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THE CONCEPT OF BLACK WOMANHOOD IN ALICE WALKER'S FICTION

Diplomová práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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ABSTRACT

The position of black women in the history was always influenced by the society. Their social status has been harmed since the times of slavery and the way of recovery has not been easy. Even though the two novels analyzed in the practical part pictured the position of black women in different time periods, the same things were observed – black women are influenced by their background which usually binds them and their journeys of finding a freedom are full of obstacles. Nevertheless, once these women take enough courage to fight for their rights they can find the long-desired freedom.

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Introduction

"The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power."

(Angelou, 1970, p. 273)

This quote by Maya Angelou is the perfect beginning to this thesis which is going to observe Alice Walker and the concept of black womanhood in her fiction. The aim of this thesis is to look at the themes of assault, racism, sexism, and empowerment in two of Alice Walker's novels and it is divided into two parts – theoretical and practical ones.

The theoretical part consists of five chapters, each of them focusing on different theme. Chapter number one gives a short overview of African American literature from the Harlem Renaissance until the present. The second chapter takes a look at American feminism in general. This topic is followed by the theme of black feminism, black womanhood, and some of the struggles of black women in chapter number three. The fourth chapter covers Alice Walker, her life from childhood to her activist years, and also gives an overview of her literary work. And the last chapter looks at two African American writers and activists – Pauli Murray and Maya Angelou.

The aim of the practical part is to analyse two of Alice Walker's novels – *The Color Purple* and *Meridian*, the focus being on the women in these stories and their lives, oppression, and empowerment. Chapter number one covers the novel *The Color Purple* and looks at four women in particular – Celie, Nettie, Sofia and Shug. The main character Celie is analyzed through Maya Angelou's rules to success. The chapter also contains a lesson plan for this novel. The second chapter is structured similarly, however, only the main female character, *Meridian*, is analyzed, looked at from different angles and connected to Pauli Murray. This chapter also includes ideas of how this novel could be used at schools. The third chapter focuses on the comparison of these two novels from different perspectives and states Alice Walker's intentions.

Theoretical Part

1 The Era of Alice Walker

This chapter gives a historical overview of four different time periods that cover the life of Alice Walker. The guideline for this division was taken from the Norton Anthology of African American Literature written by Gates and McKay. Among these four time periods belong the Harlem Renaissance; Naturalism, Realism and Modernism; the Black Arts Movement and then literature since 1970. Even though Alice Walker was born in 1944, during the second period, it is important to know what was happening before that. Some of these subchapters also look at the position of black women because of the time settings of her two novels that will be discussed in the practical part.

1.1 The Harlem Renaissance (1919-1940)

1.1.1 The Movement and the Literature

The Harlem Renaissance is also known under different names, such as the New Negro Renaissance, the Negro Renaissance or the New Negro movement. Gates and McKay (1997, p. 929) agree with Wintz (in Kirshke, 2014, p. 5) and other scholars that the movement started in New York's district Harlem, where many African Americans settled when they moved to the North. This fleeing rather than moving happened right after the end of the Reconstruction era, which brought a wave of segregation. This segregation made living conditions for blacks in the South close to impossible and the industrial expansion, which started in the North, provided a lot of new job vacancies and many of the employers did not think twice about hiring black workers.

If the Harlem Renaissance is primarily viewed as a literary movement, then, the Civic Club Dinner of March 21, 1924 is an important point in the history of the Harlem Renaissance. This dinner was supposed to be a celebration of the writer Jesse Fauset for her novel *There is Confusion* (1924), but thanks to Alaine Locke who insisted on honouring African American writers in general rather than one writer, it turned out to be a transformative event with more than one hundred attendees. Among these guests were found African American writers and other black intelligentsia. White guests included predominately critics and publishers. Carl Van Doren,

an editor of Century magazine, in his speech called upon the writers in audience to contribute to this new literary age that was about to emerge in America. From the point of Civic Club dinner on, the phase of the Harlem Renaissance accelerated. (Wintz, C. D. in Kirshke A. H., *Women Artists in Harlem Renaissance*, p.5-6)

As it was already mentioned, the Harlem Renaissance emerged in Harlem, New York City. English (1999, p. 809) presents the statement of Alain Locke from his manifesto *The New Negro*, where he said that Harlem plays the same role in New Negro as did Dublin for New Ireland or Prague for Czechoslovakia. Wintz (In Kirshke, 2014, p. 9) also agrees that Harlem played a key role in this movement, but according to her it was more just an anchor for this movement, as it quickly spread across the United States, the Caribbean and other parts of the world. Only a few of the writers actually lived in Harlem, which is a district situated north of Central Park and east of Eighth Avenue or St. Nicholas Avenue. This district was initially built for the white middle class, but after some years the buildings became vacant so the realtors began to rent the apartments to black people coming up from the South.

It can be said that the Harlem Renaissance was the most important event for the intellectual and cultural life of African Americans in the twentieth century. It influenced literature, music, critical writing, musical theatre, and visual arts. It spread its roots before World War I and it continued many years beyond the 1930s. There is no ideological or stylistic standard that would define the movement. What unified the participants was taking part in common endeavours and their effort to give and an artist expression to the African American experience. Even though this movement was diverse, a few common themes emerged over time. It cannot be said that every writer focused on all of the themes but they usually touched on some of them. The first theme was the attempt to recapture the African American past, especially its urban experience, rural southern roots and African heritage. Some of the writers who touched on this theme were W. E. B. Du Bois, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston and many others. The second theme was an attempt to depict life in Harlem, some of the writers were even accused that they overemphasized crime, sexuality and life in the ghetto to win favour with white readers. F. C. McKay, R. Fisher or W. Thurman depicted these topics in their writings. The next theme focused on race. Every novel, play or poetry explored race and the impact of race and racism on African Americans. It was their way to protest against racial injustice. Some of the important authors were again Claude McKay, Langston Hughes or Countee Cullen. And finally, the Harlem Renaissance tried to incorporate all aspects of African American culture in its work. This means

that music became an inspiration for poetry or black folklore inspired novels and short stories. Langston Hughes was well known for using rhythms and styles of jazz and blues in his poetry. The Harlem Renaissance writers, artists, and musicians tried to express the African American experience through these themes. (Wintz, C. D. in Kirshke A. H., *Women Artists in Harlem Renaissance*, 2014, p.14-18)

1.1.2 The Position of African American Women

Bracks and Smith (2014, p. 17) claim that because of the opportunities that were created during World War I, African American women made great progress in industry. However, after the end of World War I, a new wave of racial hate against African Americans emerged and women lost their jobs in manufacturing and other places. Nevertheless, black women did not give up and rather became more active in trying to uplift their race. The only place they were able to find a job again was the domestic service sphere.

Among the things that defined and restricted black women at that time could be found: racism, over sexualized gender stereotypes, and inadequate intellectual abilities. However, black women were changing, they started getting married at a later age, they wanted to have control over their bodies (connected to the birth control topic which is discussed in later chapter) and they desired to get both a proper and higher education. Women that belonged to the middle class started to promote women's voices through organizations, among which belongs the National Association of Colored Women. As the Harlem Renaissance was at its heights, African American women started to be looked at more as someone who is able to fight for equal rights and justice. (Bracks and Smith, 2014, p. 17-19)

1.2 Realism, Naturalism, Modernism (1940-1960)

1.2.1 The Literature, Themes and Writers

During this period of time, African American writers were able to use many events as foundations for their work. Among these events can be found World War II, social revolution, or the second wave of Great Migration from the South to the North, during which more than five and a half million black people moved from the rural South to the industrial North. Realism can

be seen in reproduction of material reality, naturalism is often seen as an attempt to depict the frank reality and modernism is hidden in the function of language such as for example the “hip talk”, which is the result of people moving from the South. (Gates, H. L., McKay, N. Y., 1997, p.1319-1320)

One name that is worthy of mention is Richard Wright. This African American writer grew up in Mississippi as the son of a sharecropper and a housemaid. The abandonment of his father, the mental illness of his mother, and the violence in his family influenced his later life and work. The term urban realism began with Richard Wright himself and his novel *Native Son* (1940). As someone who moved from a rural area to an urban one, he was able to depict the signs, sights and sounds of the city. He was also able to combine urban realism with naturalism in this novel, when he depicted the harsh realities of living for African Americans in urban areas. Gates, McKay (1997, p.1320-1321) and Moskowitz (2008, p. 58) agree that Richard Wright paved the way to success for many others writers, such as Margaret Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks or Lorraine Hansberry. Throughout his life he supported many black writers and either directly or indirectly gave them opportunities to publish their works.

Among other writers in this time period can be found Ann Petry with her novel *Country Place* (1947), which is considered to be a non-negro novel due to the absence of black characters or black urban settings, James Baldwin’s semi-autobiography novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) or Margaret Walker and Gwendolyn Brook and their poetry. (Gates, H. L., McKay, N. Y., 1997, p.1323-1327)

1.2.2 The Position of African American Women

Erik McDuffie (2011, p. 126) brings up the speech of Ester Cooper Jackson which she delivered at the Fifth All-Southern Negro Youth Conference in Tuskegee, Alabama in 1942. In her speech, she focused on black women and their importance in helping to win the war and establishing democracy. She incorporated the thought that fighting for black women’s lives and freedom would help to defeat Jim Crow laws, colonialism, and fascism.

These years were exciting for black women radicals. Black communist women continued to fight for femininity and the practices of female respectability. Even though these women were fighting

for black women's rights, their position did not protect them from these fights against racism and sexism in their own Party. This led many women to reassess their relationships with the Communist Party. During the first World War, the economic status of black women improved and the number of African American women working in the industrial sphere tripled while the percentage of women working in the domestic sphere dropped from the sixty to forty. (McDuffie, 2011, p.127-128)

October 1951 was significant due to the act of some African American women, who wanted to speak to the U.S. attorney general about the government's activities to end racial injustice. These women were a part of newly formed organization called Sojourners for Truth and Justice. This group fought for the dignity of black women and against Jim Crow laws, Cold War, domestic policy, and colonialism. (McDuffie, 2011, p. 160-161)

One point that cannot be omitted is that this period of time was also significant for black women radicals also in their writings. They were able to link economic inequality, racial injustice, the protection of civil liberties, and decolonization to black women's concerns in their works. And on top of that, by prefiguring conclusions drawn by feminists in the 1970s they became a link between women writers in the early and late twentieth century. (McDuffie, 2011 p.166)

1.3 The Black Arts Movement (1960-1970)

1.3.1 The Movement and the Literature

Movement can be defined as an attempt to bring about fundamental social reform; it is based on collaboration. This is also true of the struggle for black freedom that was happening during the 1960s. Its main focus was set on changing the way in which black people were treated in the United States. African American artists and writers attempted to change the portrayals of black people in literature and the arts. Larry Neal (1968, p.29) saw this art as one that speaks to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to satisfy these needs and to accomplish these aspirations, the Black Arts Movement came up with a proposal to change the cultural aesthetic of the western world. Neal supported the merging of the Black Arts with the concept of Black Power. This helped to incorporate the political values of the concept of Black Power into the work of African American poets, dramatists, novelists, and many other artists.

Fine (1971, p. 374) described what it meant to be a Black Arts artist. Those artists were obliged to use past actions to evoke new revolutionary ideas, to have knowledge of recent political and social events in order to defend themselves from the enemy, and lastly, to depict the future that could become a reality after the fight was finished. According to the author, artists were supposed to be involved with black community and try to repair the damages visited upon them by the white community.

Gates and McKay (1997, p. 1797) state that one of the literary genres that was highly used during this period of time was poetry. The reason for it was simple - poetry does not require as much time to create as novels or short stories. The writers saw the need to create quickly and so they expressed themselves in poems. They believed poetry could be used in the campaign to set the black nation free. They formed a new type of poetry by combining sermons, music, and speeches. The verse was free, also described as jazzy, conversational or bluesy. Amiri Baraka, with his volume *Black Magic Poetry (1967)*, was one of the most influential poets at that time.

The Black Arts movement was meant to be widely distributed within the black community. Poetry and prose were written in simple language so they would not be misunderstood. Gwendolyn Brooks, Dudley Randall or Robert Hayed were considered as senior black writers but they decided to join this movement. Randall and Brooks were excited about the new writers and their energy so they offered to guide them during their work, and they also arranged venues where their works could be published. Nevertheless, not all of the writers were fond of this movement and they looked at it rather sceptically and as they saw it as an estrangement from the standard of art and culture. (Gates, H. L., McKay, N. Y., 1997, p. 1799-1800)

During this period of time, new periodicals were founded – *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Black Books Bulletin*, *Negro Digest*, *Soulbook* or *Amistad*. The major publishers of that time, such as Doubleday, Random House or William Morrow saw market possibilities in the art and so they signed some African American writers to profitable contracts. (Gates, H. L., McKay, N. Y., 1997, p. 1804)

1.3.2 Martin Luther King Jr. and Non-violent Resistance

James W. Wander Zanden (1963, p. 544) defines non-violent resistance as: *“a tactic well suited to struggles in which a minority lacks access to major sources of power within a so-ciety and to the instruments of violent coer-cion.”* This non-violent resistance was also known as “passive” and it was one of the most important “weapons” in the Negro movement against segregation. It was largely used during the movement that started in late 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, which focused on the segregation on city buses. The whole movement supported non-violent ways of fighting – sit-ins, boycotts.

