

Women

Alice Walker

They were women then
My mama's generation
Husky of voice—Stout of
Step
5 With fists as well as
Hands
How they battered down
Doors
And ironed
10 Starched white
Shirts
How they led
Armies
Headragged Generals
15 Across mined
Fields
Booby-trapped
Kitchens
To discover books
20 Desks
A place for us
How they knew what we
Must know
Without knowing a page
25 Of it
Themselves.



Three Sisters (1985), Jonathan Green. Oil on masonite, 11" × 14". Collection of Ted Carlsen. Photograph by Tim Stamm.

Thinking Through the Literature

1. What **images** from this poem stand out in your mind?
2. What do you think Walker admires most about her mother's generation? Cite evidence from the poem to support your opinion.
3. Why do you think the mothers are described as "Headragged Generals" crossing "mined fields" and "booby-trapped kitchens"?



- what the mothers are fighting for
- what obstacles they had to overcome

4. Point out words in the poem that you think have strong **connotations**

Poem at Thirty-Nine

Alice Walker

How I miss my father.
I wish he had not been
so tired
when I was
5 born.

Writing deposit slips and checks
I think of him.
He taught me how.
This is the form,
10 he must have said:
the way it is done.
I learned to see
bits of paper
as a way
15 to escape
the life he knew
and even in high school
had a savings
account.

20 He taught me
that telling the truth
did not always mean
a beating;
though many of my truths
25 must have grieved him
before the end.

How I miss my father!
He cooked like a person
dancing
30 in a yoga meditation
and craved the voluptuous
sharing
of good food.

31 **voluptuous** (ve-lŭp'chŭŭ-es)
pleasurable to the senses.

Now I look and cook just like him:
35 my brain light;
tossing this and that
into the pot;
seasoning none of my life
the same way twice; happy to feed
40 whoever strays my way.

He would have grown
to admire
the woman I've become:
45 cooking, writing, chopping wood,
staring into the fire.



Illustration by Raul Colon.