

Name:

Date:

**"The Flowers" by Alice Walker
Journal Prompt**



Share a time in your life when you realized you weren't a little kid anymore. Use detailed descriptions to recall your experience.



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"The Flowers" by Alice Walker

"The Flowers" is a short story written by Alice Walker, published in 1973 as part of the collection *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What is the setting?

2. Who is the main character? How is he/she feeling in the beginning of the story?

3. How old is Myop?

4. What is Myop looking out for as she walks?

5. Where do things start to change in the story? How does the mood of the story change?

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6. What does Myop step on? What details can you infer about her findings?

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7. What emotions might Myop be experiencing in response to the grisly surprise in the woods?

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8. Why do you think the title of the story is "The Flowers?"

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9. Why do you think Myop “laid down her flowers”?

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10. How did the story make you feel? Explain.

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“The Flowers” by Alice Walker
Literary Analysis

Literary Device	Textual Evidence	Explanation/Significance
Setting/Historical Context	“Turning her back on her family’s sharecropper cabin, Myop walked along the fence till it ran into the stream.”	After the Civil War ended and slavery was no longer legal in the United States, prejudice against African-Americans was still heavily prevalent, especially in the southern states. Lynching is a form of violence in which a mob kills someone for an alleged offense without a legal trial. The most common method of murder was to hang the person from a tree via a noose. According to the NAACP, between 1882-1968, 4,743 lynchings occurred in the United States. Lynching was not legal, but most of the time the murderers were not prosecuted even though they would openly celebrate the crimes they committed. This explains why Myop found a noose and corpse in the woods during this time period.
Diction/Language		
Plot Structure		
Symbolism: Myop’s name		
Symbolism: Flowers		

Symbolism:
Summer

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Symbolism: The
dead corpse and
noose

Point of view

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Theme (author's
message)

Imagery/Figurative
Language

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Foreshadowing

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Juxtaposition is a literary device where an author places two or more characters, themes, descriptions, or concepts that are contrary/opposite side by side in order to highlight their differences through means of contrast.



Directions: In a minimum of two fully developed paragraphs, answer the following prompt. How does the author's use of juxtaposition develop and enhance the theme? Use textual evidence to support your answer.

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Pretend you are sending a letter to Myop in the past. Write a letter (present day) to Myop that she will receive on the very day she discovered the body. What advice would you give to Myop? What would you say to her to help her process what she's just experienced?

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“The Flowers” by Alice Walker— Suggested Lesson Procedure

1. Assign students the Before Reading journal prompt.
2. Have students silently read the story “The Flowers” to themselves. The story is less than 600 words, so it should only take about five minutes.
3. Pass out the reading questions to students. Read the short story **AGAIN** as a class. Have students answer the reading questions during reading and review the answers as you go. This important step will solidify students’ understanding of the literature as well as model important skills for literary analysis.
4. Give a copy of the Literary Analysis graphic organizer to students. I recommend having students work in groups of two or three on this activity. Require groups to discuss and answer questions; they should record all of their answers on their worksheets. Review answers as a class and/or collect worksheets.
5. Pass out the constructed response worksheets. Have students complete this activity independently—either for homework or during class.
6. Assign students the after reading activity where they will write a letter to the protagonist Myop.

Note to teachers: I am unable to offer a full text version of the story because of **Copyright**. If you enter “Full Text The Flowers by Alice Walker” into any search engine, you will find a copy of the story available for you to print and use in class. Here is the link I used: [The Flowers by Alice Walker](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at chompingatthelit@gmail.com

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“The Flowers” by Alice Walker Journal Prompt

Answers will vary.

Share a time in your life when you realized you weren't a little kid anymore. Use detailed descriptions to recall your experience.

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Name:

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"The Flowers" by Alice Walker

"The Flowers" is a short story written by Alice Walker, published in 1973 as part of the collection *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What is the setting?

It's a warm and sunny day outside on a farm during the summer. The setting adds to the cheerful and vibrant mood. Myop's family lives in a sharecropper cabin which indicates the timeframe of the story is sometime after the American Civil War.

