



# Activity One

## Epistolary Novels

An epistolary novel is a novel written as a series of documents, letters, diary entries, and newspaper clippings. The word “epistolary” derives from the Greek word meaning a letter. The novel *The Color Purple* follows this form with a series of letters written mostly by Celie to primarily either God or her sister Nettie.

This form adds greater realism to the story through the use of a first person narration. Write an essay evaluating the use of the epistolary form. Explore reasons why this form is used to narrate this particular novel. Speculate how the story would be different if another form of narration was used.

Take your essay one step further by exploring the use of language in this novel. Explore how the use of language affects the narration of the story. How does it help? How does it hinder? How would the story be different if the language was different?

As an extension to this exercise, get into groups and have a discussion regarding the epistolary form. Discuss the questions highlighted above. Make a chart with the answers each member of your group come up with from your discussion. Then, present your findings to the rest of the class and compare your chart with theirs. What similarities did you find? What differences arose? Discuss your findings in a follow-up essay.





# Activity Two

## History of Africa

The novel, *The Color Purple*, paints a detailed picture of Africa, and alludes to some of its history. We learn from the novel that there were great cities thousands of years ago and that the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored. We know that

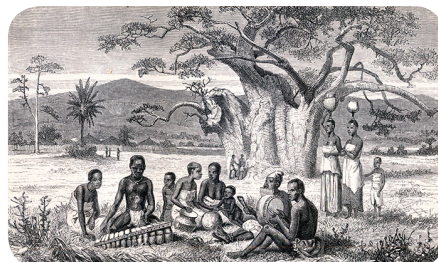
Egypt is in Africa, and that Ethiopia the characters read about in the Bible meant all of Africa. We also learn that the Africans who sold their own into slavery loved money more than their own sisters and brothers, and that the Africans sold into slavery came to America in ships.

Do some further research into the history of Africa. Validate the information learned in the novel and specify what information, if any, is incorrect. Explore the longer history of Africa and find similarities between its history from thousands of years ago, to a hundred years ago, and then to its present. What do you notice about its ongoing history?

Create a timeline highlighting key events in Africa's history. Make connections between recurring patterns in history. Then, write a brief essay exploring these patterns and why history may or may not repeat itself.



Daily life in ancient Egypt



19<sup>th</sup> Century Africa



Modern Africa



# Activity Three

## Missionaries



*The first missionary with the Native Americans*



*Missionaries in Africa*



*Modern missionaries in Africa*

"English have been sending missionaries to Africa and China and God knows where all, for over a hundred years." — Letter 57, *The Color Purple*

In the novel, *The Color Purple*, we are introduced to the lives and work of missionaries who travel to Africa in order to educate the people there of the Western world. Do some research into the history of missionaries. How were they formed? What were their missions? Where did they travel first?

Then, find information on today's missionaries. Do they still exist? If so, what do they do now? Where do they travel? What are their current missions? If not, when were the last missionaries active? Why did they stop?

Write an essay detailing the history of Missionaries. Explore their growth through the years, comparing their work at the beginning to now. Go one step further and investigate the history of the countries they traveled to. How did their influence affect these cultures? Give one example of how they were a positive influence, and one example of how they were a negative influence.

