

“Everyday Use”
Analyzing Characterization and Point of View
in Alice Walker’s Short Fiction

Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will explore how author Alice Walker uses the narrative elements of characterization and point of view to explore the proper value and expression of heritage in African American culture.

Course: English, grades 9 through 12

Time Frame: 4 – 5 class periods

ENGLISH CORE LEARNING GOALS:

- 1.1.1: Link appropriate experiences and prior knowledge about the topic to the text.
- 1.1.3: Paraphrase and/or summarize significant ideas in a text
- 1.1.4: Analyze and evaluate the purposed and effect of non-print texts, including visual, aural, or electronic media.
- 1.2.1: Determine the significance of the following as each contributes to the meaning of a text: characters’ defining traits; perspective of the author or speaker as well as the effects of first or third person narration
- 1.3.2: Comprehend and interpret a variety of texts, including fiction, nonfiction, and informational texts (literary criticism)
- 1.3.5: Determine and/or explain the theme(s) found in a work of literature.

Common Core State Reading Standards for Literature 6-12

- RL1: Cite strong and thorough textural evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- RL10: By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Objective(s):

- Students will read the short story to analyze the author’s use of point of view as a tool in developing characterization and impression on the reader
- Students will research the work of local quilt makers to explore visual and emotional reaction to the art form.
- Students will read and annotate a piece of literary criticism as it relates to selected short fiction in order to gain deeper insight into the effect that the author’s chosen point of view has on the reader’s understanding/interpretation of plot and character.
- Students will create an original two-voice poem to demonstrate understanding of character

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Vocabulary Words & Literary Concepts	Definitions
Heritage	property that is/can be inherited; something passed down from preceding generations; tradition.
Earnest	showing deep sincerity or seriousness.
Furtive	secret; stealthy
Assalamu Alaikum	an Islamic greeting, meaning “peace be with you.”
Doctrine	a body of principles presented for acceptance or belief, as by a religious, political, or philosophical group.
Whittle	to cut small bits or shavings from a piece of wood.
Point of view	vantage point from which a writer tells a story.
Characterization	the process of revealing the personality of a character.
Direct characterization	the author clearly states a character’s main personality traits.
Indirect characterization	the author presents the character and allows the reader to draw conclusions regarding the character’s personality based on his/her actions, speech, thoughts, appearance,

	and other's reaction to the character.
Two-voice poem	A poem told in two distinct voices where each voice expresses separate thoughts/feelings on a shared event or experience.

Materials:

Resource Sheet 1: Short story "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker
 Resource Sheet 2: Characterization chart transparency
 Resource Sheet 3: Analysis/Discussion Questions Handout
 Resource Sheet 4: Article of literary criticism transparency (suggested: "Fight vs. Flight: a Re-evaluation of Dee in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'")
 Resource Sheet 5: Two-Voice Poem assignment sheet
 Resource Sheet 6: Model Two-Voice Poem

Resources:

Publications:

Farrell, Susan. "Fight vs. Flight: A re-Evaluation of Dee in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 35.2 (Spring 1998): 179-186.
 Rpt. in *Short Story Criticism*. Ed. Jelena O. Krstovic. Vol. 97. Detroit: Gale, 2007. Literature Resource Center. Web. 10 April 2010.

Walker, Alice. "Everyday Use." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Third Edition Shorter*. Ed. Nina Bayn et al. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989. 2367-2372.

White, Evelyn C. *Alice Walker: A Life*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Web Sites:

<http://www.notablebiographies.com/Tu-We/Walker-Alice.html>
www.classicshorts.com
<http://go.galegroup.com>
www.AAQB.org
www.CaroleLylesShaw.com

www.glendarichardson.com

<http://www.sandrasmithquilts.com/>

[www.tolerance.org/activity/poems-two-](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/poems-two-voices)

[voiceshttp://alinihatekenblog.wordpress.com/2008/03/28/discussion-questions-for-alice-walkers-everyday-use-1973/](http://alinihatekenblog.wordpress.com/2008/03/28/discussion-questions-for-alice-walkers-everyday-use-1973/)

<http://www.k-state.edu/english/baker/english251/sg-Walker-EU.htm>

Historical Background:



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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alice_Walker.jpg

Alice Malsenior Walker (born February 9, 1944) is an American author, poet, feminist, and activist. She is best known for the critically acclaimed novel *The Color Purple* (1982) for which she won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

Early life

Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia, the youngest of eight children, to Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Lou Tallulah Grant. Her father, who was, in her words, "wonderful at math but a terrible farmer," earned only \$300 a year from sharecropping and dairy farming. Her mother supplemented the family income by working as a maid. She worked 11 hours a day for \$17 per week to help pay for Alice to attend college.