One of the leaders of this movement was Martin Luther King Jr., whose biggest concern was with injustice done to any person. He fought against all types of oppression. If there was a majority oppressing a minority, either violently or non-violently, and the minority started to fight against it with violence, he disapproved of these actions. He simply did not justify violence and even though he was a part of the minority he was interested in the common good of all. (W. E. Steinkraus, 1973, p. 104)

1.3.3 Women of the Civil Rights Movement

Barnet (1993, p. 162) states that even though black women had to face a lot of indignities in the society structure they were often more than followers. A lot of them became leaders and were able to do the same jobs as black men. They often initiated protests, came up with different strategies or found resources. Among these women could be found teachers, sharecroppers, college professors, housewives, office secretaries, students, and many others. Even though, these women were defined by racism, classism, and sexism in the society, they still became activists. However, many of these women were forgotten and attention was only paid to the male leaders and activists of that time.

Here are three different reasons why black women of this movement were forgotten. The first one points to the problem of black women being connected to “pathologies” in their families – poverty, teen pregnancy, or illegitimacy. The second reason is that people focus on the middle class, which does not take into consideration the poor and working class women among whom most black women belonged. The last reason focuses on black females being depicted as

politically passive or followers rather than the movement leaders or people in charge. (Barnett, 1993, p. 164-165)

1.4 African American Literature since 1970

Griffin (2004, p. 165-166) states that the establishment of African American studies at the University of Pennsylvania during 1970s played a key role in the explosion of literary production by African Americans. She did not deny that black writers had been publishing their work for centuries, but she saw those thirty plus years as a time of institutionalizing and expanding this literature, as well as making a market for it and creating a structure for its study. According to the author, the changes could be made only because of what preceded it – the achievements of the civil rights movement, the concept of Black power, and the Black arts movement.

Literature of this time period focuses on the uncovering of African American history from the point of view of black writers. They point to the traditions of their literature and emphasize that it is important to understand slavery or try to highlight the legacy of earlier generations. One of the writers who brings up this legacy is Alice Walker and she does it either through her own works, where she focuses on black women and their abilities, or by reviving the works of some of the earlier writers, such as Zora Neale Hurston. (Gates, H. L., McKay, N. Y., 1997, p.2011-2013)

As stated in Gates and McKay (1997, p. 2013), the theme of slavery is no longer suppressed but rather it is used to understand the present. African American writers did not usually focus on mapping history in its linear development, but they looked to the past and tried to find things that would help them understand the present time. Toni Morrison with her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Ishmael Reed's novel *Flight to Canada* (1976) or Alice Walker can be found among these writers. Huge attention is also paid to the language that is used and Alice Walker tries to show the rich potential of Black English in her work. The use of music is not forgotten and August Wilson or Sherley Anne Williams still use blues and jazz to explore the black culture. However, the music's evolution allowed the writers of 1980s-90s to use rap and its rhythm.

2 Feminism in America

The aim of this chapter is to explain what feminism is, to cover its origin in America, and to look at three different waves of feminism throughout the American history.

2.1 What is Feminism?

As the title shows, the key question for this sub-chapter is: 'What is feminism?' The answer to this question can be found in many dictionaries. Susan Osborne in her work (2001, p. 8) shares the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics's definition: '*Feminism is a way of looking at the world, which women occupy from the perspective of women. It has as its central focus the concept of patriarchy, which can be described as a system of male authority, which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions.*' Chambers dictionary sees feminism as: '*A belief or movement advocating the cause of women's rights and opportunities, particularly equal rights with men, by challenging inequalities between the sexes in society.*' No different is a definition which is given in the Cambridge dictionary: '*the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.*'

Susan Osborne (2001, p. 9) and Margaret Walters (2005, p. 12) both quote the statement of Rebeca West, a British author, journalist and literary critic, who says that she has never been able to define what feminism is but she has been called a feminist many times, especially when she expressed sentiments that distinguished her from a doormat.

2.2 Feminism in America

The roots of feminism can be influenced by religious points of view. Deborah L. Madsen (2000, p.2) states in her work, that the position of women in colonial times was influenced by the views of Puritan colonists. For example, John Winthrop said that a real woman is pleased by her subjection to men and is honoured by his position under her husband's authority. Despite the fact that the position of women in the New World was still better than in the Old one, the situation was not ideal. Women tried to get a voice and to gain equality with men during the

Revolutionary Era, but they were ignored by the Constitutional Convention. Despite many attempts, women in America during 19th century were still not able to vote, when they got married they lost the power to control their property, their wages usually went straight to their husbands, they could not make decisions about their children, or even create a will or sign a contract.

2.2.1 Three Waves of American Feminism

American feminism can be divided into three waves – the first wave took place from the 1840s to the 1920s, the second wave is marked by the year 1960 and the third one emerged in the mid-1990s. The first wave is connected to the Women's rights movement which emerged from the American abolitionist movement, when a group of women began to fight for their own freedom. One of the activists and an important person was Margaret Fuller. She claimed that women need to fulfil their national and personal destinies, but also the spiritual destiny of humanity. She stated that men were those who made their ways to fulfil these destinies harder – with statements that women are the ones responsible for the fall of human race, coming from religion, or claiming that the human body is inherited from women as mothers but the souls come from father, which is the Roman conviction. (Madsen, D.L., 2000, p. 3-6)

Both Deborah Madsen (2000, p.6) and Eleanor Smeal in Hutchinson Inside American History (2006, p.19104t) mention the year 1848, which is important because of the Seneca Falls Convention. Women and also some men met in the city Seneca Falls and together they wrote the Declaration of Human Sentiments. The foundation for this Declaration was the Declaration of Independence. It proclaimed that all men and women are created equally, inalienable rights from the Creator. These rights are life, the pursuit of happiness, and liberty.

Two associations emerged during this period of time – the National Women's Suffrage Association and the American Women's Suffrage Association. Both of them merged in 1890. Their demands in addition to the previous ones were these: improvement of the working conditions for women and the reformation of the divorce law.

The Woman's Party in 1923 was the first one to propose the Equal Rights Amendment to Congress, pointing out that men and women should have the equal rights throughout the United

States. This proposition was not successful, but it laid out the groundwork for the second wave of American feminism. The Equal Rights Amendment was accepted in 1972 after all. It can be said that the second wave focused on an accusation of male sexism and the oppression of women in the domestic sphere. (Madsen, D.L., 2000, p. 6)

American feminists focused particularly on the theme of male violence. Susan Brownmiller published her rape study *Against Our Will* in 1975. A slogan came out from this popular study – “Pornography is the theory and rape is the practise.” She argued that pornography is a tool of intimidation used by all men against all women. This piece of work also mocked the way a rape is looked at and justified by statements such as: “if you are going to be raped you may as well enjoy it, or she was asking for it.” (Walters, M., 2005, p. 112-113)

According to Laura Brunell (in Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016) the third wave of feminism began during the mid-1990s. This wave profited from the first and second wave but the representatives criticized the unfinished situation which they felt was left by the second wave. Many of the women in this movement were daughters of women fighting in the 1960s-1970s. At the establishing of the Third Wave Foundation in 1997 stood, among others, Rebecca Walker, a daughter of Alice Walker who was a second wave activist. Authors of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards were brought up by second wavers. Together with many others, these women were raised to become self-aware, high-achieving and empowered. Even though they grew up with examples of women’s success they are still aware of the obstacles caused by sexism, classism and racism. Their weapons against these are inversions of sexist, racist, and classist symbols, answering violence with survivors’ stories or fighting with irony against patriarchy.

Third wavers were influenced by postmodernism and so they tried to reclaim and redefine all that influenced the ideas about womanhood, sexuality, beauty, gender, femininity, etc. Basically, their goals were to widen the sexual liberation, which was fought for by the second wavers. Firstly become aware of the way sexuality and gender identity were shaped by society, only then to discover one’s real gender identity. The whole wave included women of colour more than the two previous ones. They reacted to the stereotypical portrayals of women as weak, passive, faithful or on the other hand overbearing and demanding by defining them as women of power, assertiveness and in control of their own sexuality. As others, even the third wavers were criticized. Some of the writers claimed that the movement stopped being useful and others,

mostly those from the second wave, opposed them with assertions that they did not change anything concerning the issue of feminism. Around the year 2000, writers from outside and inside the wave reported that the third wave had ended. (Brunell in Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016)

3 Black Feminism, Womanhood and the Struggles

This chapter follows the theme of feminism and explains the reasons for black feminism. Later it looks at black womanhood, the theme of abortion/birth control and education in connection with African American women and explains why black women became silent.

3.1 From Feminism to Black Feminism

There were several reasons for the origin of black feminism. Bryson (p. 227) shared the attitudes of some white feminists. It could be said about several of them, that they were racist, even though they were mostly fighting against slavery and for the civil rights of African Americans. It went that far, that they did not allow black women to be a part of suffrage campaigns.

Another reason for the development of black feminism was that feminism around 1970s did not include the experiences of black women. There were white women who were fighting against sexual discrimination and then there were black women who had to fight against more things, such as racism, classism and also sexism. Another difference between these two groups of women was that white feminists usually came from the middle class while black feminists were mostly part of the working class, which made them focus on different things. Even though white feminists were proclaiming “we are all women”, black feminists saw this as just a way to avoid fighting for their specific needs and rights. Jennifer Rich (2007, p. 31) also quotes a part of manifesto released by Combahee River Collective group: *“Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, and that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else’s but because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression.”* From this statement, it is clear that black women did not find refuge in mainstream feminism, because the different types of oppressions that black women encounter every day were not taken seriously. In an attempt to make this situation better, a significant first step needed to be taken: to acknowledge these different black women’s experiences. (Rich, J., 2007, p.31-32)

3.2A Closer Look at Black Feminist Thought

Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p. 1-3) brings up the work of Maria Stewart, the first African American woman who gave a political speech in public. The year 1831 was written when Stewart asked the question of how long should the daughters of African be buried under the pots and kettles. She was not concerned with the reasons of oppressions anymore, she tried to urge black women to rise and fight for their independence. Stewart was persuading mothers to try to change their children's thinking. She was the first of the American black feminists who saw the need to unify women and to help them realize that there is a power in education and knowledge. However, many of the black women intellectuals were forgotten and undervalued, such as Zora Neale Hurston, but Collins reminds the readers about Alice Walker and her assertion that if this happens, scholars need to rebuild the legacy of these intellectuals and remind future generations about them.

Contemporary African American women try to reclaim black women's ideas. This involves many things. First of all, it includes discovering, analyzing and interpreting the works of black women's intellectuals who were not forgotten and of those who were silenced. Secondly, it also involves reinterpreting the works through new theoretical frameworks. Another important thing is to search for the expression of black feminist thought among women that are not seen as intellectuals, but who also contribute to this thought by self-conscious struggle on behalf of African American women disregarding the social location of this work. (Collins, 2000)

Patricia H. Collins states that it is not important to occupy one's thoughts with different titles for Black feminist thought, but rather to remember the distinguishing features of Black feminist thought. The first feature is that black women represent the oppressed group. If this oppression would not exist, there would obviously be no reason for black feminism. The second distinguishing feature comes from the linking of experiences and ideas. African American women face similar challenges every day, but that does not mean that they deal with it in the same way. Each different response itself describes the black women's group knowledge. Another feature concerns the contributions of black women intellectuals whose task is to ask questions and investigate the standpoint of black women and for black women. The fourth distinguishing feature is the need for change; Black feminist thought needs to be dynamic and evolve along with changing social conditions. The last feature involves the relationship to other projects,

which means that the struggle of black women is seen by African American women intellectuals as part of a bigger human struggle for dignity, social justice and empowerment. (Collins, 2000, 21-43)

3.3 Black Womanhood

Maria del Guadalupe Davidson (2010, p. 121) looks at the article *The Occult of True Black: Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies Womanhood* written by Ann duCille in 1994. DuCille asks the question why white men and women are so interested in black women. Davidson (2010, p. 121) brings up the exact quotation: “*interested in me and people who look like me (metaphorically speaking)? Why have we—black women—become the subjected subject of so much contemporary scholarly investigation, the peasants under the glass of intellectual inquiry in the 1990s?*” The author herself gives a possible answer to this question later in her article. She states that black women are not only seen as the second sex but also as the last one, due to the fact that they are the most oppressed one, the ones at the margin of the society, and the most different ones. With this in mind she points out that the last shall be first. This inversion happening in the postmodernism era happened in history before, to be more accurate, it happened in the early twentieth century. It was the time when black women were seen as an erotic icon due to their exotic look and also their role as mammies, where they were seen as the best ones in nurturing.

3.4 Black Women and Abortion/ Birth Control

Loretta J. Ross (in James and Busia, 2005) covers the approaches to abortion and birth control among African American women through the years 1800 – 1970. For the purposes of this thesis the years 1950-1970 are most important, but a short overview of the evolution of this subject will be given.