SHARE WITH STUDENTS: Sharecropping became common during the Reconstruction era following the American Civil War. Sharecropping is a type of farming in which families rent small plots of land from a landowner in return for a portion of their crop. Sharecropping was one of the few opportunities available for freed African-American slaves to earn a living, but many sharecroppers became tied to the land as a result. This sets the tone for the story as readers can infer Myop's ancestors were slaves and her family currently doesn't have a lot of money.

2. Who is the main character? How is he/she feeling in the beginning of the story?

Myop is the main character. She is in a delightful and explorative mood. "She skipped lightly from hen house to pigpen to smokehouse that the days had never been as beautiful as these." She was singing on her walk indicating cheerfulness as she ventures into the woods by her house. "Turning her back on the rusty boards of her family's sharecropper cabin," she's unbothered by her circumstances.

3. How old is Myop?

Myop is ten years old.

4. What is Myop looking out for as she walks?

Myop is looking out for snakes.

5. Where do things start to change in the story? How does the mood of the story change?

In the fifth paragraph, the mood changes. "By twelve o'clock, her arms laden with sprigs of her findings, she was a mile or more from home. She had often been as far before, but the strangeness of the land made it not as pleasant as her usual haunts. It seemed gloomy in the little cove in which she found herself. The air was damp, the silence close

and deep.” The mood is now ominous and foreboding although it began bright and promising. Myop is uncomfortable in this part of the woods.

6. What does Myop step on? What details can you infer about her findings?

Myop finds the decomposed body of a violently murdered man. She steps through the skull. He has clearly been dead for a long time because only his dry corpse remains and much of his clothing has rotted off. Myop notices that he was a tall man, and all of his teeth were broken; plus, she finds remnants of a noose. She looks up and notices another scrap of rope hanging from the tree. These details suggest that the victim was murdered by lynching. Readers can infer from the time period that the body was of an African-American man, most likely a victim of racism.

7. What emotions might Myop be experiencing in response to the grisly surprise in the woods?

The narrator never states that Myop recognizes what the noose means, but Myop's shift in mood suggests that she understands it is a symbol of racial violence against people that look like her. She is probably feeling disturbed, sad, discouraged, distraught, and unsettled. Her sanctuary has been corrupted by sins of the past.

8. Why do you think the title of the story is “The Flowers?”

Answers will vary. Perhaps because flowers represent youth and innocence as they are beautiful, delicate, and short-lived and this story is all about innocence lost.

9. Why do you think Myop “laid down her flowers”?

Myop gathered the flowers (just like a child would do for fun) but she leaves them behind because it's typical for someone to leave flowers at a grave. This man's body was left here, with no regard for his remains, so she is paying respect to him. Symbolically, it's as if she's leaving her childhood and innocence behind.

10. How did the story make you feel? Explain.

Answers will vary.

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"The Flowers" by Alice Walker
Literary Analysis

Answers will vary.

Literary Device	Textual Evidence	Explanation/Significance
Setting/Historical Context	"Turning her back on her family's sharecropper cabin, Myop walked along the fence till it ran into the stream."	After the Civil War ended and slavery was no longer legal in the United States, prejudice against African-Americans was still heavily prevalent, especially in the southern states. Lynching is a form of violence in which a mob kills someone for an alleged offense without a legal trial. The most common method of murder was to hang the person from a tree via a noose. According to the NAACP, between 1882-1968, 4,743 lynchings occurred in the United States. Lynching was not legal, but most of the time the murderers were not prosecuted even though they would openly celebrate the crimes they committed. This explains why Myop found a noose and corpse in the woods during this time period.
Diction/Language	<p>"He had been a tall man. From feet to neck covered a long space. His head lay beside him." (Short, choppy sentences)</p> <p>"She had often been as far before, but the strange land was not as pleasant as usual." (Builds suspense)</p>	<p>Walker's language is simple and uncomplicated, fitting the thoughts and language that a child would use. She begins with longer sentences, and as the story progresses, the sentences become short and choppy.</p> <p>The story is very descriptive but without explanations. Readers must make inferences because Walker doesn't explicitly state certain facts. For example, she doesn't state where or when the story takes place or that the corpse was an African-American man killed by lynching. Walker's language and use of ambiguity/mystery builds suspense and leads to the twist ending.</p>