Living under Jim Crow laws, Walker's parents resisted landlords who expected the children of black sharecroppers to work the fields at a young age. A white plantation owner said to her that black people had "no need for education." Minnie Lou Walker said, "You might *have* some black children somewhere, but they don't live in this house. Don't you ever come around here again talking about how *my children* don't need to learn how to read and write." Her mother enrolled Alice in first grade at the age of four.

Growing up with an oral tradition, listening to stories from her grandfather (the model for the character of Mr. in *The Color Purple*), Walker began writing, very privately, when she was eight years old. "With my family, I had to hide things," she said. "And I had to keep a lot in my mind."

In 1952, Walker was accidentally wounded in the right eye by a shot from a BB gun fired by one of her brothers. Because the family had no car, the Walkers could not take their daughter to a hospital for immediate treatment. By the time they reached a doctor a week later, she had become permanently blind in that eye. When a layer of scar tissue formed over her wounded eye, Alice became self-conscious and painfully shy. Stared at and sometimes taunted, she felt like an outcast and turned for solace to reading and to writing poetry. When she was 14, the scar tissue was removed. She later became valedictorian and was voted most-popular girl, as well as queen of her senior class, but she realized that her traumatic injury had some value: it allowed her to begin "really to see people and things, really to notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out".

After high school, Walker went to Spelman College in Atlanta on a full scholarship in 1961 and later transferred to Sarah Lawrence College near New York City, graduating in 1965. Walker became interested in the U.S. civil rights movement in part due to the influence of activist Howard Zinn, who was one of her professors at Spelman College. Continuing the activism that she participated in during her college years, Walker returned to the South where she became involved with voter registration drives, campaigns for welfare rights, and children's programs in Mississippi

Activism

Alice Walker met Martin Luther King Jr. when she was a student at Spelman College in Atlanta in the early 1960s. Walker credits King for her decision to return to the American South as an activist for the Civil Rights Movement. She

marched with hundreds of thousands in August in the 1963 March on Washington. As a young adult, she volunteered to register black voters in Georgia and Mississippi. On March 8, 2003, International Women's Day, on the eve of the Iraq War, Alice Walker, along with Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *The Woman Warrior*; Terry Tempest Williams, author of *An Unspoken Hunger*; and 24 others were arrested for crossing a police line during an anti-war protest rally outside the White House. Walker and 5,000 activists associated with the organizations Code Pink and Women for Peace marched from Malcolm X Park in Washington D.C. to the White House. The activists encircled the White House. In an interview with Democracy Now, Walker said, "I was with other women who believe that the women and children of Iraq are just as dear as the women and children in our families, and that, in fact, we are one family. And so it would have felt to me that we were going over to actually bomb ourselves." Walker wrote about the experience in her essay, "We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For."

In November 2008, Alice Walker wrote "An Open Letter to Barack Obama" that was published online by *The Root*. Walker addressed the newly elected President as "Brother Obama" and writes "Seeing you take your rightful place, based solely on your wisdom, stamina, and character, is a balm for the weary warriors of hope, previously only sung about."

Personal life

In 1965, Walker met Melvyn Rosenman Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights lawyer. They were married on March 17, 1967 in New York City. Later that year the couple relocated to Jackson, Mississippi, becoming "the first legally married interracial couple in Mississippi". They were harassed and threatened by whites, including the Ku Klux Klan. The couple had a daughter Rebecca in 1969. Walker and her daughter became estranged. Walker and her husband divorced amicably in 1976.

Writing career

Walker's first book of poetry was written while she was a senior at Sarah Lawrence. She took a brief sabbatical from writing while working in Mississippi in the civil rights movement. Walker resumed her writing career when she joined *Ms.* magazine as an editor before moving to northern California in the late 1970s. Her 1975 article "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston", published in *Ms.* magazine, helped revive interest in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, who inspired Walker's writing and subject matter. In 1973, Walker and fellow Hurston scholar Charlotte D. Hunt

discovered Hurston's unmarked grave in Ft. Pierce, Florida. The women collaborated to buy a modest headstone for the gravesite.

In addition to her collected short stories and poetry, Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, was published in 1970. In 1976, Walker's second novel, *Meridian*, was published. The novel dealt with activist workers in the South during the civil rights movement, and closely paralleled some of Walker's own experiences.

