Do you think that the 2024 *Color Purple* film is clear and unambiguous when portraying Celie and Shug's relationship?**

7. Producer Oprah Winfrey said in a clip, 'There's nothing that's been more important or vital to me culturally or artistically than *The Color Purple*. It's a solid base of spiritual and emotional power for me. Every woman and man who has been invisible, who has felt unseen and unvalued, this is their story.' **Do you agree with Oprah?**

Director Blitz Bazawule also argues that the film *The Color Purple* also reminds him of this journey of going from being unseen to being seen, which is Celie's ultimate journey. **Do you think it is something that young people like you can relate to? Do you hope to be seen one day?**

**9. Do you remember when the color purple appears in the film?**

**How does it materialise and what does it symbolise?**

a) One of the dominant metaphors of Alice Walker's works is the quilt which represents black women's creative energy. The film ends with images of quilts. **Can you remember some of the symbols of the quilts?**

b) The metaphor of a quilt, itself a piece of art made up of formally disparate but conceptually independent pieces, can usefully describe the way that content and form converse in Walker's work. The metaphor of the quilt enables us to see a characteristic common to everything she writes: her work, more than anything else, is overtly and persistently intertextual. Walker's work fits together like a patchwork: each story, poem, novel and essay is separate from the rest of her work and yet continuous and contingent.

**What do quiltmakers and storytellers have in common?**

**Would you say that quiltmakers and storytellers are part of a literary or cultural tradition?**



## 10. The language

In a 1984 interview, Alice Walker said that the vernacular of *The Color Purple* represents a means of recovering Southern black culture:

'This was the way my grandparents spoke, this is the way my mother speaks today, and I want to capture that. Especially for my daughter, who has a very different kind of upbringing and who doesn't get to Georgia very often. I want her to know when she grows up what her grandparents, her great-grandparents sounded like, because the sound is so amazingly alive.'

Celie's vernacular letters also link Alice Walker's mother's speech with writer Hurston's achievements in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

**Try to rewrite this opening passage from the novel in standard English.**

*'Dear God,*

*My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing. She scream at me. She cuss at me. I'm big.  
I can't move fast enough. By time I git back from the well, the water be warm.  
By time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By the time I git all the children ready for school  
it be dinner time. He don't say nothing. He set there by the bed holding her hand an cryin,  
talking bout don't leave me, don't go.'*

## 11. The body language

The body language is often hinted at in the novel. In the film, the many close-ups, low angles and the lighting make us sympathise with some characters. The cinematography helps draw sympathy for the characters' plight.

**Can you remember some examples?**



# POUR ALLER PLUS LOIN

## Other texts for further study

### Maya Angelou – Excerpt from the novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969)

'Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly (nightmare of a) dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of my kinky mass that momma wouldn't let me straighten. My big beautiful baby blue eyes were going to hypnotize them, after all the things they said about "my daddy must have been a Chinaman" because my eyes were so small and squinty. Then they would understand why I had never picked up a Southern accent, or spoke a common slang, and why I had to be forced to eat pig's tails and snouts. Because I was really white and because a cruel fairy stepmother, who was understandably jealous of my beauty, had turned me into a too big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil. If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult.'

### Maya Angelou, "Phenomenal Woman", 1978

*Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.  
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size  
But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.  
I say,  
It's in the reach of my arms,  
The span of my hips,  
The stride of my step,  
The curl of my lips.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.*

*I walk into a room  
Just as cool as you please,  
And to a man,  
The fellows stand or  
Fall down on their knees.  
Then they swarm around me,  
A hive of honey bees.  
I say,  
It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.*

*Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.*

*Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.  
When I try to show them,  
They say they still can't see.  
I say,  
It's in the arch of my back,  
The sun of my smile,  
The ride of my breasts,  
The grace of my style.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.*

*Now you understand  
Just why my head's not bowed.  
I don't shout or jump about  
Or have to talk real loud.  
When you see me passing,  
It ought to make you proud.  
I say,  
It's in the click of my heels,  
The bend of my hair,  
The palm of my hand,  
The need for my care.  
'Cause I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.*