Ross in her essay explains that this subject of abortion is not very well covered by African Americans. She urges the need to record the history of activism in this field by black people because she believes that white women who spoke on this matter were not able to speak for African American women, simply because they did not share the same history as them. With this statement she supports the reasons for black feminism given by Jennifer Rich (2007), that black

women were not able to find refuge in white feminism. Ross is passionate about reproductive health activism also due to her own experience which she shares in this essay: *“Abortion rights and reproductive freedom are not intellectual abstractions for me, but have determined many aspects of my life. By the time I was in my twenties, I had experienced many of the reproductive crises consistent with being Black, poor and female in America. At the age of 15 I became a teen mother because of sexual activity coupled with sexual ignorance, not an unusual combination even today. I realized for the first time the lack of options available for pregnant teens in the 1960s. Because abortion was illegal and travelling anywhere else was not possible, I had my son in a very difficult pregnancy, after staying in a home for unwed mothers.”* (Ross in James and Busia, 2005, p. 145)

Ross (in James and Busia, 2005) explains the situation during the nineteenth century. Plantation owners were keeping track of the women’s reproduction cycles in order to maintain the class, race, and gender inequality. They tried to control both abortions and the methods of birth control to maintain the caste system. The slave masters’ labour force increased with the high fertility of black women. They demanded that teenage girls get pregnant, and in order for those girls and women be more willing to do this, they set the laws that pregnant women do the lighter work and receive certain “benefits”. Those infertile women were passed from one owner to the other, no one cared for them. Ross and Angela Davis (in Fried, 1990, p.17) agree that at that time, African American women used birth control and resorted to abortion not because they did not desire to bear a child but because of the social conditions in which their children would have to live and grow up. For them, abortion and birth control became a form of resistance to slavery.

With the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the next one, there was a decrease in the numbers of children born to black women. This fact indicates that women became aware of the spacing between having children and that it was essential to health, economics, race relations and racial progress. African American women saw themselves not as breeders, but as someone who helps to build a nation. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League, African American organisations of that time, in co-operation with leading Black newspapers, promoted family planning. Instruments such as pencils or hatpins were commonly used to induce abortions, this proves that those abortions were deliberate and not the outcomes of poor conditions. (Ross in James and Busia, 2005, p. 148-149)

Between the years 1950 and 1970, the underground movement was in motion. Since abortion was illegal, many women were looking for midwives or doctors who would induce the abortion. They did so regardless of the fact that abortion was expensive, it could cost between 50 to 75 dollars. Dr Dorothy Brown was the first state legislator who introduced a bill to make abortion legal in the 1950s, which was legalized nationwide in 1973. However, these years shifted away from the ideas of the beginning of 20th century. Even the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People moved from the idea of family planning to promoting the idea that women need to give birth to more children. Angela Davis (in Giddings, 2008) adds to what Ross says that the years between 1960 and 1970 were unfortunate for women, because some of the groups tried to push their needs into the background.

3.5 Black Women and Education

It can be said that the educational consciousness of African American women came from black women in the South. Lucy Craft Laney, one of the most famous educators from Georgia, claimed that it is the responsibility of educated black women to help to elevate the entire race. She mentioned that the salvation of the race is situated in kindergartens and primary schools, and that women are meant to teach in these grades. (Morton in Boukari, 2005, p. 2)

The years between 1895 and 1925 were pivotal for the higher education of African Americans. Scholars of those times agreed that the concept of education has to be centred on the trades and it is crucial for everyone to learn about themselves. It has to be mentioned that African Americans saw education as a means to escape poverty, and that it would help them to fight against social injustice and inequality. White institutions would not hire black people even though they were highly educated, but black institutions required from them the higher education to offer them a job position. During these times, African American women were the ones who stood at the crossroad of class, race and gender oppression. And even though it was hard, they tried to create a legacy of hard work. They dedicated themselves to the families and community and they fought against exploitation. (Boukari, 2005, p. 3)

Being able to attend secondary schools was not easy for black men nor for black women before the civil war. The opening of the St. Francis Academy, boarding school, in Baltimore was a huge event for the whole race. This academy was founded by the Oblate Order and was run by black

nuns. Since it was a school which let African American girls in, the news about its foundation spread quickly and females from all over the United States and Canada came to attend this Academy.

Boukari (2005, p. 5) also mentions Oberlin College situated in Ohio. It was one of the only significant colleges that gave the opportunities to black women to attend their courses together with white men and women before the civil war.

The oldest college which was founded for the purposes of black women's education was Spelman College which was established in 1881 in Atlanta, Georgia. The new discipline emerged and it was called Black Women's Studies. The scholars came to explain the need for this new discipline; they agreed that courses for Women's studies focused only on the lives of white women and the courses targeting Black studies emphasized the lives of black men. These were the reasons why African American women were experiencing racism from white women and sexism from black males and needed courses that would focus on them and their history. (Guy-Sheftall in James and Busia, 2005, p. 79)

3.6 Black Women and the Silence

One of the themes in black women's history which is analyzed the least is their sexual vulnerability and their lack of possibilities to protect themselves from domestic violence and rape, even though this theme is remarked upon the most. Hine (1989, p. 912) also suggests that rape and the threat of it caused the development of silence among black women. By this, the author means that black women hide the truth about themselves and their lives from their oppressors.

Broussard¹ (2013, p. 374-375) agrees with Hine (1989) that black women turned to the "code of silence" which was the result of things going on during the slavery and after it. Broussard also points out that this silence continuous until today. She sees this method as a method of defence which helped black women survive the times of slavery and the times of Jim Crow laws. By keeping things inside and not talking about them, black women protect two groups of people. The first one is the group of white men, who gained power from their silence and also from the

¹ <http://commons.law.famu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1067&context=faculty-research>

way that the justice system worked. The second group consisted of black men and the reason why black women are still silent is because they do not want to tarnish the reputation of black men any further. Broussard refers to the wave of negative reviews that Alice Walker received after publishing *The Color Purple*, where she portrayed her main heroine as a victim of sexual, physical and psychological abuse done to her by her husband and her father.

Black women also use this silence to protect themselves. They had to endure different types of abuse for centuries, and whenever they tried to point that out, two things usually happened. In the better cases, there was no justice done. In the worse cases, there were consequences for revealing the truth of their abuse. However, different ways of escaping the abuse emerged – either fighting back or running away, becoming activist or becoming silent. (Broussard, 2013, p. 386)

4 Alice Walker

The aim of this chapter is to focus on Alice Walker and her personal life and career. The first subchapter covers her childhood, college years, and activism. The second subchapter looks at her literary work and the last chapter explains the term *womanism* which Alice Walker is an author of.

4.1 Biography

Melanie L. Harris states (2010) that Alice Walker's life can be divided into three phases, during which her values and morals were shaped and influenced her activism and writing career. The first phase is her birth and childhood. The second one covers her early activism and college years. The last one focuses on her mothering and professional writing.

4.1.1 Birth and Childhood

Alice Walker was born as the eighth child on February 8, 1944 to Minnie Grant Walker and Willie Lee Walker, in Eatonton, Georgia. Her great-great-great grandmother came to Eatonton during 1800s, witnessing the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction era. Walker pays a tribute to her in her writings from which can be seen that remembering her own roots and heritage influenced her later writing when she tries to recall the voices of women who were previously silenced. (Harris, 2010, p. 16)

Nelson (2002, p. 360) states that when she was only eight years old, an accident happened to her which influenced her later life. She was shot with a BB gun by her brothers and she lost sight in one of her eyes. Harris (2010, p. 24) adds that she was forced by her brothers to keep silent about how it happened. By the time the truth about the accident came out, it was too late for Walker; her emotional and psychological state had already been damaged. After the accident, she drew back from her friends and became a loner.

4.1.2 College Years and Early Activism

Because of her handicap she received a scholarship and was able to study at Spelman College in Atlanta, where she stayed for two years. Walker's time at this college was not easy, and she decided to transfer to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, where she got the opportunity to spend a summer in Africa. After receiving her B. A., she soon left to join the civil rights movement in Jackson, Mississippi. While there, she met a Jewish man Mel Leventhal who also worked with this movement. They returned to New York, where Leventhal finished his law school. Afterwards, they got married and moved to Mississippi, where interracial marriages were forbidden at those times. (Nelson, 2002, p. 361)

The reason for her becoming an activist arose when she was growing up. While watching TV, she realized that no black characters appeared on the shows. This led her to think less of herself, almost as if she was not alive compared to the white people. Something changed when she watched Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. being arrested in Alabama and the picture of empowerment and self-esteem shaped her life's activism. She joined the civil rights movement when she was only sixteen years old. (Harris, 2010, p. 29)

4.1.3 Mothering and Professional Writing Years

Alice Walker and her husband had one daughter together, Rebecca Walker. There were many things preceding Walker getting pregnant with Rebecca. She suffered depression from everything that was going on with the movement and giving herself hard deadlines for her new work. The decision to have a baby came with the fact that her husband could have been sent to prison by refusing to fight in the Vietnam War and not being a "family" man. However, the fact that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and her hope for non-violent fight dissolved, she lost her baby. Their daughter was born a year later, a few days after Walker finished writing her second book. While Walker and her husband were working hard, they tried to keep their marriage together but did not succeed and got divorced after nine years of marriage. (Harris, 2010, p. 39-40)

Walker's time in Mississippi was a crucial time for her writing career, since she established herself as a writer based on a novel, collections of short stories and poetry that she created there. (Nelson. E. S., 2002, p. 360-361)

Gates and McKay (1997, p. 2377) also point out that Alice Walker founded her own publishing company named Wild Trees Press which was active during the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s. There she helped to publish works of many writers; among them was also California Cooper. It cannot be denied that Alice Walker was and still is one of the major African American writers and feminists born in the 20th century.

4.2 Writing Career

Alice Walker is one of the best known African American writers of the 20th century. Gates (1997, p. 2375-2377) and Smith (2015, p. 158) give an overview of her novels and collections of poems and short stories.

4.2.1 Novels

In her novels, Walker tried to point out the needs of black women and claimed that it was a necessity for them to start a feminism that also focused on their needs as African American women and one that would help them to connect with other black women. She was often criticized for her style and straightness, the most for her novel *The Color Purple* (1982). Ishmael Reed published a book *Writin' is Fightin'* (1988), in which he reacts to this problematic style and accuses black female writers of depicting black men in negative ways. Reed was also worried with the way that this book was later filmed by Steven Spielberg. He was not the only one reacting to Alice Walker and her work, Trudier Harris in his piece of work *On the Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence* (1984), stated that the way in which Walker's feminism was praised after publishing this novel, made it impossible to give a constructive criticism of this work. (Byerman, K., 2006, p. 76)

Nevertheless, the novel *The Color Purple*, published in 1982, won Walker the Pulitzer Prize as well as two other awards – the National Book Award and American Book Award. She became the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize. The criticism continued, as one

group of critics claimed that this book was more representing white feminism, because of its portrayal of incest, domestic abuse, and lesbianism. Another group of critics praised her for capturing the sexual politics of black life in a clear and courageous way. (Gates, 1997, p. 2375)

Walker committed to explore the lives of black women as an African American woman writer. She talked about this issue in an interview with Mary Helen Washington in 1973, where Walker said that there are three types of women missing from literature in the United States. The first type according to her, are women who were abused physically and emotionally. The lives of these women were limited and by their life circumstances they were driven to madness, as two of Walker's characters from her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970). The second type of women are those abused psychically and estranged from their own culture. And the last, but not least type of women, are those who achieved some kind of wholeness in their lives even though they also suffered oppression. The representatives of these women are Shug and Celie from her novel *The Color Purple* (1982). (Gates, 1997, p. 2375) In the novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), Walker portrayed the themes of racism, sexism, and unemployment and their cruel impact on women's lives. Her years spent as an activist of civil rights movement influenced her novel *Meridian* (1976).

4.2.2 Short Stories

Petry (1989, p. 12-26) gives a review of two of Alice Walker's major collections of short stories *In Love & Trouble* (1973) and *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981). This overview tried to give an evaluation of Alice Walker as a short story writer and to answer questions that were asked in connection to these two collections, especially why there is such a large disparity between these two works.

One of the epigraphs in the *In Love & Trouble* (1973), which was an extract from Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966), helped explain that Walker focuses on women that were really in love and trouble, because of the relationships, their self-image, and the fact that society did not care about them. All of the mental suffering of female characters, all examples of bad marriages which ended up in women attacking their husbands, was just a way of bringing to light that society refuses to accept the fact that women became suicidal and homicidal due to their position. Nevertheless, Walker was able to lead most of the female characters in each of the short

story to the recognition that struggles and crisis can help one to grow. And the women of these stories really tried to face their life situations and to deal with them, even though it seemed sometimes, that they were insane, anti-social, or ignorant.

Johnson (1996, p. 223-224) and Petry (1989, p. 14) agree that there was a big shift between the female characters from *In Love & Trouble* (1973) and women in *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981). The second collection portrayed females whose courage would not be crushed, who would not be kept down but when down they would rise again. They were women who struggled a lot but were not defeated nor oppressed. They knew their value, beauty, and authenticity, and they insisted on getting their own needs met. However, Petry (1989, p. 22) and Bradley (1984) were in agreement that the second collection of short stories was not as successfully written as the first, for which according to Gates (1997, p. 2376), Walker won the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters' Rosenthal Award.

4.2.3 Poetry and Collection of Essays

At the age of twenty-three, she wrote her first collection of poetry which she entitled *Once* (1968), with this she committed to explore the lives of black women as an African American woman writer. This piece of work was influenced by her time in Africa, where she went during the summer while she attended Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Walker came back home pregnant, and abortion was still illegal at that time. She knew that her family would have to face the shame this would cause, so she decided to commit suicide. However, she changed her mind and published this book. Her second collection was titled *Revolutionary Petunias* (1973) and Walker focused on the theme of resistance that African American women have against injustice towards them. (Gates, H. L., McKay, N. Y., 1997, p. 2375-2376)

Munro (1984, p. 161) states, that during her life, Walker, continued to explore the oppressions, the loyalties, the insanities and the victories of African American women. Gates and McKay (1997, p. 2377) agree with this statement and present the collection of essays *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), as a best example of this. Munro further presents that the collection is put together from thirty six different essays, from which thirty four were published in numerous magazines during the years between 1966 and 1983. According to her, these essays are evidence of Walker's humanism and wit.