In 1982, Walker published what has become her best-known work, the novel *The Color Purple*. About a young troubled black woman fighting her way through not only racist white culture but also patriarchal black culture, it was a resounding commercial success. The book became a bestseller and was subsequently adapted into a critically acclaimed 1985 movie as well as a 2005 Broadway musical.

Walker has written several other novels, including *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (which featured several characters and descendants of characters from *The Color Purple*). She has published a number of collections of short stories, poetry, and other published work. She expresses the struggles of black people, particularly women, and their lives in a racist, sexist, and violent society. Her writings also focus on the role of women of color in culture and history. Walker is a respected figure in the liberal political community for her support of unconventional and unpopular views as a matter of principle.

Her short stories include the 1973 *Everyday Use*, in which she discusses feminism, racism and the issues raised by young black people who leave home and lose respect for their parents' culture.

In 2007, Walker gave her papers, 122 boxes of manuscripts and archive material, to Emory University's Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. In addition to drafts of novels such as *The Color Purple*, unpublished poems and manuscripts, and correspondence with editors, the collection includes extensive correspondence with family members, friends and colleagues, an early treatment of the film script for *The Color Purple*, syllabi from courses she taught, and fan mail. The collection also contains a scrapbook of poetry compiled when Walker was 15, entitled "Poems of a Childhood Poetess".

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Walker

Lesson Development:

Motivation:

1. (Quickwrite) Have the following prompt on the board and allow students time to respond in writing. Remind students to allow thoughts to flow freely, without editing for content or form.
Think about the objects in your home. Which objects have been passed down from other family members? Why do they continue to have a place in your home? If you were to move away to live on your own, which objects in your home would you want to take with you? Explain why for each object selected. How would your parent/guardian feel about you taking each item? Explain your response.
2. Allow volunteers to share responses aloud. Steer discussion toward the concept of heritage. Create a web that includes elements of a person's heritage. Then, write a definition for students to copy into their notes.

Procedures:

3. Introduce and distribute **Resource Sheet 1: Short story "Everyday Use."** Be sure to inform students that the story explores the theme topic of heritage and its role in everyday life. Review the literary concepts of point of view and direct characterization, and indirect characterization.
4. Instruct students to read the story independently and, as they read, underline or highlight information in the text that reveals character traits that are revealed both directly and indirectly.
5. Distribute **Resource Sheet 2: Characterization Chart**. Instruct students to use underlined/highlighted information to complete the chart. After students have completed work, ask for volunteers to share their responses with the class. Make "class chart" on the board or overhead transparency, encouraging students to add any missed information to their individual charts.
6. Direct students to browse websites to view quilts made by local African Americans in order to gain a visual appreciation of the complex craft of quilting. After viewing the various sites, students should select a favorite quilt and write a brief paragraph explaining the choice. Encourage students to comment on visual appeal as well as emotional reaction to design.

Websites to view quilts:

African American Quilters of Baltimore – www.AAQB.org,

www.CaroleLylesShaw.com

Maryland Quilt Artist Glenda Richardson – www.glendarichardson.com

Maryland Quilt Artist Sandra Smith – <http://www.sandrasmithquilts.com/>

Maryland Quilt Artist Dr. Joan Gaither –

<http://www.joangaither.com/p/my-american-series.html>

7. Distribute **Resource Sheet 3: Analysis/Discussion Questions Handout** to students and allow them to work in pairs/small groups to answer questions for Part A. Have groups share responses aloud as a guided class discussion, again encouraging all students to add new information to their own notes as appropriate. If your students needs higher level questions, visit these sites: <http://alinihatekenblog.wordpress.com/2008/03/28/discussion-questions-for-alice-walkers-everyday-use-1973/> and <http://www.k-state.edu/english/baker/english251/sg-Walker-EU.htm>
8. Distribute **Resource Sheet 4: Article of Literary Criticism Transparency** which contains literary criticism for students to read and annotate. Remind students of the annotation process and model via overhead projector using the first paragraph. (To annotate thoroughly, students should define all unfamiliar words, underline/highlight words and phrases in each paragraph that best convey the critic’s meaning, and paraphrase small sections of text in the margin until the entire criticism has been annotated.)
9. Instruct students to reconvene with small groups formed earlier in the lesson to discuss criticism and answer questions on Part B of **Resource Sheet 3: Analysis/Discussion Questions Handout**.

Assessment:

Introduce two-voice poem assignment on **Resource Sheet 5: Two-Voice Poem Assignment** and show **Resource Sheet 6: Model Two-Voice Poem**. If students are unfamiliar with this poetic format, a brief introductory lesson will be needed. The poem for this lesson will require students to assume the point of view of two characters from the story who independently share their perspectives on the events of plot, value of heritage, or ownership of the quilt.

