ADAPTATIONS & RELEVANCE OF CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions
- *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel. What can be learned through letters, journal entries, and other firsthand documents that cannot be learned elsewhere? Why might Alice Walker have chosen to write her novel in this style?
- Since its origins as a novel, *The Color Purple* has been adapted into a critically-acclaimed film and Broadway musical. What benefit might there be in translating a literary work into alternate mediums? Discuss some considerations that need to be made when adapting a work between page, film, and stage. What about this story makes it so appealing and accessible for adaptation?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions
- *The Color Purple* centers on the lives of African American women at the beginning of the 20th century. Is the story still relevant in contemporary society? What universal truths can be learned from the story that transcend elements of gender, race, and setting?

WRITE: Epistolary Storytelling
1.) Students write journal entries or letters from the perspective of a character from *The Color Purple*. (Avoid Celie or Nettie.) During brainstorming, students should identify specific traits pertaining to their character, including important relationships, worldviews and attitudes, and any observed dialect.
2.) Based on their chosen character, students select a theme around which to develop their story. Their story arc should develop over the course of at least three journal entries or letters (a beginning, middle, and end). Suggested themes include: identity and transformation, love and relationships, overcoming oppression, gender roles, and divinity.
3.) Once students draft, peer-edit, and revise their stories, students compare and contrast their pieces with one another. They should focus on their creative choices, specifically characters and relationships, theme, use of language and specificity, and plot. Sharing should be open, positive, and productive.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT & RELATIONSHIPS

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions
- *The Color Purple* is a “story about love” and presents a cast of characters who exist within a variety of unique relationships. Brainstorm and discuss relationships in your life. How do we categorize and define these relationships? Do we act, dress, and speak the same way in each of these different relationships?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions
- Two connected themes throughout *The Color Purple* are identity and transformation. Compare and contrast both Celie’s and Mister’s journeys over the course of the story. How does their development as principal characters influence others and vice versa? Who has changed more? Identify specific character traits to support your argument.

PLAY: Bombs and Shields

Pre-Show: Participants stand around the room and identify two student “others”: one BOMB and one SHIELD. Once the facilitator says “go”, participants begin walking. Their objective is to keep their SHIELD between their BOMB and themselves at all times, without giving away who their “others” are. Remind participants they cannot stand still, but they may not run. After a minute or two, the facilitator calls “switch”, and players’ BOMBS become their SHIELDS and vice versa. The facilitator may call “freeze” at any point and ask players whether or not they have met their objective. To debrief, participants discuss universal concepts and truths that can be learned from this game, including conflict resolution, flexible thinking, secrets, relationships, objectives, obstacles, tactics, etc.

Post-Show: This time, participants choose and embody a character from *The Color Purple* throughout the action of the game. They identify their BOMB and SHIELD in the likeness of another character in the show. Participants must be able to justify, based on the character they have chosen to embody, why they have chosen their BOMB and SHIELD as they did.

To debrief, participants discuss their relationship choices, using show-specific evidence as justification.

CREATE: Musical Soundtracks

Modern musicals can be likened to epistolary novels, given the expository nature of songs and how they drive plot and character development forward. Students create a playlist for their assigned or chosen character. They should choose 3-5 songs that either reflect their character in some way or fit a particular pivotal moment for their character. They should be prepared to defend/explain their song choices, remarking on lyrics, composition, and performer/artist.
CENSORSHIP & CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions
• The Color Purple is a controversial piece of American literature that has been on countless banned book lists. Do you believe there are circumstances in which literature should be banned or inaccessible to the public, specifically young people? Why or why not?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions
• In the world of The Color Purple, how are gender roles defined? Which characters break free of this society’s beliefs about gender? Looking back to your pre-show discussions, in what ways do these depictions support or defy your own beliefs about gender roles?

EXPLORE: Like a Woman, Like a Man
Each student selects a copy of a famous piece of artwork. (These are to be kept a secret from other students.) Students mimic the subject’s individual poses in a tableau (a frozen picture that tells a story), while the other students write down a.) Whether they think the subject of the original, depicted artwork is a man or a woman, and b.) What words or images they associate with the pose.

Once everyone has time to brainstorm, they should share their thoughts on questions posed above. To debrief, students should discuss why certain poses are associated with men or women, and why artists chose to depict the figures in these ways. What stereotypes or cultural perceptions about body language have changed since this art was created? What has stayed the same? Participants should discuss what ideas we can learn from this game, including issues about gender roles, body image, and interpretation of art through acting.

Suggested artworks:
- “Girl with a Pearl Earring,” Johannes Vermeer
- “Young Lady in Green,” Tamara Lempicka
- “Les Raboteurs de Parquet,” Gustave Calliebotte
- “The Thinker,” Auguste Rodin
- “Portrait of Madame X,” John Singer Sargent
- “The Blue Boy,” Thomas Gainsborough
- “Young Lady in a Boat,” James Tissot

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STANDARDS
Common Core State Standards:
English Language Arts
RL.8-12.2 Themes
RL.8-12.7 Adaptation Between Mediums
W.8-12.3 Narrative Writing
SL.8-12.1 Collaborative Discussions

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards:
Theater
A.12.1 Attend & Evaluate Theatrical Performance
C.8.2 Research

TOPICS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION
1.) African American History: Farm Laborers to Entrepreneurs
2.) African American-Inspired Music
3.) Ebonics and Black Folk English
4.) Missionary and Aid Work Throughout History
5.) Classic Tropes: The Color Purple’s Church Ladies as Greek Chorus

MILWAUKEE REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
The Education Department offers backstage tours, pre- and post-show workshops and classroom residencies.

For questions or to schedule a workshop, please contact:
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See The Color Purple Play Guide page 9 for more information about the controversy surrounding the novel and its adaptations.