

OPRAH WINFREY PRESENTS

The Color Purple

The Musical about Love.

SYNOPSIS

Act One

The Color Purple begins in 1911 as young sisters Celie and Nettie play a hand-clapping game in a field. They leave their game, and join the residents of their rural Georgia community, heading to church on Sunday morning. Celie, age fourteen, is pregnant with her second child. The women of the church, who act as a commenting chorus throughout, observe that Celie's own father is the father of her children.

Celie gives birth to a boy, whom she names Adam. Pa takes the baby away, just as he did her first child, Olivia. Mister, a local farmer and landowner, wants to marry Nettie. Pa refuses, offering him Celie instead. Mister grudgingly agrees.

At Mister's house, Celie is weighed down with work: laboring on the farm, cleaning the house, and looking after Mister's children, who have run wild. Nettie arrives at Mister's house, saying she can no longer live with Pa. Mister allows Nettie to stay, but begins to make advances. When she resists, Mister throws Nettie out. When Celie protests, Mister threatens Celie, saying she will never see Nettie again; Nettie vows to write to Celie – only death will keep her from it.

1919. Years have passed, and no letters have arrived from Nettie; Celie believes she must be dead. Mister's 17 year old son, Harpo, brings his intended bride Sofia home to meet his father. Mister doesn't approve of the match, but stubborn Sofia does not back down. Celie is entranced with Sofia's strength and willpower.

Three years pass, and Sofia and Harpo are married, but constantly battling. Mister advises Harpo that he needs to beat Sofia if he expects her to mind him. Harpo asks Celie what she thinks: she also tells Harpo to beat Sofia.

A furious Sofia confronts Celie. She explains that she's had to fight her entire life, but never thought she'd have to fight in her own house. She advises Celie to fight back against Mister's mistreatment, but Celie doesn't have the strength. Sofia departs to stay with her sisters.

It's 1922, and with Sofia gone, Harpo has decided to turn his house into a juke joint. Squeak arrives to apply to work as a waitress; she also wants to sing. She tells Harpo that if he can get the blues singer Shug Avery (who happens to be Mister's old girlfriend) to sing at the juke joint, he'll attract a huge audience.

The entire town is abuzz with the news that Shug Avery is coming to town; when she arrives, she is ill and exhausted. Celie nurses her back to health. Mister's father, Ol Mister, shows up to criticize his son for keeping company with Shug Avery. Mister, angered, shows him the door.

As Celie tailors a dress for Shug, they talk about Mister: Shug has always had a passion for him, while Celie doesn't think she's ever felt passion of love. Shug realizes that Celie can't see her own beauty and strength of character; she encourages her to find her own inner power.

Performing at the juke joint, Shug brings down the house with a raucous blues. Sofia arrives with her new boyfriend, Buster, a prizefighter. Harpo and Sofia dance, causing a jealous Squeak to pick a fight with Sofia. The fight escalates into a bar brawl; Celie and Shug escape to get some air.

Walking back to the house, Shug tells Celie that she's feeling well enough to go back on the road. Celie doesn't want her to leave; the two of them begin to realize what a strong bond they have. Shug reveals that she's found a letter for Celie that has come from Africa. Celie is stunned to discover that the letter is from her sister: Nettie is alive.

Act Two

A moment after Act I ended, as Celie reads the letter that Mister has kept hidden from her. Nettie describes her journey to Africa, working with the missionary couple who adopted Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. Celie is filled with rage that Mister has kept Nettie's letters from her for so long, but Shug counsels her not to confront Mister.

While shopping in town, Sofia encounters the mayor's wife, who admires how well-groomed Sofia's children are. The mayor's wife, who is white, tells Sofia she wants her to be her maid; Sofia rejects this idea with a hearty "Hell, no." Enraged, the mayor's men attach and beat Sofia. Celie comes to Sofia's jail cell to care for her.

Time has passed: it is 1937, and Shug has arrived for Easter, bringing her new man Grady with her. Celie is bitter; she has not heard from Nettie, Sofia has been beaten down, and Mister still mistreats her. Shug tries to get Celie to see the simple joy in everyday life that is all around her – it is there if you look for it, like the color purple flowering in a field.

Celie, Mister, Shug, Grady, Sofia, Squeak, Harpo and Ol Mister sit down to Easter dinner. Shug announces that she and Grady are leaving for Memphis, and Celie is coming with them. Squeak wants to come along. Mister scoffs at the women, but Celie stands firm. She curses Mister: "Until you do right by me, everything and everyone you touch will crumble, everything you even dream will fail."

Shug, Celie, Grady and Squeak depart, leaving Harpo and Sofia alone; they decide to live together as man and wife again. Celie, who has been sending letters to Nettie in Africa, now writes to Nettie describing Shug's house in Memphis.

After a storm, Harpo finds Mister lying in the road. Just as Celie predicted, everything has gone wrong for Mister. Harpo tells him that it's no curse: he has made a mess of his life with his own hands. Mister has a moment of insight, and realizes he must do his best to repair the mistakes he has made.

It is 1943; Celie gets the news that Alphonso has died – the man she knew as Pa, although he was really her stepfather. She has inherited a house and a store; she decides to open a sewing business, making one-size-fits-all pants for her customers.

Meanwhile, Harpo and Sofia are rebuilding their relationship, working together to run their household. Mister comes to them, saying he's gotten a letter from Nettie; she and the children have run into difficulty in trying to come home. Mister makes a plan with Harpo and Sofia.

Shug and Celie relax eating Chinese food. Shug tells Celie she is involved with a young musician in her band; she is leaving the life she and Celie have together for one last fling. Now alone, Celie reaffirms her belief in herself – that she has everything inside of her that she needs to live a bountiful life.

It is the 4th of July, 1945. People gather at Celie's house for a celebration. Mister comes to make amends; he asks Celie to marry him again, but she decides that they are better off as friends – "two old fools left over from love."

Celie notices a group of strangers approaching the house. It is Nettie, along with Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. Everyone gathers around Celie and Nettie, as the long-parted sisters are reunited at last.