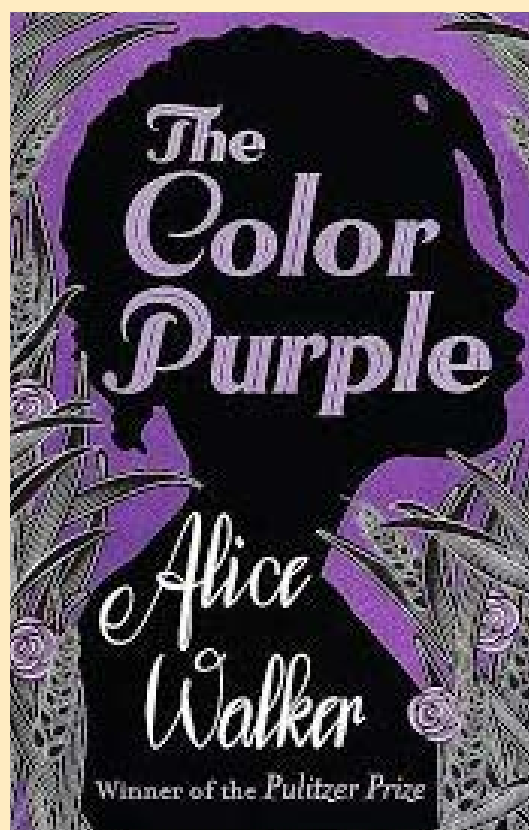
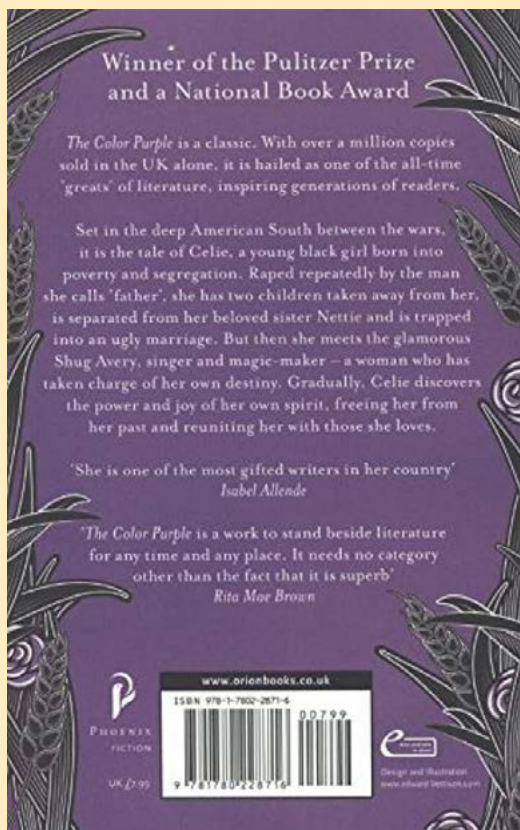
## Tasks

### How can these two texts by Maya Angelou be linked with the 2024 *Color Purple* film?

Think of the themes they explore, the main characters of the texts or film and the points of view.



## Book cover and back cover of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*



The blurb on the back of the book says :

'Set in the deep American South between the wars, it is the tale of Celie, a young black girl born into poverty and segregation. Raped repeatedly by the man she calls 'father', she has two children taken away from her, is separated from her beloved sister Nettie and is trapped into an ugly marriage. But then she meets the glamorous Shug Avery, singer and magic-maker – a woman who has taken charge of her own destiny. Gradually, Celie discovers the power and joy of her own spirit, freeing her from her past and reuniting her with those she loves.'

### Task

Would you say that the 2024 film *The Color Purple* is a faithful and even successful adaptation of the book?

