

Alice Walker

Writer, poet (1944-)

One of the leading voices in contemporary American literature, Alice Walker, has written poetry, novels, short stories, essays and literary criticisms. She began her life on February 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia as the eighth and last child of sharecroppers, Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker. Both her parents were storytellers, and Alice particularly remembers her mother as “a walking history of [her] community.” An accident at the age of eight left her partially blind in one eye, and even though it was somewhat corrected when she was fourteen, the accident’s effects were lasting. As an outcast, Alice began to see the world around her and the people so deeply involved in it. Her retreat into solitude included extensive reading and she also began to write stories.

Alice graduated as valedictorian of her class, and with a “rehabilitation scholarship” attended Spelman College in Atlanta eventually transferring to Sarah Lawrence in New York. During her senior year

at Sarah Lawrence, Alice wrote the poems that would be included in her first collection, *Once*. Also, during college Alice became more politically aware and active, participating in numerous marches and rallies in support of the Civil Rights Movement. Political activism remains an important part of her character to this day.

Upon graduation, Alice spent a short period of time in New York, but felt compelled to return to the South. She worked for a time registering voters in Atlanta and spent time exploring the South she came from. In 1969, Alice had a daughter Rebecca.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Alice’s first novel, was completed in 1967 with the assistance of a McDowell Fellowship, but was not published until 1970. Though some critics condemn the way black men are portrayed in the novel, no reader can deny the power and emotion conveyed through Walker’s brutally honest style.

In Love and Trouble and You Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down

explored more deeply the racism and sexism affecting black women.

In 1982 Alice published her most famous work, *The Color Purple* that won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. As well as these two prizes, she has also received the Lillian Smith Award, the Rosenthal Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Townsend Prize, Lyndhurst Prize and a Merrill Fellowship

Though her novels often portray black characters and the struggles and obstacles they face, Alice Walker’s works transcend race and gender and speak to the larger human condition.

Some thoughts from Alice Walker:

“Abortion, for many women, is more than an experience of suffering beyond anything most men will ever know, it is an act of mercy, and an act of self-defense.”

- Alice Walker, “White Man Say to the Black Woman?” *Her Blue Body Everything We Know* (1991), *The Right to Life*

“Deliver me from writers who say the way they live doesn’t matter. I’m not sure a bad person can write a good book. If art doesn’t make us better, then what on earth is it for?”

- Alice Walker, in Evelyn L. Beilenson and Ann Tennenbaum, eds., *Wit and Wisdom of Famous American Women* (1986)

“Nobody is as powerful as we make them out to be.”

- Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983)

“She say, Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to *share* God, not find God.”

- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982)

Alice Walker’s works include:

The Color Purple
Her Blue Body Everything We Know
Meridian
The Temple of My Familiar
Possessing the Secret of Joy
In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens
In Love and Trouble
Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems
The Third Life of Grange Copeland
Once: Poems
You Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down
The Same River Twice
By the Light of My Father’s Smile

Whole Woman’s Health
Women’s History Project

Alice Walker

Writer, Poet
(1944-)



“Yes, Mother...I can see you are flawed. You have not hidden it. That is your greatest gift to me.”