McMillan (2004, p. 107-108) praises Walker and her ability to write on multiple levels, which she demonstrated in the collection, where she used personal testimonies and also literary criticism without letting the personal part fall into essentialism. Moreover Munro (1984, p. 161) is impressed with the range displayed in these essays. Walker dealt with the work of the most known writers and evaluated the work of Civil Rights Movement as well as she tried to lift up the voices of less known people e.g. Mathilda Moseley, who knew Zora Neale Hurston in person.

4.2.4 Womanist/Womanism

Gates, McKay (1997, p. 2377) and Munro (1984, p. 161) could not omit one more important thing about the collection of essays *In Search of our Mother's Gardens* (1983). By writing these essays and publishing them together, Alice Walker coined a new term *womanism*. According to Gates and McKay, she replaced the word *feminism* and simply replaced it with a word that was derived from the folk expression *womanish*. Munro states that Walker defined the collocation *to be a womanist* as to be courageous, outrageous, brave, deliberate, and to always speak one's thoughts even when those ideas are not considered to be appropriate by society. Walker (1983, p. xi) herself gives definitions of the word *womanist* at the beginning of the collection *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*. According to her, the first meaning is: the black feminist or a feminist of color. The second one is: a woman who can love other women, either sexually or non-sexually and appreciates women's culture, strength, and emotional flexibility. The third definition which Walker gives is: *womanist* loves dance, music, the spirit, the moon, struggle, love, food, roundness and all of this regardless. For the last meaning, she says: "*Womanist is to feminism as purple to lavender.*"

5 Significant African American Women

The aim of this chapter is not to mention every important African American Woman who influenced black women's lives in America but to look at two particular women – Pauli Murray and Maya Angelou. The reason why these two women were chosen is connected to the practical part where the main characters of those two novels will be analyzed or connected to these women.

5.1 Pauli Murray

Kapai (in Nelson, 2002, p. 286) states that Pauli Murray was born in Baltimore in 1910 and died in 1985. Her mother died when Murray was only three years old, and her grandparents were already in their seventies so the work of raising her fell to her two aunts, her mother's sisters. Her grandfather fought for the Union and participated in opening schools during the Reconstruction era. However, her grandmother was born as a slave and brought up by the Smith family. This fact made her hesitant about her feelings toward her ancestors. She was proud of her grandfather but felt ashamed of the situation her grandmother was brought up in.

Murray was an intelligent girl and her desire to receive higher education caused her to move from the South to New York. Her financial situation was not ideal, but her determination helped her to earn a bachelor's degree from Hunter College. Later, she applied for studies at the University of North Carolina, where she was turned down because of her race. A similar thing happened, when she submitted her application to Harvard Law School, where she was not enrolled because of her sex. This did not stop her and she later pursued her studies at Howard University and later on at the University of California where she earned her master's degree in Law in 1945. Due to her own experiences with discrimination based on race and gender, she became an advocate for justice. She was one of the founding members of the National Organization for Women and she also worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. She was the first African-American woman who earned a doctorate law degree at Yale University and also the first African-American associate at a New York law firm. Among other "firsts" she also became a deputy attorney general of California and the first woman Episcopal priest. (Kapai, L. in Nelson. E. S., 2002, p. 286-287)

When it comes to her literary work it can be also said that she accomplished a lot. In 1956 her autobiography and memoir *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* was published. It is narrated by Murray herself as a child. She later said that the goal of this work was to search for her own identity and to face the ghosts of the past. Thirty years passed before she published the continuation of this work which was *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage* (1987). It was re-printed after a few years under the title *Paul Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet* (1989). She stayed active in her writings during those years between these two autobiographies. Her main focus was set on poetry, prose, sermons, and academic writings. Nevertheless, she was an expert on legal writings. Murray's work *State's Laws on Race and Colour* (1950) was so powerful that it earned a title "the bible of civil rights movement." She was torn between her passion for creative writing and the necessity for her to be active in social action. Still, she was able to write and publish her poetry volume *Dark Testament* (1970), where she combined her activism as a lawyer with her passion for literature. She became inspiration for others and in 2011 Pauli Murray Project initiated the Youth Prophecy Poetry Contest, which focuses on discovering students writing poetry about social justice. This project's goal is to encourage young people to fight for their rights and for a better community by learning about Pauli Murray and her life and work. (Winner, L. F. in McMillen, S.G., Gillespie, M., 2015, p. 340-341)

As Haney (1988, p. 75) states, Pauli Murray ended up in jail for her activism in 1940 triggered by her being treated horribly on the bus, but the way she treated the jailers and other prisoners revealed her values which focused on non-violent means of protest. With this attitude she preceded the later leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Haney (p. 75-76) also quotes Murray herself: "*Much of my life in the South had been overshadowed by a lurking fear. Terrified of the consequences of overt protest against racial segregation, I had sullenly endured its indignities when I could not avoid them. Yet every submission was accompanied by a nagging shame which no amount of personal achievement in other areas could overcome. When I finally confronted my fear and took a concrete step to battle for social justice, the accumulated shame began to dissolve in a new sense of self-respect. For me, the real victory of that encounter with the Jim Crow system of the South was the liberation of my mind from years of enslavement.*" Pauli Murray's life is a story of people who struggle to live with dignity and justice, living in the cruel system of racism and segregation. It is also the story of an inevitable encounter with white people and the system, avoidance as well as the story of protest, pride, and dedication to liberation from oppression.

5.2 Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou is considered to be one of the most inspirational and honest writers. She was born on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri as Marguerite Johnson. One of the relatives that influenced her deeply was her grandmother. From her Angelou learned that she can control her own destiny and can be proud of herself despite the racism she experienced and the poverty she grew up in. The years spent with her grandmother equipped her and she became more educated than her peers, being ahead in mathematics and loving literature. When she was visiting her mother at the age of 8, she was raped by her mother's boyfriend. He was sent to trial but was able to get out of jail, however he was found dead right after that, probably beaten to death. This impacted Angelou and she started to believe that her words have the power to kill. (Nelson, 2002, p. 10-11)

Amy Alexander (1998, p. 170) adds that Angelou described her abuse in her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969)*, where she was completely honest about the rape and because of that description society was outraged. Yet, it still remained one of the most influential autobiographies ever. For years after the incident, she did not talk about it with anyone other than her brother. Years later, one lady encouraged her to read literature and poetry aloud, and at that point, Angelou gained her voice back.

During her teenage years, she had to move back in with her mother who lived in California. There she attended Washington High in San Francisco, where Angelou's English teacher discovered her talent and nominated her for a scholarship at the local theatre's art program. She started to sing, dance and, act. She also started to become a dignified woman. At the age of fifteen after a month living on her own, she laid the roots for her own philosophy – to be willing and to continue to learn as much as possible and to be able to forgive oneself and others for their shortcomings. (Alexander, 1998, p. 172-173)

Nelson (2002) and Alexander (1998) agree that her career was diverse. She was a writer, dancer, director, editor, singer, lecturer, and also civil rights activist. Alexander (1998) states that Angelou became an activist after she got married and returned back to America in the sixties. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asked her to become the head of the northern office of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and she agreed to it. Later in life, she became a professor at

Wake Forest University in North Carolina where she became a teacher of writing, poetry and folklore in America. Amy Alexander (1998, p. 175) cites Angelou's word from an interview: *"I have forgiven myself. I'll make change. Once that forgiveness has taken place you can console yourself with the knowledge that a diamond is the result of extreme pressure...Pressure can change you into something quite precious, quite wonderful, quite beautiful and extremely hard."*

Clay Boykin shares on the webpage mensfellowship.net² a video made by Evan Carmichael. In this video, the author depicts Maya Angelou's ten rules for success taken from interviews with her throughout her life. The list consists of these suggestions that anyone can follow:

- 1) Just do right!
- 2) Be courageous
- 3) Love
- 4) Laugh
- 5) Be a blessing to somebody
- 6) Turn struggles into triumphs
- 7) You are talented
- 8) Learn to say no
- 9) Always do your best
- 10) Keep rising

² <https://mensfellowship.net/maya-angelous-top-10-rules-for-success/>

Practical Part

The practical part of this thesis has three aims. The first one is to look at two novels, *The Color Purple* and *Meridian*, and to analyse the black female characters. These characters are analyzed through different themes, considering their lives' experiences e.g. rape, education, knowledge, African heritage, empowerment, use of their voice, ignorance of history, and activism. The second aim is to find a way how these authentic texts could be used in English lessons at secondary schools. This goal is accomplished by creating lesson plans for these two novels that can be used as a part of English lessons at upper secondary schools. The last aim is to compare these two novels using some of the themes that Alice Walker used while writing them.

1 The Color Purple

Alice Walker wrote this novel in 1982 and it is set during the first half of the twentieth century. This chapter gives an overview of the plot and later it focuses on four women characters from this book – Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug. Each of these characters is looked at differently, due to the fact that they are going through different things in their lives. Themes that appear during the analyses of these characters are – rape, education/knowledge, empowerment, African heritage, and racism. Those themes are chosen because of the information that they convey concerning black womanhood. Celie, as the main heroine is also looked at through Maya Angelou's rules for success.

1.1 Plot

The whole story is centered on Celie, a fourteen year old black girl who is growing up in Georgia. Through her life, she has to go through painful things – being raped by her father repeatedly and later being abused by her husband – Mr. _____, giving birth to two children that are taken from her by her father, who later in the book turns out not to be her biological father, and sacrificing herself for her younger sister Nettie.

During her married life, she comes across Harpo, her husband's son and his wife Sofia, with whom she has some things in common, but they both act differently. Shug Avery appears in the

story, she is the mistress of Mr. _____ and treats Celie horribly, but later they bond and Celie starts developing deeper feelings for Shug. She helps Celie to fight for herself and reveals to her that Mr. _____ has been keeping Nettie's letters from her. From those letters, we learn that Nettie went to Africa with a missionary couple Corrine and Samuel. She finds out that their children are actually Celie's children. This point was crucial for Celie, and she decided to leave her husband and to move to Memphis with Shug. There she opens her own business – sewing pants and becomes more independent. Once she comes back to her home town for the funeral of Sofia's mother, she finds out that Mr. _____ has changed and they started to get along better, being connected by their love for Shug. The novel takes us through different events that are ended with Nettie coming home from Africa, with her now husband Samuel and Celie's children.

1.2 Celie

Celie is the main female character of this book and most parts of the novel are written from her perspective. The first thing that is important to look at is Celie and the theme of education. The readers may observe from Celie's language that she is not well educated, for example she is misusing the plural "*I don't even look at mens.*" (p. 7) or is not creating sentences properly "*Our new mommy she see it too. She in her room crying.*" (p. 9). Another reason why the readers might think she is not educated is because the whole novel is written in the form of letters and in history letters were seen as a symbol of uneducated people. Also, her father himself says: "*She ain't smart either.*" (p.10). Well, this statement could be seen as a bias one, since he obviously does not care about her. He is just using her for his pleasure. However, in no time, readers come across a passage, where they learn, that Celie stops going to school, when her teacher Miss Beasley comes to their house and tries to talk to Celie's father: "*Next thing I know Miss Beasley at our house trying to talk to Pa. She say long as she been a teacher she never know nobody want to learn bad as Nettie and me. But when Pa call me out and she see how tight my dress is, she stop talking and go.*" (p. 12). This simple passage convicts readers that a chance for education was taken from her when she became pregnant, however, it uncovers a quality of Celie's, and that is, that she longed for an education. She also explains why she thinks an education is an important thing for her: "*Us both be hitting Nettie's schoolbooks pretty hard, cause us know we got to be smart to git away.*" She saw the way out of her misery, the life that she was forced to live, in getting educated. This view of education is also supported by many scholars and as it was stated in the theoretical part of this thesis, Boukari (2005) also sees it as a way for African Americans to fight against injustice.

The second theme to look at when analyzing Celie is the rape. The novel begins with a description of Celie being raped by her father. She is threatened by him to not say anything to anybody; otherwise he would kill his mother. She is in a tough position. Her mother is too sick to help her, and she would probably not be able to help her even if she was healthy. There is also no mention of other relatives who would be able to stand up for her. With her saying: "... *I don't ever git used to it.*" (p. 3) it is really obvious that the situation she is in right now is hopeless. And as the readers can see, it is also an example why African American women were silent about being raped – simply because they were threatened to. Someone may think that for a woman being raped it is a bad enough situation, but when somebody becomes pregnant, twice, and the babies are taken away from her, the situation is probably becoming even more hopeless. "*He took it. He took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods. Kill this one too, if he can.*" ... "*He took my other little baby, a boy this time.*" (p.4-5).

However, even though the situation seems hopeless, the readers do not see Celie giving up on life at this point, although she is not fighting for herself either. Maybe it is because she knows that her father has the power over her, maybe it is because she does not know how to "fight and get out of this situation". Although the readers might notice Celie's good character quality, when they see her determination to protect her little sister Nettie from their father. "*I keep hoping he fine somebody to marry. I see him looking at my little sister. She scared. But I say I'll take care of you. With God help.*" (p.5). This willingness to protect her sister is seen again, when father's new wife is sick "*I ast him to take me instead of Nettie while our new mammy sick... I tell him I can fix myself up for him... He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway.*" (p. 9). Here, she is not "just" raped but even beaten in order to protect her sister.