## **Extract from Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple***

**It is an excerpt from one of Celie's letters to God**

**(Sofia and Celie are having a conversation.)**

*"You told Harpo to beat me, she said.*

*No I didn't, I said.*

*Don't lie, she said.*

*I didn't mean it, I said.*

*Then what you say it for? She ast.*

*She standing there looking me straight in the eye. She look tired and her jaws full of air.*

*I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't.*

*What that? She say.*

*Fight. I say.*

*She stand there a long time, like what I said took the wind out her jaws. She mad before, sad now.*

*She say, All my life, I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. She let out her breath. I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do? But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me. Now if you want a dead son-in-law you just keep on advising him like you doing. She put her hand on her hip. I used to hunt game with a bow and arrow, she say.'*

***The Color Purple* sparked intense controversy because of its ostensible portrayal of black men as abusive, vindictive and cruel.**

**Walker responded to such criticism in the essay *In the Closet of the Soul* :**

*'A book and movie that urged us to look at the oppression of women and children by men (and to a lesser degree, by women) became the opportunity by which black men drew attention to themselves – not in an effort to rid themselves of the desire or the tendency to oppress women and children, but, instead, to claim that inasmuch as a 'negative' picture of them was presented to the world, they were, in fact, the ones being oppressed.'*

**In this extract, what did Walker claim and argue?**

Alice Walker continues her defence of *The Color Purple* in *The Same River Twice*, a book entirely devoted to the making of the film, the critical controversy, and Walker's correspondence at the time of the making of the film.

**In your opinion, why did Alice Walker feel obliged to write a big book about the making of the film *The Color Purple* and the controversy around it?**

Imagine's Alice Walker's response to the 2024 *Color Purple* film. **Write her entry into a diary about her reaction after she saw the film.**

**Now, write your own review of the 2024 *Color Purple* film for a social network.**



# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

## Before watching the film

### Task 1

1/ b.                    2/ a.                    3/ c.

### Task 2

- 1/ The trailer offers a glimpse into Blitz Bazawule's film adaptation of the *Color Purple* Broadway musical.
- the sound and the music: upbeat and joyful music - tension - people laughing but yelling too - a gunshot - catchy tunes - musical clips
  - the camera and the camera shots (a lot of wide shots in beautiful landscapes - domestic scenes and outdoor scenes - private moments = a lot of close-ups / moments of love and joy, especially between the two sisters - high angle shots for the moments of fear, oppression and drama - inserts : the names of the actors, the producers and filmmaker or the title of the film
  - the mise en scène: a sharp contrast between dark scenes and bright scenes - beautiful and colourful costumes or clothes - the USA and Africa
  - the performance: an A-list cast - a combination of singers and actors (elite vocal powerhouses and established actors) - African-American actors - a performance that runs the gamut of emotions - drama and love

*The Color Purple* is a musical but the trailer does not make it clear that it is a musical.

2/ Similarities: storyline - joy and drama - the bond between two sisters - the importance of music

Differences: the color purple (purple fields in this trailer in the opening and closing shots) - more dramatic moments - women's empowerment

3/ Yes - Musicals are very popular, especially in the USA. The film will appeal to music lovers

No - Some people cannot stand musicals. The trailer does not make it clear that it is a musical though.

The 2024 *Color Purple* film is an adaptation of a very popular Broadway musical which has been adapted from a book by Alice Walker. It is part of American black culture and heritage. It will appeal to a wide audience. It is a film about hope and joy. It is perfect for Christmas.

### Task 3

Poster 1 - C / Poster 2 - B / Poster 3 - A

Similarities in the three posters: color purple - golden hues - African-American women = the lead characters

Differences: one, two or three heroines? Whose point of view? children or adults? children playing - woman reading - empowered women (radiant/ well made-up/ smartly dressed women)

'a new musical' / 'a bold new take on the beloved classic': variations / something new has been added

'a bold new take' = are the women emboldened/ fearless? Is the film faithful to the book and to the previous film or musical or is it totally different?

### Task 4

1/ The film will be distributed by Warner Bros.

# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

The film's star-studded cast includes Taraji P. Henson, Danielle Brooks, Colman Domingo, Corey Hawkins, H.E.R., Halle Bailey, Phylicia Pearl Mpasi, and Fantasia Barrino.

