

# "The Flowers"

by Alice Walker

It seemed to Myop as she skipped lightly from hen house to pigpen to smokehouse that the days had never been as beautiful as these. The air held a keenness that made her nose twitch. The harvesting of the corn and cotton, peanuts and squash, made each day a golden surprise that caused excited little tremors to run up her jaws.

Myop carried a short, knobby stick. She struck out at random 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. She was ten, and nothing existed for her but her song, the stick clutched in her dark brown hand, and the tat-de-ta-ta-ta of accompaniment,

Turning her back on the rusty boards of her family's sharecropper cabin, Myop walked along the fence till it ran into the stream made by the spring. Around the spring, where the family got drinking water, silver ferns and wildflowers grew. Along the shallow banks pigs rooted. Myop watched the tiny white bubbles disrupt the thin black scale of soil and the water that silently rose and slid away down the stream.

She had explored the woods behind the house many times. Often, in late autumn, her mother took her to gather nuts among the fallen leaves. Today she made her own path, bouncing this way and that way, vaguely keeping an eye out for snakes. She found, in addition to various common but pretty ferns and leaves, an armful of strange blue flowers with velvety ridges and a sweet suds bush full of the brown, fragrant buds.

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.

Myop began to circle back to the house, back to the peacefulness of the morning. It was then she stepped smack into his eyes. Her heel became lodged in the broken ridge between brow and nose, and she reached down quickly, unafraid, to free herself. It was only when she saw his naked grin that she gave a little yelp of surprise.

He had been a tall man. From feet to neck covered a long space. His head lay beside him. When she pushed back the leaves and layers of earth and debris Myop saw that he'd had large white teeth, all of them cracked or broken, long fingers, and very big bones. All his clothes had rotted away except some threads of blue denim from his overalls. The buckles of the overall had turned green.

Myop gazed around the spot with interest. Very near where she'd stepped into the head was a wild pink rose. 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 benignly into the soil. Around an overhanging limb of a great spreading oak clung another piece. Frayed, rotted, bleached, and frazzled--barely there--but spinning restlessly in the breeze. Myop laid down her flowers.

And the summer was over.

## “The Flowers” Close Reading Questions

1. Who is the main **character**? What do we know about her from the story?
2. How does Walker develop her character? What techniques does she use?  
In the second paragraph, what technique does Walker use to construct the character of Myop? What do we learn about the character through this technique? Be sure to reference at least two specific details from the text.
3. What is the **setting**?
  - a. What clues in the text allow us to construct an historical context around this story?
  - b. What mood does Walker set with images of the setting in the first paragraph? Please use evidence from the text (quotes!) to support your answer.
  - c. What happens to the setting as we progress through the story?
4. What do paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 reveal about Myop’s life? Use at least one specific reference to the text in your answer.
5. Although Myop is surprised, she does not change as a character immediately.
  - a. What causes her to change?
  - b. What action shows that she has changed?
6. What does the word *benignly* mean? Why does Walker use it to describe the noose?
7. How is the final sentence significant?
8. Sometimes names carry significance. Look up *Myop* in the dictionary. Can you find a word starting with *myop* that might connect to the character? Please explain the connection.
9. What is this story’s point of view, and how does it affect the story as a whole—how the readers see it?