



# The Chicago International Film Festival

Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival  
Education Outreach Program Screening: *Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth*  
Director: Pratibha Parmar  
82 minutes, not rated  
In English

Please use the below synopsis, study ideas/questions and helpful websites to lead your students in preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the film, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays (either all or select) must be sent to Cinema/Chicago.\*

**Synopsis:** *Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth* tells the extraordinary story of one of America's greatest living writers, from her childhood in a family of Georgia sharecroppers to a distinguished career as an activist and author. The first black woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Color Purple*, Walker found herself at the center of a national controversy surrounding the book and the film adaptation's depiction of the relationship between black women and the men in their lives.

**Recommended for:** literature and poetry studies, history studies, humanities and cultural studies, journalism students, film and video students

**Appropriate for:** all students 6-12 grade

## Study Ideas/Questions:

1. Alice speaks about how her mother pushed for her children's education, despite the conditions in which they lived. Without her mother's conviction, do you think Alice would have grown to be the person she is? Why or why not?
2. Alice stayed in school, recognizing that going home would have kept her from reaching her goals and career aspirations, but she had to make difficult decisions to stay in school. When you look at your opportunities for the future (career, family, education), how do you intend to take advantage of them? What obstacles might you face, and how can you overcome them?
3. When discussing the Civil Rights Movement, the film brings up an important question: *Were the blacks fighting to transform America, or just to join it?* How would you answer this question? Are we still answering this question today?
4. When Alice and Melvyn were first married, their parents reacted strongly. Alice's family did their best to hide their shock, but Melvyn's mother considered her son dead. What does this say about acceptance of interracial couples in the 1960s? How have things changed (or remained the same) for interracial couples?

5. Alice claims that she would have used a gun on anyone attempting to hurt her daughter, despite the fact that she is a pacifist by nature. What is a pacifist? Does our instinct to protect ourselves and those we love outweigh our values and beliefs about violence?
6. Trying to live a “normal life” was difficult for Alice and Melvyn because of the prejudice and oppression they faced. Based on your personal experiences, what prejudices do non-white Americans still face today? How do you think that impacts their daily lives?
7. Drawn to *The Color Purple*, director Steven Spielberg felt that a black director would be a better fit, but he directed it anyway. Do you think a black director would have done a better job? Can directors tell stories that are not inherently their *own*, just as well as someone who might have a personal relationship with the material might? (Examples would include stories about men directed by women, white directors of black stories, black directors of Hispanic stories, etc.) Why or why not?
8. Alice received considerable backlash on *The Color Purple* from the black community, who claimed that it represented black families in a bad light. What do you think was the source of their anger and aggression? Do you agree with these people that we should only ever highlight the strengths of our own culture, or do you think it is important to also highlight the weaknesses? Why?
9. The negative response to *The Color Purple* was very painful for Alice. She stayed true to herself, kept writing, and never apologized for her work. Have you ever been criticized for standing up for something you believe is right? How did you handle that criticism?
10. Alice describes the process of writing as a “sustained period of bliss.” What form of artistic expression brings you bliss? Can you relate to that feeling she describes?

**Useful Links and Resources:**

Film website (includes video): <http://www.alicewalkersfilm.com/the-film/>

Official Alice Walker website: <http://alicewalkersgarden.com/>

Information about Cinema/Chicago’s Education Outreach Program:  
<http://cinemachicago.org/education/>

\*Schools who do not send in essay requirement will not be allowed to attend future Education Outreach Screenings.