The third theme in the analysis of Celie is empowerment – "growing up", being educated by life even though she was not given an opportunity to finish her school studies. At the beginning of the novel, she is a girl that is being raped by her father, later married to a man who beats her and uses her only as a servant. This man even invites his mistress to come live with them in their house.

The first thing that starts to slowly change Celie's life is the arrival of Shug Avery. At the beginning, Shug did not treat her well: "*She look me over from head to foot... You sure is ugly, she say, like she ain't believed it.*" (p.42). Later they became friends and Celie started developing deeper feelings for Shug. The second thing that influenced her was Celie's new

hobby – quilting. She got really good at sewing which also influenced her life later in the book. As it may seem, the most important, turning point in Celie’s life appeared when she found out that Mr. _____ had been keeping her sister’s letters from her. It is a moment where she also expresses anger about the injustice against her: *“How I’m gon keep from killing him, I say.”* (p. 122). And this is the time, where the readers can see that her hobby of sewing influenced her life and probably saved her from prison: *“And every day we going to read Nettie’s letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think.”* (p. 125). In one of Nettie’s letters, Celie is encouraged by her to fight for herself and leave Mr. _____ *“You’ve got to fight and get away from Albert. He ain’t no good.”* (p.107) However, we do not see her take actions in this direction for another sixty pages of the book. It is at this point, where even Shug decides that she will take Celie with her to Memphis: *“Celie is coming with us, say Shug.”* (p.170), that Celie herself takes action to stand up against her abusive husband and to fight for herself: *“It’s time to leave you and enter into the Creation....You took my sister Nettie away from me, I say. And she was the only person love me in the world.”* (p.170). Two things can be observed in this statement. The first one is that she was also encouraged by Shug to leave her husband, and Shug took the first step towards leaving for her. It is a picture of one woman being encouraged by another woman, and a picture of Celie rising and fighting for her independence, which was also a key thought of Maria Stewart’s political speech from 1831. The second thing we can notice is the bond between Celie and her sister Nettie. And the fact that she was separated from her sister gave her enough power to stand up against Mr. _____ and to fight for herself.

Another thing that helped Celie with empowerment happened in Memphis, where she was able to make a living from her sewing skills. She opened a pants business, and everybody wanted a pair of those pants she made. She got into a happy place in her life: *“I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time.”* (p.183). She went back home when she heard that her friend’s mother died. Celie met Mr. _____ who seemed to have changed. At the same time, she learned, that her father died and the house he claimed to be his actually belonged to Celie and Nettie. She became the owner of a house and started to renovate it for her family. At this point, she reconciled with Mr. _____ and the past, probably because of the fact that both loved Shug and neither of them had her: *“Mr. _____ seem to be the only one understand my feelin.”* (p. 220). This is a sign of reconciliation, because when the things that he has done to her in the past are considered, it sounds strange to hear these words from Celie. The readers also learn that Celie does not hate him: *“I know you hate me for keeping you from Nettie, he say....But I don’t hate*

him.” (p.220). A little bit later we learn, that she is content even without Shug in her life: “*If she come, I be happy. If she don’t, I be content.*” (p. 240).

These examples from the end of the novel can be seen as signs of completed empowerment. Freeing herself from the things/people that hobbled her, not feeling hate and taking good care of herself goes in hand in hand with the definition of the word *empowerment* given by Cambridge dictionary: “*the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want*”.

The fourth and last look at Celie is given through Maya Angelou’s rules for success, which are stated in italics. When Maya Angelou talked about *being a blessing for someone*, she recalled the people that were blessings for her during the life she got to live and she encouraged others to look at the people that were blessings for them and to become someone special to others too. When it comes to Celie, she was undoubtedly a blessing for her sister Nettie. From the early passages of the novel, it can be seen that she tried to protect her little sister from the evil of their “father”, even though it meant being hurt herself, and because she was successful at protecting her it can be said she was a blessing.

The rule *just do right* Angelou connected with picking up the battles on our own because in fact it is our life. The readers saw that Celie took a long time before she started to fight her battle; she had to experience abuse, the “loss” of her sister and many other things before she became strong enough to start fighting. This topic is connected with another rule *learn to say no*. At the beginning of her marriage with Mr.____, she was not even able to say “no” to his children, nor to him. But once she found *courage*, which is another of Angelou’s rules, to pick up her life she also learned how to say no to him – announcing to all of them that she is moving to Memphis with Shug.

The other two rules *turn struggles into triumphs* and *you are talented* are also connected together. When readers learn that Celie found out that Mr.____ was hiding Nettie’s letter from her, she started to sew in order not to kill him. All of her anger caused by him and probably also her father, was transferred into sewing which later ended up being an important part of her life, once she moved away from home and opened a business sewing pants. That is one example of her struggling being turned into something positive, and she definitely was talented, because everyone wanted to buy the pants from her. The rules such as *love*, *laugh* and *always do your*

best can be also observed throughout Celie's life. She did as best she could to keep the house and children clean. She loved her sister enormously, and she loved Shug and would do anything for them. And at the end of the novel, she also learned how to laugh. The last rule mentioned is *keep rising*. Celie did not stop doing that after she moved away. Once she moved back home, she continued empowering herself, rising and never letting anyone treat her as inferior again.

1.3 Nettie

The first look at Nettie, Celie's younger sister, is given through the theme of school and real life education. Firstly, as it was described in the previous subchapter about Celie, her sister tried to protect her which gave her a chance to go to school. Nettie herself loves to learn and she admires her teacher Miss Beasley: "*Nettie dote on Miss Beasley. Think nobody like her in the world.*" (p.11). The teacher became a role model for her. Secondly, the readers learn from Celie, that she sees Nettie as a teacher: "*Nettie steady try to teach me what go on in the world. And she a good teacher too...All day she read, she study, she practice her handwriting, and try to git us to think.*" (p. 17). From this extract, it can be learned that Nettie does not just try to teach Celie some facts, but she encourages her to think, which can be a sign of her realizing that school education is one thing, but if you do not think and do not desire to know you will not make it far.

Moreover, Nettie can be pictured as a mother to Celie, even though she is younger. This portrayal supports Maria Stewart's desire for mothers to change their children's thinking. Nettie was thankful to her teacher: "*But on think I do thank her for, for teaching me to learn for myself, by reading and studying and writing a clear hand. And for keeping alive in me somehow the desire to know.*" (p.112). The reader can see in this quote that she was aware of the fact, that people have to have desire to know, and when they lose it, they lose themselves. Lastly, Nettie is aware of the fact that school gave her some education, but the real education started for her when she set out on a boat to Africa to become a missionary: "*...and my real education began at that time.*" (p. 112).

The second look at Nettie is given through the theme of African heritage. The novel is set in the early 20th century, the time of the Harlem Renaissance. One of its features was to explore the African heritage and Nettie was the one character which was able to do that in this novel. There was an incident between Nettie and Sophia, who was at that time the mayor's maid. Sophia was

embarrassed to talk to her from the position she was in, and so Nettie started to think about her heritage: “...I started asking questions about Africa and started reading all the books....Did you know there were great cities in Africa...I read and I read...I read where the Africans sold us because they loved money more than their own sisters and brothers. How we came to America in ships. How we were made at work.” (p. 111). Here it can be seen that it took a little, just a small incident in a shop, for her to start thinking and to develop the desire to learn more. She realized that history was a big part of her life and she had not cared about it until this moment: “I hadn’t realized I was so ignorant, Celie. The little I knew about my own self...” (p. 111).

The third look is analyzed through the theme there is more to life than someone knows. Firstly, Nettie grew up surrounded by violence and poverty. When she met Samuel and Corrine, the missionary couple, she was surprised that they wanted her to learn: “Oh, Celie, there are colored people in the world who want us to know! Want us to grow and see the light!” (p. 112). What can be taken from this is that the things people are used to seeing, and the situations people are used to living in do not have to be the only things in the world. So, when people do not let themselves stay in these miserable conditions but rather try to step out of the known environment, they can be surprised. And secondly, this is the picture that Nettie portrayed in her letter, which is connected to the Harlem Renaissance and the situation of African Americans who fled from the South to the North due to the industrial expansion happening there, they have a chance for a better life, the yet unknown life: “New York is a beautiful city. And colored own a whole section of it, called Harlem. There are colored people in more fancy motor cars than I thought existed, and living in houses that are finer than any white person’s house down home.” (p.114).

1.4 Sofia

There are two themes that can be used to analyze Sofia. The first one is full empowerment. Firstly, Sofia is different than Celie and Nettie. She found her value at the place where she grew up, and where she got married. She found her independence and is not willing to let go of it just because she got married to Harpo. He grew up seeing his father beat his wife and seeing Celie doing everything she was forced to do. He expected the same behavior from Sofia, but she acted differently. The readers learn from what Sofia says to Mr. ____ and Harpo before they even get married that she thinks of herself as a free person: “What I need to marry Harpo for? He still

living here with you...When you free, me and the baby be waiting." (p. 30). From the way her mind is set her actions are derived.

Secondly, Sofia does not allow people to treat her as an inferior. When Harpo is advised by his father to beat Sofia to make her obey him, he is the one that ends up being beaten. *"Next time us see Harpo his face a mess of bruises. His lip cut. One of his eyes shut like a fist. He walk stiff and say his teef ache."* (p. 35). There are two reasons why she did not let herself to be beaten – one is that she was stronger and bigger than Harpo, the other is that she really thought of herself as free and not to be subordinated. We learn this from Celie: *"...when Harpo and Mr. _____ come in the room, she keep right on. If they ast her where something at, she say she don't know. Keep talking."* (p. 34).

The second theme of Sofia's analysis is racism. She is the only character from this book who crossed paths with a white woman and it did not turn out well for her. Sofia meets the mayor's wife Miss Millie. She sees how nice Sofia's children look like and automatically she wants her to become their maid: *"All your children so clean, she say, would you like to work for me, be my maid?"* (p. 76). Here, it seems like a polite question, but Miss Millie would probably not ask some white woman to become their maid. It also portrays for the readers the presumptions that black women were always seen as someone who can take care of children and the household. With this in mind, Sofia's reaction to this question is no surprise: *"Hell no."* (p. 76). Mayor slapped her in the face but Sofia never lets anyone beat her, so she fought back – this landed her in prison with a cracked skull and ribs, swollen, and blind on one eye. For this act, Sofia was sent to prison to work in a laundry, but was transferred to Miss Millie's house to become the maid after all. The irony of this situation is, that Sofia was not broken by this situation, at least not on the outside and Miss Millie was afraid of her: *"She scared of Sofia. Everytime she talk to her it like she expect the worst."* (p. 88).

1.5 Shug Avery

The character of Shug is completely different from the rest of the female characters. When she appears in the novel, she is already an adult woman. The readers learn through the story that she gave up her children some time ago, but that is the only thing they learn about her past. The first theme to analyze here is her emancipation. She is portrayed as a strong woman admired by

many. She is emancipated and does not let anybody to look at her as a subordinated person. She even talks to Mr. ____ this way: *“I don’t want to smell no stinkin blanket-blank pipe, you hear me, Albert?”* (p. 43). From this, the readers learn that she is really sure about her position around him, and that he would not hurt her the way he has been hurting Celie.

The second theme is her freedom. Throughout the story, she is seen to leave this town, even though, there are people that care about her – Celie, Albert. She is also seen to return. This repeats many times. She always finds somebody to be with and is saying that she just wants to enjoy her life. The bond she shares with Celie is however stronger, and she comes back to her after all: *“Oh Celie, she say, stepping out of the car, dress like moving star, I missed you more than I missed my own mama.”* (p. 240). The fact that can be taken from her travelling is that she truly is a free person and does not hesitate for a moment to enjoy her life.

1.6 Conclusion

To begin with, it is important to say that every one of these four women is different, even though their backgrounds might seem similar. Their live’s journeys take them through different situations, but throughout the process they had to fight for the same things – to be free, independent, to know their value, and to not let others treat them as dirt. First of all, in the relationship of Celie and Nettie it could witnessed that if someone else is going before you and is fighting (in this case it was more protecting, sacrificing yourself) than those that follow can have a better life. This can be a picture of those first black women that started to fight for their race and mostly for their women, started to fight for freedom, for justice, against racism and sexism. Secondly, from Nettie’s life we observe the fact that if you are smart, meaning you know what is important in life - education, knowledge of your heritage, real life education and getting out of your comfort zone, you can achieve a better life. Thirdly, people solve their life situations/problems differently. Celie and Sofia both experienced male violence – with the difference, that Sofia knew her value and knew how to protect herself and that was the difference between their ways of coping with it. And lastly, the character of Shug was showing to readers that once you achieve a state of freedom in your life, you should enjoy it and also use it to help others, the way she did it with Celie.

1.7 Lesson Plan

To begin with, it is important to consider the content of this book, the violence that is described in harsh language and the topics it covers when creating a lesson plan. Based on this consideration, this novel would be more appropriate to use in English lessons in the third or fourth year of upper secondary schools/high schools.

Firstly, the teachers should have in mind that this book is mainly focused on women, or at least told from the perspective of female characters, but this does not mean that it cannot be adjusted for a classroom where both groups of girls and boys are present. Secondly, teachers need to bear in mind that there is usually not enough time for extracurricular activities. Due to this reality, only some of the themes described in the novel should be presented to the students. Considering the fact that third and fourth year students of the upper secondary schools are about to graduate and mostly leave for college, the theme of education seems to be right for this group of students and it can be shown in the lives of Celie and Nettie.