Closure:

After peer and teacher evaluation, have students share two-voice poems aloud in front of the class with a partner of their choice. Students will first spend time practicing poems with their partners to ensure a smooth recitation.

Thoughtful Application(s):

This lesson could also be used as an introduction to literary criticism. Teachers could provide criticism from different critical approaches (feminist,

biographical/historical, philosophical, psychological, etc.) for students/groups to analyze and compare.

- This lesson could also be used as a study of symbolism; that is, redirect lesson's focus to the quilt and what it represents for each of the characters. What are the characters meant to represent?

Lesson Extension(s):

- Students could rewrite the short story from a different character's point of view.
- Students could complete a persuasive essay on the following topic: Which daughter should have the quilt?
- Students could complete a persuasive essay on the following topic: What is the true value of heritage: preservation and display or incorporation and use?
- Students could prepare notes for and participate in a class debate on either of the topics listed in extension numbers 2 and 3.
- Students could create a "quilt" that represents their own identity. Students should consider what important pieces of their own lives they would incorporate (CD covers, clothes, pictures, etc.) to show their own heritage and values.
- Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture to view the quilts on display. Students should select a quilt and imagine/create a fictional identity for the "owner" of this quilt in order to write/argue persuasively whether the quilt should remain on display or should be returned to the family for "everyday use."

RESOURCE SHEET 1

Everyday Use

by Alice Walker

For resource,

Open Hyperlink below

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug97/quilt/walker.html>

RESOURCE SHEET 2

“Everyday Use” Characterization Chart

CHARACTER	DOMINANT CHARACTER TRAITS	SUPPORT examples of <u>direct</u> characterization (quotes & page #)	SUPPORT examples of <u>indirect</u> characterization (quotes & page #)
MAMA			
MAGGIE			
DEE			

RESOURCE SHEET 3

“Everyday Use” Analysis/Discussion Questions

Assignment: Part A

After reading the short story, respond thoughtfully to the following questions.

1. From what point of view is the story told? From which character’s perspective?
2. What impact does the author’s use of point of view have on the reader’s understanding of plot?
3. What impact does the author’s use of point of view have on the reader’s understanding of and reaction to each character? Be sure to complete a response for Mama, Maggie, and Dee.
4. How does Dee think one’s value or appreciation of heritage/culture should be demonstrated? How does Maggie?
5. Analyze the significance of the story’s title.
6. With which view do you think the author agrees? What does this story have to say about heritage/culture overall? Support your responses with evidence from the text.
7. With which view do you agree? Explain.

Assignment: Part B

After reading and annotating the criticism, respond thoughtfully to the following questions.

1. How does the critic view the impact of Walker’s use of point of view on the reader’s understanding of plot?
2. How does the critic view the impact of Walker’s use of point of view on the reader’s understanding of /reaction to each character?

RESOURCE SHEET 4

Article of Literary Criticism Transparency

For resource,

Open Hyperlinks below and chose one

http://userpages.umbc.edu/~jamie/html/on_everyday_use.html

<http://www.lonestar.edu/13778.htm>

<http://www.ukessays.co.uk/essays/english-literature/everyday-use.php>

<http://philosophiles.net/2012/09/28/a-short-analysis-of-everyday-use-by-alice-walker/>

RESOURCE SHEET 5

Two -Voice Poem

Assignment: Students will assume the voices of two characters from the short story, “Everyday Use” in order to create a two-voice poem. “Voices” must reflect the speaker’s feelings about/interpretation of one of the following events/experiences:

- Short story plot events
- The value of heritage
- Rightful ownership of the quilts

Specifications

Your original poem must:

- Include two separate speakers who are each clearly identified within the first two lines
- Include at least nine shared lines that reflect similar thoughts/feelings
- Include lines that reflect opposing or individual thoughts/feelings
- Include a clearly identifiable event or experience
- Be complete in explanation. That is, tell a full story of each person’s impression, involvement, feelings regarding the chosen event.
- Include a total of 20-50 lines for each speaker
- Reflect a consistent voice for each speaker
- Make appropriate use of spelling, punctuation, and grammar

RESOURCE SHEET 6

MODEL TWO-VOICE POEM

**A Poem for Two Voices
I Heard It on the Bus One Day**

by Jeff Sapp

For resource,

Open Hyperlink below

[http://www.jeffsapp.com/jeffsapp.com/ACRM_files/LOTF%20Two-Voice%20Poem%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.jeffsapp.com/jeffsapp.com/ACRM_files/LOTF%20Two-Voice%20Poem%20(1).pdf)