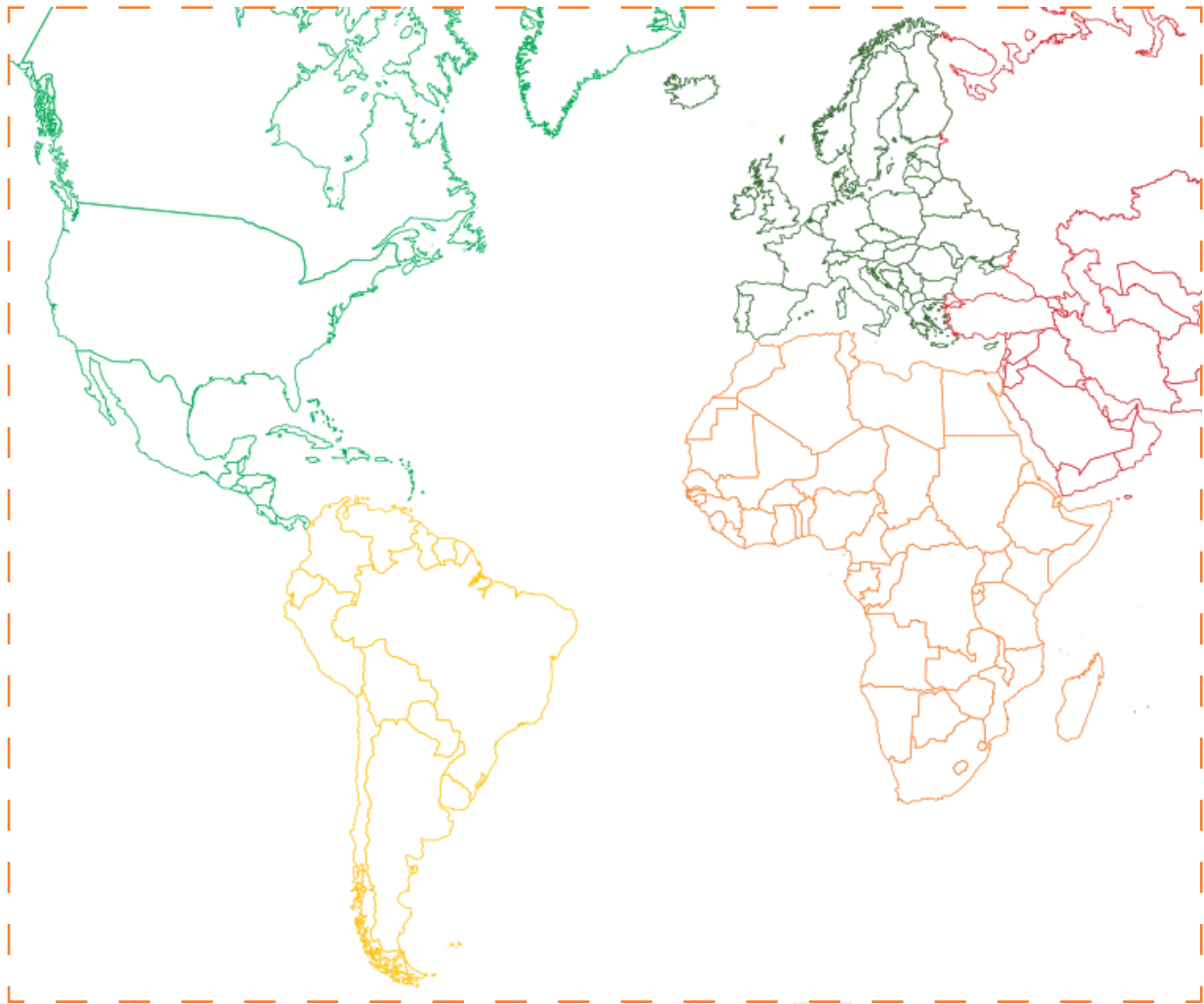
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# Activity Four

## Map their Route

In Nettie's letters, she specifies in detail the route she takes to Africa. Using the portion of the world map below, plot Nettie's route to Africa. For each stop, describe the place where Nettie is, using information provided in the novel. Then, research each place and write a brief bio of each stop. Make sure to include languages spoken, primary religion, and key components of their society/culture.





# Activity Five

## The History Behind Lynching

In the novel, *The Color Purple*, Celie learns that the man she knows to be her father is really her stepfather. Celie's real father owned a store in town that became so successful that the white storeowners became furious with him for taking away all the black business. As a result, the white storeowners burned down Celie's father's shop and lynched him.

Investigate lynching and its use and purpose during these times. Explore the following questions:

- What is its history?
- When and where was lynching used predominantly?
- What were the reasons for lynching a person?
- How was a lynched person perceived by the public?
- How would lynching a person be justified?

Write an essay drawing on the questions above. Explore the use of lynching in America's history. Why was it used as a form of punishment? How much importance was given to it in American culture? How does it compare to other forms of punishment throughout history?

Discuss your findings with a partner, small groups, or with your class.



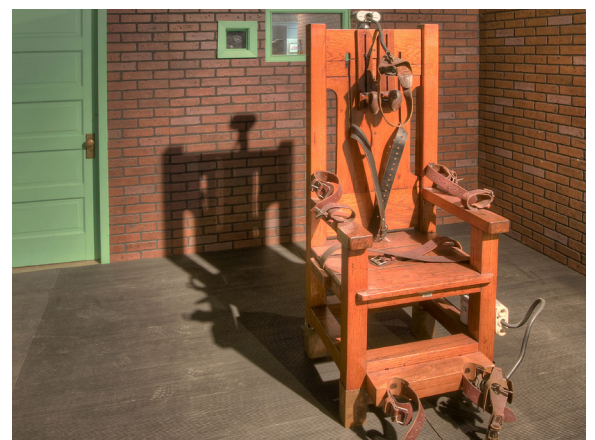
Guillotine



Gallows or Hanging



Pillory



Electric Chair



# Activity Six

## From Book to Film



*Shug returns with a husband*

The novel, *The Color Purple*, was published in 1982. In 1985, a film version was made. It was directed by Steven Spielberg and starred Whoopi Goldberg as Celie, Margaret Avery as Shug, Oprah Winfrey as Sofia, Akosua Busia as Nettie, Rae Dawn Chong as Squeak, Willard E. Pugh as Harpo, and Danny Glover as Albert.

Watch the film after you have read the novel. Compare the film to the novel. How true is the film to the novel? What are the differences? What are the similarities? What was left out of the film? Did the tone stay the same? Were the themes the same?



*Celie reading Nettie's letters*

Write a review of the film elaborating on the questions mentioned above. Make sure to use evidence from both the film as well as the novel to support your comparison. As an added option, post your review on a social film review site, such as Rotten Tomatoes.



*Nettie and Celie reunited*

Then, imagine making a current film version of the novel. Who would you cast in each role? What would you change from the original film? What would you include? How would your film version compare to the original? How would your version compare to the novel?