The music was composed by Kris Bowers.

The film was produced by Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg, Quincy Jones and Scott Sanders.

It is based on the novel by Alice Walker.

The screenplay was written by Marcus Gardley.

The film was directed by Blitz Bazawule.

2/ It is a star-studded/ A-list cast. The actors are African-American. Oprah Winfrey and Steven Spielberg are celebrities. Oprah is a very popular TV presenter and producer and Steven Spielberg is a well-established filmmaker.

3/ Oprah Winfrey 'presented'/ produced the 2005 Broadway musical.

Steven Spielberg directed the 1985 film.

4/ This 2024 film must be a safe bet because the *Color Purple* is already very well-known. The film cast and crew are very talented. The film will be a big box-office success.

5/ & 6/ Opinions may vary here.

## Task 5

1/ Alice Walker is an African-American writer.

2/ She grew up in Georgia, in the USA. She moved several times. She lived in New York and Mississippi.

3/ When she was 8, she was accidentally injured by a BB shotgun in the eye by her brother. Her parents were very poor and they could not afford to take her to see a doctor so Alice Walker became blind in one eye.

4/ She explores the themes of oppression, insanity, loyalties, empowerment, 'womanism', despair and survival.

5/ Her works are praised for her portrayal of the harsh realities African Americans face. However, Alice Walker is criticised for her negative portrayal of African American men.

## Task 6

1/ Blitz Bazawule is shown in picture A.

2/ Steven Spielberg C

3/ Oprah Winfrey B

Who is Who?

a/ He is Steven Spielberg.

b/ She is Oprah Winfrey.

c/ He is Blitz Bazawule.

## Food for thought

1/ Blitz Bazawule wants to show that black, brown and indigenous people live in beautiful places. He is able to find beauty and to capture it for his films to show it to the world.

2/ Alice Walker's book *The Color Purple* was strongly criticised for its depiction of black men. Some people thought that Alice Walker was harming the black community.

# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

3/ Oprah Winfrey said that the book *The Color Purple* changed her life because the book helped her put into words what had happened to her. She was raped and had an unwanted child at 14. She identified with the main character of the book who went through the same ordeal. So it was very important for her to play the lead in the film. She landed the job. She made her acting debut in *The Color Purple* (in 1985). She is now co-producing the new 2024 *Color Purple*. Oprah Winfrey thinks that the film can heal the audience and be cathartic.

## After watching the film

### Task 1

- a/ Celie
- b/ Nettie
- c/ Sophia
- d/ Mister
- e/ Harpo
- f/ Shug Avery
- g/ Squeak

### Task 2

- 1/ The story is mainly set in a/ in America's rural South  
c/ in Georgia, in the Deep South
- 2/ The film also takes us to a/ Africa where Celie's sister Nettie and children live.
- 3/ Africa is depicted as a b/ a land of great beauty and riches.
- 4/ When the film opens, it is a/ 1909
- 5/ The film spans a/ about half a century (four decades)
- 6/ The film focuses on a/ family dynamics b/ violence d/ survival
- 7/ The novel from which the film is adapted is composed entirely of letters and it is told from Celie's point of view. It has been identified as a/ the first African-American epistolary novel.
- 8/ There are several acceptable answers.  
a/ Celie is the heroine of the film  
d/ Sofia e/ Nettie f/ Shug are key characters.  
b/ Celie's husband is an anti-hero.
- 9/ The score (=music of the film) is mainly a/ joyous (=full of joy)
- 10/ You can hear specific African American songs: a/ blues c/ gospel d/ jazz f/ spirituals

### Task 3

- 1/ The mailbox is not an essential prop in the 2024 film. It is important but not essential. It shows that time passes by and that the two sisters Celie and Nettie are kept apart.
- 2/ Shug's arrival saves Mister.
- 3/ Celie understands that she has been wronged and that she must react and stand up to her husband.



# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

3/ She will not be submissive any longer. She is ready to fight and to empower herself. She feels empowered/emboldened.

