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.

---

*Sharecropper-- A tenant farmer who gives a share of the crops harvested to the landlord in place of rent. Sharecropping arose in the South after the American Civil War originally as an arrangement between freed slaves and landowners, continuing for many decades.
Inference: the process of making educated assumptions or drawing logical conclusions based on observed details and prior knowledge.

Instructions: Closely read the short story, “The Flowers,” by Alice Walker. Answer the following questions, first underlining and coding the text as directed below. Then write your responses in the space provided, using well-constructed sentences and evidence from the text to support your answers.

1. What is the mood in the beginning of the story? Underline the words and phrases in the story that helped you draw your conclusion, identifying them with the number 1 in the right margin. Write your response below citing evidence from the text.

2. At what point in the story does the mood change? Once again, underline the clue words and phrases in the text, identifying them with the number 2 in the margin, and writing your response below.

3. Myop lives in a “sharecropper’s cabin.” Why is this an important detail? What inferences can you make about Myop—her socioeconomic status, ethnicity, the location and time period in which she lives?

4. What inferences can you make about the man Myop finds in the woods? Consider the setting—the time and place—of the story and the condition of the man she finds. Underline clue words and phrases and identify them with the number 4; then answer below.

5. What might the flowers symbolize? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
CSI: Dead Man in the Woods

You are part of a CSI unit assigned to the following case:
10-year-old witness Myop, who lives in a local sharecropper cabin, has just reported finding the remains of unknown victim in the woods. Using clues from “The Flowers,” by Alice Walker, your unit must determine how the victim died. Be sure to use ample evidence from the text to support your findings.

Unit Roles:
- **Unit Investigators**: describe in detail the physical evidence found at the scene
- **Medical Examiner**: describe in detail the physical condition of the victim
- **Witness (Myop)**: describe in detail your experiences and findings of that day
- **Detective**: summarize all evidence, providing any additional relevant information (about witnesses, for example, or location of the scene) that could help solve the case

**UNIT INVESTIGATOR REPORT**

Name(s) of Investigator(s): __________________________________________________________

Location of Crime Scene (if exact address is unavailable, provide any relevant information about the location of the scene, such as type of setting and city/state/region of U.S.)

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

Crime Scene Sketch: (Draw from an aerial view—that is, looking down from directly above. Include all details you can infer, such as placement of body, witness and any objects such as trees, noose, flowers, etc.)
Medical Examiner Report

Examiner’s Name:__________________________________________________________

Fill in the following with any information available. If unknown, write “Unknown.”

**WHO IS THE DECEASED?**

Name: ___________________________ Age: _____ Sex:  M  F  Race: ______

Address: __________________________________________________________________

If address unknown, please provide any information about the possible location of residence, for example, state or region of U.S.:______________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Estimated Date of Death (or time lapsed since discovery of deceased):____________

**Describe in detail the physical condition of the deceased:**

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Marks, Wounds and Injuries

Circle the areas of the body in which evidence of injury is found. Describe injury.

Probable Cause of Death: ____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________
SHERIFF’S DEPARTMENT
COUNTY COURT
WITNESS STATEMENT

Name of Witness: ___________________________________________ Age of Witness: ______
Address (include any known details): ____________________________________________

STATEMENT REGARDING INCIDENT (Please provide all known details):

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

I swear, under penalty of perjury, that the above is true and correct.

Signature of Witness: ___________________________________________ Signature of Officer: ____________

Officer Comments (consider age, demeanor, credibility, accuracy of recall, occupation, and/or home life of witness, as well as any special circumstances that should be noted about the witness and/or his/her testimony):
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Detective Report

Based on the evidence collected, what are your conclusions on the following:

1. Cause of Death: _____ Accident _____ Suicide _____ Homicide

What evidence contributed to your findings?

2. If a suicide or homicide, what might have been possible motives?

What evidence contributed to your findings?

3. If a homicide, who might be possible suspects?

What evidence contributed to your findings?

Name of Detective(s):

Signature(s):
REFLECTION

“The Flowers” is Alice Walker’s shortest short story. There is as much left unsaid in this story as there is stated. Why do you suppose Walker left so much up to the reader to infer rather than including more background on the time and place of the story and the circumstances regarding the death of the man she found in the woods? Write a well-constructed paragraph explaining your answer, supported with evidence from the text.