SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED TW; SCORE: 9

Prompt 2: An individual's struggle toward understanding and awareness is a traditional subject for any novelist. In an essay, apply this statement to one novel of literary merit. In order to analyze the arc of a character’s struggle to find enlightenment, compare/contrast this character as seen in an early scene with his/her depiction in a scene near the end of the novel. Then consider how this comparison/contrast reveals the new understanding and awareness the character has gained and how this contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Each and every individual experiences a struggle when emerging from childhood, being exposed to the new and unfamiliar characteristics of an unsheltered life. In Alice Walker’s The Color Purple, Celie is first depicted as a young girl being raped and abused by her “father,” later shifting to being shown as a businesswoman with a successful occupation, all contributing to the overall theme that people can reach better understanding of themselves by observing their surroundings and how it relates to them.

The first few letters that Celie writes to God center around the start of a long period of abuse that she suffered at the hands of different men. Her own “father,” Alphonso, rapes and beats her, even going so far as to take the two children that she gave birth to. This act alone is inhumane, but along with everything else Celie has experienced, it is no surprise that she feels weak and alone with little self-worth. She is pictured as being taken advantage of, with little strength to fight back. Celie writes lettered addressed to God, yet she is not entirely certain that he is listening or even cares about a single black girl, such as herself. A few letters later, Celie is given as a bride to Mr. \_\_\_\_, with Alphonso describing her as the uglier of the two sisters. This degrading way of talking about her has definitely been engrained, as Celie does not protest or deny what he says; she simply remains submissive, as it is clear that she believes there is little purpose to life anymore. Celie’s childhood has forced her to become someone who is obedient and quiet, brainwashed by all the men she has interacted with thus far.

Fast forward to the last few letters of the novel: Celie has erased the toxic men from her life, and found new companionship with her sister/lover figure, Shug Avery, and her birth sister, Nettie, whom she has reconnected with. Celie is depicted as starting a business making custom tailored pants, first for Shug, then for other people who were willing to buy them. Sewing is traditionally seen as a domestic entity, and the fact that Celie is able to make a profit out of this is representative of how she is no longer in that mold of a typical serving wife. She has risen to a position as the owner of a business and with every pair of pants sold, her confidence continues to grow. The feeling of another person valuing one’s product is priceless, and the contented feeling is evident in Celie’s new persona. Celie eventually returns to her mother’s house to claim it as rightfully hers, when she runs into Mr. \_\_\_\_. He tries to attack her with his vicious words, but they do not have the effect that they once did. Celie has, since the last time interacting with Mr. \_\_\_\_, grown as a character and found a sense of worth and purpose. She is now immune to his threats and no longer believes anything that comes from his mouth. Celie has made peace with the past, as she can stand in front of him and be proud of who she is, despite what his opinions may be.

Looking at the image of Celie at the beginning of the novel and a couple hundred pages later, one would think they’re two separate women. Celie has interacted with new people and had turning-point moments in life between the two points in time. Celie has gained a new awareness of the world by interacting with strong women, such as Sofia and Shug Avery, who have demonstrated that just because one is a woman that does not define what they can or cannot do. Celie has a more accurate understanding of herself, free from the grasp of those who tried to cloud her vision. The dramatic shift that she has undergone reflects the value of friendship and how having another understanding person to confide in can make all the difference. Celie went from writing letters to God, to writing letters to Nettie, and that shift marked a change in Celie’s perspective and a renewed sense of optimism for the future. It was crucial for Celie to leave her abusive house and encounter different people who had different opinions of her. When she is growing up, she doesn’t know any better than what she has experienced. This exposure literally allowed her to see more aspects of society, and mentally allowed her to expand her mentality towards herself and others.

Generally, it is said that one should not heed others’ perception of them, as it does not matter what others think. In this novel, others’ views of Celie as a strong girl for surviving what she has been through, especially at such a young age, actually helps her open her eyes to see her true self-worth.

-Allison Ko (2018)