Moreover, there is the advantage of the lessons called English seminars happening once a week. These seminars are ninety minutes long, which is the perfect amount of time that is needed to go through this lesson plan. It is also a time where the teachers can let the students speak more than in regular lessons. Lastly, based on the facts stated earlier, the lesson plan focuses on improving reading and speaking skills as well as on encouraging students to think and express their opinions concerning this topic.

The lesson itself can progress like this: The first thing to remember is the administrative part at the beginning of the lesson, which usually consists of greetings, checking the attendance, and filling in the information to the class register. This part should not take longer than five minutes. Then, the actual lesson can begin.

Firstly, there should be a discussion between students and teachers based on the fact, that students are acquainted with the history of African Americans. At the beginning of the discussion, the teacher may quickly review the history with a focus on education. Questions used in this discussion may be these: *“What is education? Do you think that education is important? Yes/ No? Why? Is education connected only to school”*. It is important for the teacher to

encourage students to talk and if necessary to ask some of the students directly. This discussion should not take longer than ten minutes.

Secondly, it is important to introduce the novel *The Color Purple* to the students and especially point out who Celie and Nettie are. The teacher hands out the chart no. 1 (see attachment) and explains to the students what to do with it. The task is to find different characteristics of Celie and Nettie from the extracts that will be read during the lesson. This will take probably 10 min.

The third step of the lesson plan is to hand out extract no. 1 (see the attachment) and let the students read these three paragraphs themselves. After the reading, the teacher's role is to ask some questions, e.g. *“What can you tell us about these two girls? What is their approach to education? In what ways are these two girls different? Can the style of writing tell us something about them?”*. These questions are simple ones so there should not be a problem with students not knowing the answers. This will probably take about ten minutes.

After discussing those questions, the teacher's role is to fill the students in on what happened in the story between extract no. 1 and extract no. 2. It should not be longer than five minutes.

The next step is to hand out to the students extract no. 2 (see the attachment). The student's task is again to read this extract. After they are finished reading it, the teacher will ask specific questions: *“What happened? What role does Shug play in it? How is Celie feeling? If she decided to kill Mr. _____, would it change her future? If yes, how?”*. The point of this discussion is to get students interested in the story and to make them think about their actions and how present actions can influence the future. This can take again about ten minutes.

After discussing these questions, students receive extract no. 3 (see the attachment). Their task is again to read it alone. While they are reading, the teacher writes these questions on the side of the blackboard which students cannot see: *“What is Nettie's “advice” to Celie? Who are Corrine and Samuel, what do we know about them? Where is Nettie? What did she realize?”*. When the students are done reading, the teacher will reveal the questions and the students will discuss them in pairs. After their discussion, it is important to ask them what their thoughts are. The goal for students is to realize the importance of history and the importance of fighting for your rights. This whole part will probably take 15 minutes.

The last extract to be handed out is extract no. 4 (see attachment). Students read it alone or in pairs, and then, the teacher can ask the students following questions: “*What/who helped Celie to stand up against Mr. _____ and leave? Did her behavior change somehow from the behavior we saw at the beginning? (See the extract n. 1, paragraph 3)*”. The class will need to spend about ten minutes discussing this extract.

To end the lesson, the teacher can ask the students about what they thought of this novel, what is their approach towards education at school, and education in the real life. A possible end to this lesson could be also a cliff hanger for the students: “*Do you think that Celie left and never came back? Are you curious to find out? You can read the whole novel or the end of the novel at home.*”. It is important to have enough time and to be prepared for possible questions. The time needed is about fifteen minutes.

To conclude this lesson plan, it is important for the teacher to realize what message he/she wants to convey to the students. Here the theme of education was used, which in the connection to black women and their possibilities to educate themselves at that time, can be an eye-opening moment for the students when they realize that they live in a privileged time in history and the position where the rights for education are not taken away from them. This should move them to be grateful for the opportunities they have simply because they live in the Czech Republic in the 21st century. The second thing that students may realize is that the more you know, the more possibilities you have to fight for yourself in society. Lastly, the teacher needs to be prepared for possible questions from the students and if possible to let them ask those questions, to let them think about this challenge and to lead them as they are about to step out into the real world when going off to universities..

2 Meridian

Meridian is a novel written by Alice Walker in 1976 that takes place during the Civil Rights Movement. This chapter gives an overview of the story, and later, it focuses on the main character Meridian. The analysis of this character is structured based on the time line of her life. It begins with her teenage years and marriage, where the focus is set on the theme from ignorance to realization. Then, it moves on to her college years and her participation in the movement. Later themes analyzed are the strategy of non-violence, the obstacles in the way of emancipation, Meridian's own way of fighting, and freedom. The character of Meridian is also looked at through Pauli Murray's life. The last part of this chapter consists of the lesson plan created for this novel.

2.1 Plot

The story is written in retrospect, which can make it harder for readers to understand what is happening, at least at the beginning. The whole story begins with the scene of Meridian and Truman Held, her former lover, meeting again in an unknown city. The flashbacks take readers to different times in Meridian's life.

The first one is about the time where she refused to kill for a revolution. The second one tells the story of losing her mother's love because of the fact that she did not want to accept Jesus. Another flashback takes place during her college years at Saxon College, where Meridian meets her friend Anne Marion and the Wild Child – a teenage pregnant girl who is excluded by society and is killed in a car accident. Later, the story takes the readers to the time of Meridian's teenage life, when she became pregnant and got married. Later, the story reveals that the marriage ended and Meridian abandoned her child and went to study at Saxon College. Another flashback tells a lot about her relationship with Truman and his new girlfriend Lynne who he later marries, but he eventually realizes that he should have never let Meridian go. The last part of the novel describes the death of Dr. Martin Luther King and Meridian's struggle with how the movement turned out. It reveals her living in a small city and together with Truman trying to persuade people to vote for their rights.

2.2 From Ignorance to Realization

As was already mentioned, the novel goes back and forth in time, but in order to analyze Meridian as a character, it is necessary to look at the important events in her life in order. When she was a teenager she started dating men. This topic was strictly not talked about at Meridian's house as she says herself: "...when she realized that her mother, father, aunts, friends, passers-by – not to mention her laughing sister – had told her nothing, what to expect from men..." (p. 50). There is no surprise that soon enough she became pregnant with her boyfriend Eddie, and they got married. Eddie was a smart boy, who always received good marks at school, and he did not quit studying even when they got married, even though he had to work twice as much as he had to before the wedding. As time goes on, the readers find out that Meridian did not learn to love Eddie: "*She wondered why she still not loved Eddie...the longer they lived together the more she became obsessed with the horrible thought that Eddie, like his name, would never be grown up. She thought he would always be a boy.*" (p. 59). This happened a little while after her baby boy is born so it is obvious she has not aged a lot, but something about this extract suggests that Meridian is not satisfied with where she is at or where Eddie is at in life. It is clear that the thought of not moving forward/maturing scares her.

One other thing that suggests that Meridian is not happy about her life situation is the relationship she has with her son: "*She sat in the rocker...and stroked her son's back, her finger eager to scratch him out of her life...she would diaper him roughly...because he looked like his father and because everyone who came to visit assumed she loved him...*" (p. 58). This is not a typical reaction to your newborn child, at least not when you are at a good place in life.

The readers may observe something of Meridian's thinking on the day that her husband left her when she went for a walk: "*On the day he left, she had walked past a house...she stopped to look only because it was black family's house, in a black neighborhood, and there were several young white people.*" (p. 61). This reveals to readers that Meridian was not used to seeing black people merging with white people and it got her thinking about what was going on in that house. She understood what was happening when she came home and saw the news on TV: "*...starring at the TV. The house she had passed was on. There was to be a voter registration drive...*" (p. 61). However, the next morning something unexpected happened, at least for Meridian: "*The next morning...she was again shown the pictures of the house – except now the house no longer*

existed...the house was demolished by firebombs...It seems they posted a guard who was alerted by the sound of a pickup truck...This struck her, that they had had a guard. Why did they need a guard?" (p. 62). The extract itself suggests that she was shocked by the fact that the house was bombed and even more shocked that they had a guard. She could not understand why those people would need a guard.

As Meridian herself explains her surprise in a later chapter, it is revealed that her mother was not interested in politics, her job was to take care of her children: *"Mrs. Hill did not complain about anything political because she had no desire to understand politics. She had never voted in her life. Meridian grew up thinking voting days...were for celebration of some kind of weird festival..."* (p. 67). These sentences reveal that politics was not something that Meridian would have thought about at home. It is no wonder that she was struck by the fact of seeing white and black people in the house together, that she was shocked that the house was bombed, and that they actually had a guard. It can be deduced from Meridian's behavior that she was not aware of the situation that was going on around her, the reasons were varied – at this point she was a seventeen-year old girl who had to quit school, while having a baby. She was not taught this by her mother with whom she spent most of her time while growing up.

This is the exact opposite picture of what Marie Stewart was fighting for many years before this story even takes place. What is certain though is that this incident changed her: *"And so it was that one day in the middle of April of 1960 Meridian Hill became aware of the past and present of the larger world."* (p. 62). And a month later she decided to join the Civil rights movement: *"I've come to volunteer."* (p. 69).

From the examples shown above and by becoming a volunteer in the movement, Meridian broke the stereotype. Black women were usually seen as politically passive, an example of that is Mrs. Hill, but Meridian was the one who realized she needed to be active in order to achieve some change. This supports the ideas of Barnett (1993) mentioned in the theoretical part, who states that many of the women at that time became not just followers of the movement but started to be active in the fight and also became leaders

2.3 The Movement and College Education

Meridian joined the movement and even though she was not qualified to do any of the things that were happening there, she started to learn. She was supported by the townspeople that were in favor of the movement from the beginning. However, her mother took a different stance towards Meridian's decision: *"As far as I'm concerned...you've wasted a year of your life, fooling around those people."* (p. 74). She took two of her co-workers with her to inform her mother about being in the movement, which leads readers to think that Meridian was probably afraid of her mother and that until now she had always done as she was told. And again it can be seen that her mother was not capable herself of helping Meridian to change her thinking, because she herself was stuck – another example of black women being seen as passive.

What is more surprising, though, is what readers learn about Meridian's IQ. Before she was expelled from high school she had been tested and learned that her IQ reached 140, which is really high for the background in which Meridian grew up. This fact opened up doors for her to a college, even though she never finished high school. She learns this news from Mr. Yateson: *"He explained that a generous (and wealthy) white family in Connecticut...had decided, as a gesture of their liberality and concern, to send a smart black girl to Saxon College in Atlanta."* (p. 75)

There were few people who supported her in going to study at Saxon College. The first one was her lover Truman Held, who saw this as an opportunity to see her more often, because he studied in the same town. The support her friend Dolores gave her was even more interesting: *"You have a right to go to college...You're lucky to have the chance...You ain't no dummy, girl, and don't you even consider acting like one...No matter what your mother says... just remember she spends all her time making prayer pillows."* (p. 75). Dolores saw something more in Meridian, something that could not be revealed in the town where she lived. Dolores recognized that in order for Meridian to make a difference in her life she would have to take this opportunity and start attending the Saxon College. She assured her that she was smart enough and could do better and greater things in life than Meridian's mother – the reference to the prayer pillows. It is an example of how much education and knowledge is important for people to improve their position in life.

However, there was somebody who stood in the way of her leaving for college, and it was not her mother. It was her baby boy Eddie Jr. When Mrs. Hill said that it is not right to abandon your children and shares her thought: *"I have six children...though I never wanted to have any, and I have raised every one myself."* (p. 78) Dolores replies with the words: *"You probably could have done the same thing in slavery."* (p. 79). Dolores again mocks Mrs. Hill's life style and her maternal job. However, Meridian realizes something. She acknowledges that it was not possible to raise your children under slavery, because your children belonged to the white masters and they usually sold the babies. She decided to leave her baby to be raised by someone else, the baby that she learned to love: *"Now that she looked at him, the child was beautiful."* (p-79). Meridian broke the stereotype of pots and kettles described by Maria Stewart. This probably took a lot of courage to do, and Maya Angelou herself sees courage as necessary in order to become successful.

2.4 Non-violent fight

It can be observed at least twice that though Meridian was a part of the movement, she was not willing to kill for it and rather chose the non-violent approach. The one time that we see this is shortly after the funeral of the Wild Child. She was a homeless teenage pregnant girl that Meridian was able to take under her wings against the will of her house mother: *"She must not stay here...Think of the influence. This is a school for young ladies."* (p. 28). Meridian tried to find another accommodation for the Wild Child, but she ran away and was killed by a speeding car. Meridian and others wanted to hold her funeral in the school chapel, but the request was denied: *"They say the president say she can't have her funeral in you all's chapel."* (p. 36). They decided to do it anyway but were denied access to the chapel: *"When Meridian and Anne-Marion arrived at the chapel steps...examined the three-inch lock on the chapel door."* (p. 37). This act angered the black students, they brought the casket to The Sojourner tree and started to sing: *"We shall overcome...We shall overcome...We shall overcome, someday...Deep in my heart, I do believe..."* (p. 38). These few words reveal a lot about the injustice that they all felt and wanted to fight against. They decided to destroy The Sojourner tree: *"...they worked all night, and chopped and sawed down, level to the ground, that mighty, ancient, sheltering music tree."* (p. 38). This tree served as a symbol of equality for the students: *"There was only one Sojourner ceremony...that united all the students at Saxon...It was the only time in all the many social activities at Saxon that every girl was considered equal."* (p. 35-36).