Plot Structure	<p>"The harvesting of the corn and cotton, peanuts and squash, made each day a golden surprise that caused shivers to run up her jaws."</p>	<p>The structure of the short story is basic. Each paragraph is roughly around six lines long—the entire story is only about 600 words. The story follows a traditional plot format, but is clearly divided into two parts. The first section is characterized by words with positive connotations. The atmosphere exudes a euphoric childhood. The second part of the story is characterized by words with dark connotations. There is a certain "strangeness" and gloom in the atmosphere.</p>
Symbolism: Myop's name	<p>"It seemed to Myop as she skipped lightly from her house to pigpen to smokehouse that the days had never been as beautiful as these."</p>	<p>Myop's name is correlated to the word "myopic" which means nearsighted or lacking discernment. This symbolizes the smallness of her world and her inexperience—her innocence.</p>
Symbolism: Flowers	<p>"Very near where she'd stepped into the head was a wild pink rose."</p>	<p>When Myop leaves her flowers on the ground, symbolically, she's leaving her innocence behind.</p> <p>A pink rose grows near the skull Myop finds. This might symbolize that beautiful things can still come from the ugliness of the world; as a culture and country, there's still hope for recovery.</p>
Symbolism: Summer	<p>"And the summer was over."</p>	<p>The summer's end symbolizes the fun is over. Myop's carefree spirit vanishes as she acknowledges the violence and dangers of the world.</p>
Symbolism: The dead corpse and noose	<p>"As she picked it to add to her bundle, she noticed a raised mound, a ring, around the rose's root. It was the rotted remains of a noose, a bit of shredding plowline, now blending into the soil."</p>	<p>The dead body of the man symbolizes the violence that all African-Americans faced during this time period. The body lies forgotten in the woods, symbolizing the hatred and racial climate of the time.</p>

Point of view	<p>"Myop carried a short stick. She struck out at chickens she liked, and worked out the beat of a song on the fence around the pigpen. She felt light and good in the warm sun."</p> <p>"She was ten, and nothing existed for her but her song, and the stick in her dark brown hand going tat-de-ta-ta-ta..."</p>	<p>This story is told from a third-person perspective, which highlights the conflict between the fantasy of a child's mind and the harsh reality of the world. The use of onomatopoeia "tat-de'ta'ta" showcases the innocence of the character Myop. Readers suspect that this day may not be as golden as Myop expects it to be because Myop is only ten years old and has no reason to believe that there's trouble ahead.</p>
Theme (author's message)	<p>"Frayed, rotted, bleached, and frazzled—barely there—spinning restlessly in the breeze. Myop laid down her flowers. And the summer was over."</p>	<p>Innocence does not last forever and losing one's innocence can be a heartbreaking, traumatizing experience. The world is not always a peaceful place; violence and danger exist everywhere.</p>
Imagery/Figurative Language	<p><i>There are multiple possible answers, so have your students pick one example from the story!</i></p> <p>"The air made her nose twitch. The harvesting of the corn and cotton, peanuts and squash, made each day a golden surprise that caused shivers to run up her jaws."</p>	<p>These lines appeal to your sense of smell, touch, and sight. You can smell the fresh air of being on a farm on a warm day. You can visualize the crops growing symbolizing the fruitfulness of life. You can feel the shivers that Myop gets from her excitement to go exploring.</p>
Foreshadowing	<p>"It seemed gloomy in the little cover in which she found herself. The air was damp, the silence close and deep."</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Myop finds a strange new blue flower, indicating her lack of knowledge, even about the area right around her home. 2) The author states, "Today she made her own path" rather than taking one of the familiar trails she's been on with her mother which hints she might find something new and sinister. 3) The mention of snakes foreshadows the possibility of danger.

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Juxtaposition is a literary device where an author places two or more characters, themes, descriptions, or concepts that are contrary/opposite side by side in order to highlight their differences through means of contrast.

Answers will vary.

- The light and dark
- The flowers (beauty, joyfulness) and the skeleton (grim, melancholy)
- Good and evil
- The safe, peaceful mood and the shocking, frightening mood
- The tiny white bubbles disrupt the thin black scale
- The innocence and the demoralization
- Life (nature, crops) and death (the man)

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Answers will vary.