



# Voices from the Gaps

# Alice Walker

“*At the moment of crisis I realize that, because my hands are bound, I can not adjust my glasses, and therefore must tilt my head awkwardly in order to locate and focus on a blue hill. . . . I notice there is a blue hill rising above and just behind the women and their naked-bottomed little girls, who now stand in rows fifty feet in front of me. In front of them kneels my little band of intent faces. Mbatí is unfurling a banner, quickly, before the soldiers can stop her. . . All of them--Adam, Olivia, Benny, Pierre, Raye, Mbatí-- hold it firmly and stretch it wide. RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY! it says in huge block letters. There is a roar as if the world cracked open and I flew inside. I am no more. And satisfied.*

— Possessing the Secret of Joy



## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1944
- \* African-American novelist, poet, and activist
- \* Arguably her most famous work is *The Color Purple*

## Biography

Born in 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, to sharecropper parents, Alice Walker has become one of the best-known and most highly respected writers in the U.S. Educated at Spelman College and Sarah Lawrence College, Walker, in a commencement speech at Sarah Lawrence years later, spoke out against the silence of that institution’s curriculum when it came to African-American culture and history. Active in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in the South, she used her own and others’ experiences as material for her searing examination of politics and black-white relations in her novel *Meridian* (1976).

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# Alice Walker

## Biography continued

Beginning with her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker has focused on a matrix which includes sexual and racial realities within black communities as well as the unavoidable connections between family and society. For exposing the former, she has been criticized by some African-American male critics and theorists; for exploring the latter, she has been awarded numerous prizes while winning the hearts and minds of countless black and white readers. Perhaps her most famous work is *The Color Purple*, brought to the attention of mainstream America through the film adaptation by Steven Spielberg. In that novel of incest, lesbian love, and sibling devotion, Walker also introduces blues music as a unifying thread in the lives of many of the characters.

Refusing to ignore the tangle of personal and political themes, Walker has produced half a dozen novels, two collections of short stories, numerous volumes of poetry, and books of essays. Though she has attained fame and recognition in many countries, Walker has not lost her sense of rootedness in the South or her sense of indebtedness to her mother for showing her what the life of an artist entailed. Writing of this central experience in her famous essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," she talks about watching her mother at the end of a day of back-breaking physical labor on someone else's farm return home only to walk the long distance to their well to get water for her garden planted each year at their doorstep. Walker observed her design that garden, putting tall plants at the back and planting so as to have something in bloom from early spring until the end of summer. While not knowing what she was seeing at the time, the adult Walker names her mother an artist full of dedication, a keen sense of design and balance, and a tough conviction that life without beauty is unbearable.



# Alice Walker

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### Works by the Author

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*The Temple of My Familiar* (1989).  
*The Color Purple* (1982).  
*You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981).  
*Meridian* (1976).  
*In Love and Trouble* (1973).  
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*The same river twice : honoring the difficult* (1996).  
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*Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1985).  
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*Her blue body everything we know : earthling poems, 1965-1990* (1991).  
*Goodnight Willie Lee, I'll see you in the morning* (1979).  
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*A cor púrpura*, trans. Peg Bodelson, Betúlia Machado, Maria José Silveira (Editora Marco Zero, 1986).

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