Celie has been timid and fearful until now. She is now fearless and resilient.

4/a/ Celie has to face many challenges but she fights and she is strong.

b/ The scene is all the more poignant as Celie used to be submissive to her husband. She is now bold and fearless. A letter would have downplayed the significance of this moment.

c/ 'Beautiful' and 'ugly' are antonyms.

The song sends a message about self-love and self-esteem. 'I'm beautiful' is repeated as if it was a personal mantra. Self-love is seen positively.

5/ There are several acceptable answers.

The concerns that were raised seem legitimate. Mister is a villain who redeems himself but he will mainly be remembered as an abusive husband. His behaviour could tarnish the reputation of African-American men.

6/ I think the 2024 *Color Purple* film makes Celie and Shug's relationship clear and unambiguous.

7/ I agree with Oprah Winfrey. *The Color Purple* sheds light on the unseen and the downtrodden.

Some people enjoy the limelight while others shun it.

8/ The color purple appears several times in the film. The costumes, some props or nature can be purple or have purples hues at times.

The color purple is associated with nobility, wealth, loyalty and bravery. It can also represent the fight for gender equality. The American suffragists used the color purple in their banners, sashes and clothing. In some religions, purple symbolises hope and redemption.

Purple is also a recurring colour throughout recent queer history.

9/ a/ There are many motifs on the quilts at the end of the film and they seem to be powerful vessels for storytelling. Some motifs are geometrical, others show human or animal figures. The quilts seem to tell stories about the joys or experiences of life. The quilts can be handed down from one generation to the next just like stories can be passed on.

b/ The quiltmakers and storytellers can share and pass on stories from one generation to the next one. They have learnt a craft and belong to a tradition.

10/ Standard English:

*Dear God,*

*My mom died. She dies screaming and cursing. She screamed at me. She cursed at me. I'm big. I can't move fast enough. By the time I got back from the well, the water was warm. By the time I got the tray ready, the food was cold. By the time I got all the children ready for school, it was dinner time. He did not say anything. He was sitting there by the bed holding her hand and crying, asking her/ begging her to stay with him and not to die.'*

11/ The dramatic moments are the most memorable. The film reaches a climax when Celie is holding a razor blade and shaving her husband. We do not know what she intends to do. Mister is saved in the nick of time by a car approaching. This scene is very poignant.

## Tasks

These two texts by Maya Angelou explore the themes of self-love, self-esteem, and beauty just like the 2024 film does. The main characters are also African American women and these texts can empower women.

## Task

The 2024 film *The Color Purple* seems to be a very faithful and successful adaptation of the book. The

# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

storyline is the same and the main characters and the place seem to be identical.

Extract from Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*

In the extract from *In the Closet of the Soul*, Alice Walker argued that black men could now tell the world that they were being oppressed too by being unfairly portrayed.

Alice Walker may have wanted to express her views on the making of the film and on the debate that it sparked.

Alice Walker's response to the film / Your review of the 2024 *Color Purple* film:

Useful expressions: amazing/wonderful /entertaining /thrilling/boring film / a must-see / a very moving portrayal / I expected / I did not expect the film to... / the film is set in/ the plot focuses on / the film reaches a climax when... / the performances are great/ the music is rich / the costumes are... / the photography is...

I highly / strongly / definitely recommend the film / I do not recommend the film

## PROJECTIONS SCOLAIRES

Le film **La Couleur pourpre** est disponible pour des projections scolaires à la demande dans tous les cinémas.

Les séances sont éligibles à la part collective du Pass Culture (dans les cinémas qui l'acceptent).

Vous pouvez contacter directement votre cinéma de proximité.  
Pour tout renseignement : [contact@zerodeconduite.net](mailto:contact@zerodeconduite.net)

## CRÉDITS

Dossier rédigé par **Eloïse Garnier** (Activités pédagogiques) et **Pauline le Gall** (Entretien) pour le site [www.zerodeconduite.net](http://www.zerodeconduite.net) en partenariat avec Warner Bros. France.