As can be observed, Alice Walker did not choose the name for this tree at random. There was an organization formed in the 1950s called Sojourners for Truth and Justice that was fighting for the dignity of black women. Meridian knew what the tree represented for all of the students on campus and as well for her, so she begged the others not to cut it down: “*Meridian begged them to dismantle the president’s house instead.*” (p. 38). This is the first time she stands up against an act of violence that could take away from them the little equality they had.

The second time the readers may see her not being able to fight with violence is when Truman visits her, and she looks back at her past. In order to join one of the groups fighting against inequality, she had to declare that she would die for the revolution. That was not a problem for her. The real problem came when she had to answer the question “Will you kill for the Revolution?” This had to be answered with a positive Yes: “This, however, her tongue, could not manage.” (p. 19). These two examples from her life show that she is willing to fight for the rights of her race, but she is not willing to cross the line and start to fight with violence. These examples tend to remind the readers of the non-violent movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., who disapproved of fighting against racism and segregation with violence.

2.5 The Obstacles in the Way of Emancipation

The first thing that can be seen as an obstacle was her baby boy which she had with her previous husband Eddie. This topic was already discussed in an earlier chapter which revealed that Meridian developed feelings of love for her son even though she could not even look at him at the beginning. Yet, it is important to mention that her decision had consequences. She started having nightmares: “*...but she had not anticipated the nightmares that began to trouble her sleep. Nightmares of the child, calling to her, crying...She thought of her mother as being worthy of this maternal history and of herself as belonging to an unworthy minority...*” (p. 80). A question like this: “Was it necessary for her to abandon her child in order to go to college?” can come up in one’s mind. The answer is given to readers by Mr. Yateson who told her this: “*...nice girls did not become pregnant in high school – and that he expected her to set a high moral standard...*” (p. 74). Was it the right thing to do? This is a question everyone has to answer for themselves.

A second obstacle may have appeared when Meridian got pregnant again and is more hypothetical. The father of her baby this time was Truman, whom she loved, but who went back to his white girlfriend Lynne: *“It was for this reason, among others, that he never knew that she was pregnant.”* (p. 100). She went and had an abortion and decided to get tubal ligation: *“...the doctor tore into her body without giving her anesthesia...I could tie your tubes...burn ‘em out by the roots for all I care.”* (p. 100-101). At that time abortion was illegal, as discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, and so she had to visit a doctor who was willing to do this. The irony of this situation came some time after when Truman came and regretted their break up telling her these words: *“Have my beautiful black babies.”* (p. 101). This could easily have shaken her emotions and influenced her life in certain directions.

The third obstacle in her way was Truman himself. Throughout the novel the readers can see Meridian falling for him, getting jealous over his new girlfriend; he also represented for her a part of the movement. Truman married Lynne, but three years after their wedding he sought out Meridian and begged her for another chance, she refused. *“He was stunned to learn that she had long ago dismissed him.”* (p.) *“I want your love the way I had it a long time ago.”* (p. 192). Something more was hidden in Meridian’s reply: *“My love for you changed...I set you free...You are not free, however, to think I am a fool.”* (p. 192). She moved on with her life and found her freedom and wanted the same for him.

2.6 Her Own Way of Fighting and Freedom

After being traumatized by abandoning her son, going through abortion, and being thrown away from the revolutionary group because she was not willing to kill for the revolution, the readers see Meridian living in a rural area, helping black people, and explaining to them why it is important to vote in order to witness a change in the society. Here are two examples:

“Truman and Meridian supported her every step of the way...up to the very door of the doctor’s examination room...The next day she came to place her name in Meridian’s yellow pad...” Ask me to do anything, young peoples,” said Miss Treasure.” (p. 187).

“I don’t have time for foolishness. My wife is dying. My boy don’t have shoes. Go somewhere else and find somebody that ain’t got to work all the time for pennies, like I do...”What’s this

here?” asked the husband ten minutes later as they came through his front door with two bags of food... “I ain’t changed my mind,” said the husband, with a suspicious peek into the bags...they did not see him again until the Monday after Mother’s Day....under the words WILL YOU BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO VOTE...he wrote his name.” (p. 182).

In both of these examples, readers observe Meridian, and Truman, doing something nice for people, to show them that they matter and to help them realize that they can change the way they are living in this world. What is even more important though is that Meridian was able to find her freedom and peace while not killing for the revolution, but rather choosing the non-violent way.

2.7 Meridian through Pauli Murray’s Life

A few similarities can be seen between Pauli Murray’s and Meridian’s lives. The first one is that Pauli Murray decided to protest segregation when she met a bus driver who did not treat her friend and Murray the same way as other passengers; she started to fight against segregation. Meridian, on the other hand, did not have the same experience, but she lived during the period of time when bus segregation existed and her mother says: *“It never bothered me to sit in the back of the bus...”* (p. 74). The thing that is interesting about her mother saying it, is the timing. Walker puts this situation right after Meridian announces that she had joined the movement – the beginning of her fight against segregation. And with the way Walker wrote this novel, it was probably not a coincidence.

The second similarity between these two women is the difficulty with college education. Murray herself was denied entrance to the University of North Carolina because of her gender, later she was also denied entrance into Harvard Law School for the same reason. Meridian, however, was offered a scholarship for Saxon college, but if they would have found out that she had already been married and had a child, she would have been expelled. These are similar examples of how both women had to face segregation and how they were both somehow shaped by these experiences.

The last theme that connects these two women is their resistance to the violence that was happening around them. In the chapter about Pauli Murray, there was a fact mentioned, that she

spent her life trying to fight against racism and segregation by non-violent means. The struggle with violence can be also witnessed in Meridian's life. She was not capable of killing for the revolution even though she truly wanted to help to fight for her people. Nevertheless, she had to go through a lot in her life before she learned how she could be helpful even without all of the killings that the leaders from the group wanted her to do. Instead of doing this, she took the time and went to see many people and explained to them that their lives could be different, if they would go and vote.

2.8 Lesson Plan

To begin with, it is always important to think about the themes of the novel, the language that is used, and the message it sends before deciding what the lesson plan will look like and with which students it will be used. After considering the themes of the novel *Meridian*, the decision was made to use this book with third and fourth year students of upper secondary schools/high schools. This novel is set during the time of Civil rights movement in the United States and these students are preparing for their school leaving exams. One part of this exam is usually English language and the history of English speaking countries, so the analysis of this novel can provide helpful information for them. The novel could be introduced to the students in their English lessons seminars which provide more time and space for extracurricular activities. After considering the students' age and readiness for life outside the school, the topic "*Do you use your voice?*" was chosen when analyzing the novel in the classroom.

At the beginning of the lesson, it is important not to forget the administrative part, meaning greeting the students, checking the attendance, and filling in the necessary information in the class register. This part of the lesson should not take longer than five minutes.

To begin with the actual analysis of the novel, the teachers need to check if students did their homework. Students were given extract no. I (see the attachment), and they were supposed to read it at home. Two situations can happen – the first one is that students did not read it and they have to read the extract now in the lesson. The second situation is better for the course of the lesson when students actually come prepared. Depending on the situation, the teacher either gives the students time to read the extract no. I or continues with the opening question: "*What do*

you think this book is about?”. This part of the lesson should not take longer than ten minutes, the ideal time is five minutes.

After hearing different answers to the opening question from the students, it is time for the teacher to give a mini lecture. In this lecture, he/she introduces the novel, frames the time in the history, and points out the conditions for African American women at that time. The teacher’s should not spend more than fifteen minutes on this mini-lecture.

The lesson continues using the information learned in the extract no. I., and the teacher may ask these particular questions: *“What did Meridian witness in the first paragraph? What happened next? Was she confused about the situation? What did she realize that day? Do YOU know the history of your country, family? Do you think it is important to know history – Yes/No – why?”*. The main idea that the teacher wants the students to understand from this extract is that the knowledge of your own history is important, and that it should be important even for them. This discussion should take about fifteen minutes.

The next step for the teacher is to hand out extract no. II (see the attachment). The students’ task is to read it alone and when they are finished reading it, the teacher asks questions like these: *“What did Meridian do? What would you do if something like this happened around you/ or what would you do if you saw someone being treated the wrong way?”*. The point of this discussion is for students to realize that they can change things if they start using their voice, if they take actions. It should not take longer than seven minutes.

Now the teacher can ask one student to hand out extract no. III (see the attachment). It is only a paragraph long, so the students will not take long to read it which gives more space for discussion: *“What did they want Meridian to do? How did they react to her not responding with “Yes””? What do you think about their requirement? What about you, do you act the same way as others or do you think about the situation and then decide what to do? Do you think Meridian should have answered “Yes” in order for her not to be excluded from the group? Would you want to be a part of a group that wants to kill/ hurt someone?”*. The teacher should let the students think about their own actions in similar situations where they are asked to do something, to let them decide when it is okay to follow someone’s demands and when it is not. This part should not exceed fifteen minutes.

The last handout to be distributed is extract no. IV (see the attachment). The teacher should give the students enough time to read it. After they are done reading it, it is time for the last few questions: “*What do we see Meridian doing in this extract? Do you think she is happy? Do you think she would be at this place if she decided all those years ago to kill for the revolution?*”. When students express their opinions on Meridian’s decision and life, the teacher should lead the discussion to the students’ lives. The point again is to let them think about how their present actions can influence their future. The time allotted for this part is fifteen minutes.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher should give out the homework which consists of writing a 250-word essay. The student can choose from two topics: How do I use my voice now and how do I see using it in the future? Where will I be in ten years? The goal of this homework is for students to keep thinking about what was discussed in the lesson and not to forget everything about it once the lesson is finished. Explaining the homework should not take longer than five minutes.

To conclude this lesson plan, during the whole ninety-minute lesson the teacher should be encouraging students to think and to say their opinions aloud. It is up to the teacher to create a safe atmosphere in the classroom for them to speak and not be embarrassed about their opinions. The teacher should also be prepared for different questions from the students and try to answer them as much as possible. After the lesson is finished, the teacher should take time to review the lesson, the goals that were set at the beginning, and the goals that were achieved.

3 The Comparison of The Color Purple and Meridian

These two novels were written and published in the span of six years. Both of them cover different time periods in the history of African American women in the United States. Alice Walker focuses on the first half of the 20th century in the novel *The Color Purple*, and the plot of the novel *Meridian* is set around the years of the 1960s. This comparison looks at the themes of family influence, ignorance, sexual violence, and silence and freedom. All of this is given in connection to the specific time in history.

It seems right to begin with the theme of family influence. In the novel *The Color Purple*, Celie was the one that was influenced the most by her family and could not get away from that influence. She was not able to stand up and fight for herself. It took her many years, most of her life, before she found the courage and left her husband. On the other hand, *Meridian's* situation evolved differently. She was also influenced by her family, especially her mother, who did not support the movement, but *Meridian* found the strength to fight against this earlier than Celie did. The difference in time periods and the status of black women at those times were definitely the reasons why it took Celie longer than *Meridian*.

The second thing that could be observed while reading these novels was ignorance. In the case of *The Color Purple* and *Nettie*, it was the ignorance of her ancestors and how they came to America in the first place, the ignorance of the slavery, later the readers learn from her that she regretted not knowing much and starting to learn more about it. *Meridian's* situation is a little bit different, because there, the ignorance is connected to the present situation, where she did not even know about the movement itself. Once she witnessed white and black people working together and then the house being bombed, she also became aware of her ignorance and started to be interested in what was happening around her. She joined the movement. In both cases, it can be observed that realization of the facts/situation triggers actions.

The third thing is connected to sexual violence and silence. It was mentioned in the theoretical portion that black women kept silent about being raped for a variety of reasons. When looking at Celie's situation, she was raped first by her father and was threatened to keep silent. If she spoke about it, he would hurt her mother or sister. Later, when she was raped by her husband, she kept silent because there was no one who would help her. *Meridian's* situation was slightly different;

she was raped by the doctor who performed the abortion, not a family member. The reason why she kept silent though was the same – there was no one who would help her, and she actually wanted the doctor to perform what was at that time a forbidden operation which would get her in more trouble. At both times in history, it was hard for black women to get justice.

The last theme is that of freedom. In both novels, it can be observed that both main heroines found their freedom. Celie and Meridian had to come a long way, overcome different obstacle, and learn a lot about themselves and their beliefs before they arrived at the “freedom destination”. It may appear that the process was easier for Meridian because she lived at the time of the Civil Rights Movement, but when a closer look is taken, it is obvious that it took her many years to get there too. What is important to mention though is, that it was possible for both of them to find their freedom even though they lived in different time periods.

To conclude this comparison, it is important to mention Alice Walker’s intentions. She definitely had many reasons for writing these two novels, some of them will be mentioned now. In *The Color Purple*, she obviously takes readers back to a different time in history and recalls the situation of women at that time in order not to forget what was happening then and in order to encourage others to join one of her life’s fights which is not to forget history and one’s ancestors. In the novel *Meridian*, it can be seen that Alice Walker was disappointed with the movement itself and how it treated black women. Yet, in the midst of that, she again portrayed the fight of Meridian who was able to stand up and face the situations that were influencing her. Both of these novels convey, among others, the themes of growing on the way to personal freedom.

Conclusion

The theoretical part of this thesis introduced an overview of African-American literature from the times of the Harlem Renaissance and pointed out the main themes, genres, and writers of those times. And a closer look was given to the status of African-American women during those times.

Another section of the theoretical part focused first on feminism in America and readers learned about the three different stages of feminism, and secondly, it pointed out the reasons for black feminism in America and it brought to light its main ideas and problems that black women faced during everyday life or still have to face till nowadays.

