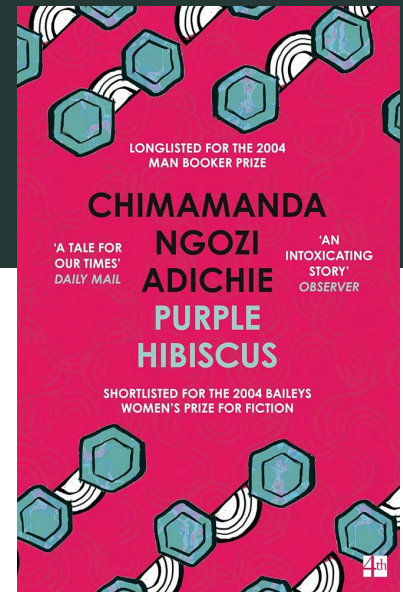


Students Bring Characters to Life in Creative Exploration of *Purple Hibiscus*



EDGBASTON
HIGH SCHOOL



As part of Black History Month, students were given the opportunity to engage creatively with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus. Midway through the novel, they were tasked with giving narrative "voices" to one of the siblings, Jaja or Kambili. Here are two examples of the students' fantastic work.

I stared at my nails, still clipped chafed short like Papa's. I recall sitting between his knees, feeling his face brush against mine as he clipped them, which were usually too short. It was such a small thing, so small I felt that everything Papa did was an excess of everything — too exhausting, too restrained, too unbreathable. Yet when I was old enough to cut them myself, I did the same. It is strange how habits, even painful ones, can become part of you. Like I'm still holding on to pieces of Papa's authority, even though it hurts, just as split log cracks from the top to the bottom along the grain. Lovely phrasing

But Jaja... Jaja appears to have no recollection any longer. Or perhaps this is the case that he remembers all too well, which is why he has changed. I wonder if he has lost the memory of the things left unsaid, the things suppressed, the things hidden. We never talked about the penalties; never talked about the consequences; never talked about the irreversible losses. So much we swallowed, viscous and sour, as if we were trained not to feel, not to speak because that was the only way to survive.

Now Jaja has discovered a certain degree of self-expression, but I don't understand: Is he harking back to the fact that we would sit quietly, obediently following order like a cold statue and letting Papa sculpt our lives? Or has he chosen to leave everything behind and move on — the silence, the secret? I am inclined to ask, but I am terrified. I am worried that only I remain trapped in the awareness by Papa's ravages, by his expectations, and by the panic that lies deep inside me. Maybe time has helped Jaja shift his focus while I remain ensnared in some behaviours, cutting my nails too short because I simply do not know any better. I wonder if whether this is the case after being mute for too long a time — you forget how to break free, how to scream. Or maybe until the epiphany moment passes, you are unconscious that you were resided in a cage.

Naomi, 9F



“ I couldn't speak even though my thoughts were loud enough to echo through the tight hallways. There was so much that was never told, so much we hid, so much, that we were forced to silence ourselves; one small piece of information could tear our perfect family image apart. But the silence, it shattered me and Kambili more than any words could have.

I do not know what possessed me to tell Aunt Ifeoma what really happened with my hand. There was something about her, about this place that encouraged me to say what cannot be said. Everything came out. It broke me, to see Aunt Ifeoma's pitied face whilst telling her my story. How papa hurt me, how papa showed no sympathy until I was paralysed enough to be sent to emergency care. Aunt Ifeoma wanted to know more. Nothing else could come out of my mouth. I knew then that I had to stop, or everything would shatter into pieces. There were so many things that I wished could be said; how papa threw furniture at me when I refused to practice; how I was beaten for an hour because I was 2nd place. So many things left unspoken. The silence is our prison.

My hands which represented the blood and bruises given to me in the past years were the filthiest it had ever been. Papa made sure they were pristine. My nails. My short nails. The nails that were not supposed to exist were longer than ever. I had not trimmed them ever since me and Kambili left home. Papa ensured that we had no nails. I did not want to trim them. They were a sign. A sign of freedom. I couldn't control my feet, which were swaying with the rhythm of the song that was sung every night. It was as though I was lost in the moment and had forgotten that I had a different life from this. I have noticed my physical appearance changing slowly each day I have stayed here. My shoulders broadening and my muscles expanding due to the work that was set by us by Aunt Ifeoma. Papa would've shamed us if we knew we were doing these things.

I knew Kambili was going to ask about why I told Aunt Ifeoma. I could easily tell that she wanted answers to many questions. I was secretly aching inside, longing to share everything; how I felt staying here and why I tried so hard to change. The answer was simple. The freedom, the longing of love and happiness. To do things I wished and to breathe freely. I wanted to tell her how this place was an escape from prison. From home. I wanted to tell her how I resented papas' control, how I resented papa's manipulative personality, how I really felt every time papa's hand struck mama's beautiful face. I wanted to tell her how I really felt when she always tried to copy papa in every way. How I felt when she mentioned papa when we had finally escaped. There is so much that I wish we had told each other.”

Zaina, 9C