Celie’s struggle for identity

In *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker the struggle for identity is shaped at both the personal level, by individual preferences, and at a wider level by social, cultural, historical and ethnic customs and expectations. Thus, for much of the novel, there is a struggle for Celie between her desire to escape from Mr ___ to Shug, and the expectation that she will obey the man she has been forced to marry.

- **1. Politics, race and religion**
  - Racism (both in America and Africa)
  - Religion - pantheism vs Christianity (a white male God)
  - Views of marriage and the opportunity to choose one’s own partner e.g. Celie, Harpo, Sofia, Shug, and Mr ___.

- **2. Attitudes towards gender and sexuality**
  - Sexuality e.g. Shug & Celie’s unconventional relationship and social attitudes towards female sexuality.

- **3. Social class, wealth and status**
  - Education e.g. Nettie teaches others to read and write.

- **4. Personal and cultural ambitions**
  - Creativity e.g. sewing, quilting, and singing
  - Financial independence e.g. Celie’s inheritance and business (Folkspants) bring her security.

Tasks

- **Working in pairs**, discuss these four key areas of Celie’s struggle for identity. Which do you think is most important to her? Find a quote from the novel to support each example given.
- Can you think of any other ideas relating to Celie’s sense of identity? Make notes on this sheet.
- Now make a note below of other characters who struggle for identity in this novel.