The two last chapters of the theoretical part focused on Alice Walker and two other African-American writers and activists – Pauli Murray and Maya Angelou, giving an overview of their lives, literary work and activism.

The practical part focused closely on Alice Walker's two novels – *The Color Purple* and *Meridian* and their analyses and comparison. From both of these novels, a few women were chosen who were analyzed considering the things stated in the theoretical portion. The readers learned about the situation of black women in the early 20th century, during the time setting of *The Color Purple*, and even though the 1960s, the time setting of *Meridian*, were different; there were still the same factors that influenced them – family, education, knowledge, support, and many others. The readers could observe that especially in the case of Celie and Meridian, they needed to acknowledge their situations and started to fight for them. They learned not to let other people around them control their lives.

A great part of the theoretical part also focused on the use of these novels in English lessons in the Czech Republic. Since both of these novels focus on African-Americans, it is evident, that a way had to be found for how to apply the topics of these novels in the conditions of Czech schools. The lesson plan for *The Color Purple* was created with the focus on the need for education in people's lives and the lesson plan for *Meridian* focused on how people use their voice in everyday life. Both of these lesson plans involve a good amount of discussion in order to let students think about their lives and to let them express their own ideas and opinions.

There is probably no better way to end this thesis than with the words of Maya Angelou, hopefully, the readers will appreciate this reminder and will adapt it into their lives' situations. Keep rising.

"You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise.
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise.
I rise.
I rise."

(Angelou, 1994, p. 163-164)

Attachment

Chart no. 1:

CELIE	NETTIE

Extract no. 1: *“The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never care that I love it. Nettie stood there at the gate holding tight to my hand. I was all dress for first day. You too dumb to keep going to school, Pa say. Nettie the clever one in this bunch. But Pa, Nettie say, crying, Celie smart too. Even Miss Beasley say so. Nettie dote on Miss Beasley....Next things I know Miss Beasley at our house trying to talk to Pa. She say long as she been a teacher she never know nobody want to learn bad as Nettie and me. But when Pa call me out and she see how tight my dress is, she stop talking and go. (p. 11-12)*

“Nettie here with us....She be sitting there with me shelling peas or helping the children with they spelling. Helping me with spelling and everything else she think I need to know. No matter what happen, Nettie steady try to teach me what go on in the world. And she a good teacher too....All day she read, she study, she practice her handwriting, and try to git us to think.” (p. 17)

“Mr. _____ children all bright but they mean. They say Celie, I want dis. Celie, I want dat... Don’t let them run over you, Nettie say. You got to let them know who got the upper hand. They got I, I say. But she keep on. You got to fight. You got to fight. But I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive.” (p. 17)

Extract no. 2: *“Now that I know Albert hiding Nettie’s letters, I know exactly where they is. They in his trunk. Everything that mean something to Albert go in his trunk. He keep it locked up tight, but Shug can git the key.”* (p. 106)

“Can you handle it? Ast Shug. How I’m gon keep from killing him, I say. Don’t kill, she say. Nettie be coming home before long.” (p. 122)

“And every day we going to read Nettie’s letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think.” (p. 125)

Extract no. 3: *“Dear Celie, the first letter say, You’ve got to fight and get away from Albert. He ain’t no good.”* (p. 107)

“I asked Samuel if he would visit you and Mr. _____, just to see how you are. But he says he can’t risk putting himself between man and wife, especially when he don’t know them. And I felt bad for having to ask him, he and Corrine have been so nice to me.” (p. 109)

“The reason why I’m in Africa is because one of the missionaries that was supposed to go with Corrine and Samuel to help with thi children and with setting up a school suddenly married...” (p. 110)

“In the morning I started asking questions about Africa and started reading all the books Samuel and Corrine have on the subject....Well, I read and I read until I thought my eyes would fall out. I read where the Africans sold us because they loved money...How we came to America in ships....I hadn’t realize I was so ignorant, Celie. The little I knew about my own self wouldn’t have filled a thimble. And to think Miss Beasley always said I was the smartest child she ever taught! But one thing I do thank her for, for teaching me to learn for myself, by reading and studying and writing a clear hand. And for keeping alive in me somehow the desire to know.” (p. 111-112)

“So when Corrine and Samuel asked me if I would come with them and help them build a school in the middle of Africa, I said yes....and my real education began at that time.” (p. 112)

Extract no. 4: *“Us leaving, Shug say again... Celie is coming with us, say Shug. Mr. ____’s head swivel back straight. Say what? he ast. Celie is coming to Memphis with me. Over my dead body, Mr. ____ say... Mr. ____ start up from his seat, look at Shug, plop back down again. He look over at me. I thought you was finally happy, he say. What wrong now? You a lowdown dog is what’s wrong, I say. It’s time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need. Say what? he ast. Shock. All round the table folkses mouths be dropping open. You took my sister Nettie away from me, I say. And she was the only person love me in the world.”* (p. 170)

Extract no. I: *“On the day he left, she had walked past a house, not far from theirs, where—since it was nearly summer—all the doors and windows were open. People, young people, were everywhere. They milled about inside, shouted out of windows to those outside, looked carefree (as childless young people, her own age, always now looked to her) and yet as if sensitive to some outside surveillance beyond her own staring. But she was the only person walking on the street. And she stopped to look only because it was a black family’s house, in a black neighborhood, and there were several young white people. And all of the young people were strangely dressed and looked, really, funny and old-timey in the overalls and clodhoppers they wore.”* (p. 61)

...

“The next morning as she lay in bed watching the early news, she was again shown pictures of the house—except now the house no longer existed anywhere but on film. During the night—between three and four A.M.—the house was demolished by firebombs. The bombs, exploding, set fire to—not just the house—the whole cluster of houses on that street. Three small children were injured—no, a flash at the bottom of the screen announced them dead; several grownups were injured. One adult, missing, was assumed dead. The others had somehow escaped. It seems they had posted a guard who was alerted by the sound of a pickup truck stopping several yards from the house and then, in a few minutes, racing off.

This struck her, that they had had a guard. Why did they need a guard? Then, a question more to the point: How had they known they would need a guard? Did they know something she did not know? She had lived in this town all her life, but could not have foreseen that the house

would be bombed. Perhaps because nothing like this had ever happened before. Not in this town. Or had it?

...And so it was that one day in the middle of April in 1960 Meridian Hill became aware of the past and present of the larger world.” (p. 61-62)

Extract no. II: “A MONTH AFTER the bombing Meridian walked through the gate of a house and knocked on the door. “I’ve come to volunteer,” she said to the dark young man starring at her there. What was she volunteering into? She had no real idea. Something about the bombing had attacked her, the obliteration of the house, the knowledge that had foreseen this destruction.” (p. 69)

Extract no. III: “You are a coward,” one of the girls said then, though they knew she was not a coward. “A masochist,” sniffed another. And Meridian had sat among them on the floor, her hands clasping the insides of her sneakers, her head down. To join this group she must make a declaration of her willingness to die for the Revolution, which she had done. She must also answer the question “Will you kill for the Revolution?” with a positive Yes. This, however, her tongue could not manage.” (p. 19)

Extract no. IV: “What good is the vote, if we don’t own nothing?” asked the husband... “I don’t know” said Meridian. “It may be useless. Or maybe it can be the beginning of the use of your voice. You have to get used to using your voice, you know. You start on simple things and move one....” “No,” said the husband, “I don’t have time for foolishness. My wife is dying. My boy don’t have shoes. Go somewhere else... “Okay,” said Meridian. Surprised, Truman followed as she calmly walked away. “What’s this here?” asked the husband ten minutes later as they came through his front door with two bags of food. “To go with the venison.” Meridian grinned. “I ain’t changed my mind,” said the husband with a suspicious peek into the bags...And they did not see him again until the Monday after Mother’s Day, when he brought six rabbits already skinned and ten newspapers logs; and under the words WILL YOU BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO VOTE in Meridian’s yellow pad, he wrote his name in large black letters.” (p. 182)

The Color Purple – lesson plan

1) Administration (5 min)

- beginning of the lesson

2) Discussion (10 min)

- based on the fact, that students were acquainted with the history of African Americans
- At the beginning of the discussion – quickly review the history and focus on education
- *Questions* –What is education? Do you think that education is important? Yes/ No? Why? Is education connected only to school?

3) Introduction of the book The Color Purple – Cellie and Nettie (10 min)

- introduce this book to the students and give out charts with the names Celie and Nettie (see attachment, chart no. 1 – explain to students that they are going to read some extracts from this book and their task is to find three characteristics about these two women

4) Extract no. 1 (see the attachment, 10 min)

- let students read these three paragraphs
- *Questions* – What can you tell us about these two girls? What is their approach to education? In what ways are these two girls different? Can the style of writing tell us something about them?

5) Telling the story (5 min)

- tell the students in a short time what happened between the extract n. 1 and extract n. 2

6) Extract no. 2 (see the attachment, 10 min)

- students read the paragraphs, discussion
- *Questions* - What happened? What role does Shug play in it? How is Celie feeling? If she decided to kill Mr. _____, would it change her future? If yes, how?

7) Extract no. 3 (see attachment, 15 min)

- students read these four paragraphs, discussion follows
- Write some questions connected to this part of the book on the blackboard while they are reading. Use the “back” side of the table so the students are not reading the questions instead of the extract. When they are done reading, reveal those questions and let the students discuss them in pairs. After their discussion ask them what they think about it?
- *Questions* - What is Nettie’s “advice” to Celie? Who are Corrine and Samuel, what do we know about them? Where is Nettie? What did she realized?

8) Extract no. 4 (see the attachment, 10 min)

- let the students read the last paragraph and discuss it
- *Questions:* What/who helped Celie to stand up against Mr. ____ and leave? Did her behavior changed somehow from the behavior we saw at the beginning? (See the extract n. 1, paragraph 3)

9) End of the lesson – (15 min)

- Ask the students about their thoughts on this topic, their approach towards education at schools and education in the real life. Point out the things that you as a teacher find crucial considering this topic and the extracts that were used in the lesson. Encourage your students and answer any questions they have. At the very end – ask for their opinion on the ending of this novel – Do you think that Celie left and never came back? Are you curious to find out? You can read the whole novel or the end of the novel at home.

Meridian – lesson plan

1) Administration (5 min)

- beginning of the lesson

2) Checking the homework (5 min)

- ask the students about the extract no. I (see the attachment) which they were supposed to read at home
- *Question* – What do you think this book is about?

3) Mini lecture (15 min)

- introducing the novel to the students, framing the time in the history and pointing out the conditions for African American women at that time

4) Extract no. I (15 min)

- *Questions* - What did Meridian witness in the first paragraph? What happened next? Was she confused about the situation? What did she realized that day? Do YOU know the history of your country, family? Do you think it is important to know the history – Yes/No – why?

5) Extract no. II (7 min)

- *Questions* - What did Meridian do? What would you do if something like this happened around you/ or what would you do if you saw someone being treated the wrong way?

6) Telling the story (5 min)

- tell them what happened between the extract no. II and extract no. III

7) Extract no. III (15 min)

- *Questions* – What they wanted Meridian to do? How did they react to her not responding with “Yes”? What do you think about their requirement? What about you, do you act the same way as others or do you think about the situation and then decide what to do? Do you think Meridian should have answered “Yes” in order for her not to be excluded from the group? Would you want to be a part of the group that wants to kill/ hurt someone?

8) Extract no. IV (15 min)

- *Questions* – What we see Meridian doing in this extract? Do you think she is happy? Do you think she would be at this place if she decided those years ago to kill for the revolution?

9) Give out HW (5 min)

- end of the lesson
- Write and 250 words long essay. Choose from these topics:
 - Topic 1 – How do I use my voice now and how do I see using it in the future?
 - Topic 2 – Where will I be in 10 years?

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RÉSUMÉ

Diplomová práce je zaměřena na postavení žen v dílech afro-americké spisovatelky Alice Walker. Rozborem dvou děl *The Color Purple* a *Meridian* bylo zjištěno, že postavení afro-amerických žen ve společnosti je velmi ovlivněno prostředím, ve kterém dané ženy žijí a které je často svazuje a také vývojem jejich postavení od doby otroctví. Pozorováním dvou hlavních hrdinek bylo dospěno k závěru, že pokud se ženy postaví za svá práva a opustí prostředí a osoby, které je negativně ovlivňují, tak mohou dosáhnout plné svobody ve svém životě.

ANOTACE

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Název práce:	Zobrazení Afro-Amerických žen v dílech Alice Walker
Název v angličtině:	The Concept of Black Womanhood in Alice Walker's Fiction
Anotace práce:	Diplomová práce se zabývá prozkoumáním období za doby Alice Walker se zaměřením na literaturu a postavením Afro-Amerických žen. Dále se také zaměřuje na definování černošského feminismu a černošského ženství. Praktická část se zaměřuje na rozbor postav z dvou novel – The Color Purple a Meridian a také na využití těchto knih ve výuce na střední škole.
Klíčová slova:	Alice Walker, Africko-Americká literatura, feminismus, černošský feminismus, rasismus, útlak, sexismus, postavení žen, Barva nachu, Meridian
Anotace v angličtině:	This thesis focuses on the time period of Alice Walker in focus on literature and the position of black women in the society. It

	defines black feminism and black womanhood. The practical part focuses on women's analysis from the novels The Color Purple and Meridian and it gives and ideas how to use these books in English lessons at upper secondary schools.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Alice Walker, African-American literature, feminism, black feminism, black womanhood, racism, oppression, sexism, the position of women, The Color Purple, Meridian
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