

# Madame C.J. Walker

## Pre-reading

### Questions:

- What do you know about this woman?

### Definitions:

- Widow – a woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried
- Literate – able to read and write



## Reading

14 Madame C.J. Walker became the United States' first woman millionaire. This was quite an  
32 **accomplishment** for any woman of her time, white or black, but especially for a woman born into her  
47 circumstances. She was born Sarah Breedlove, in 1867. Her parents, former slaves, were sharecroppers on  
a cotton plantation.

50 When she was six, Sarah was orphaned. She went to live with her older sister and her husband. She  
69 was worked very hard. She lived in poverty and had little education. She got married at the young age of  
89 fourteen and had a daughter when she was eighteen. When she was twenty, Sarah became a widow.

106 She worked long hours as a laundress and a house cleaner. She made sure her daughter went to  
124 school, and even put her through college. Sarah, who was barely literate, was very proud of her daughter's  
142 educational accomplishments.

144 In her late thirties, Sarah suffered from hair loss due to stress and damage from hair care products.  
162 Many black women had hair problems because of poor nutrition and lack of running water. They also had  
180 damage from hair straighteners that attempted to make their hair similar to that of white women.

196 Frustrated with the poor condition of her hair, Sarah began to invent hair care products. She  
212 developed one that caused her hair to grow quickly and thickly. Friends and family noticed the change in  
230 her hair. They asked for her hair care product. Sarah knew she had a product that would benefit many black  
250 women. She began selling her product to family and friends, and marketing it door-to-door.

266 After her marriage to businessman C.J. Walker, Sarah adopted the name Madame C.J. Walker. She  
281 developed a growing number of hair care products. Working closely with her daughter, her business grew  
297 and grew. A modern factory was built to produce the hair care products.

310 Walker traveled throughout the nation teaching hair care methods and demonstrating her products.  
323 She also recruited and trained thousands of black women to be her selling agents. At one time, Walker had  
342 over 3,000 agents working for her. By 1914 she had grossed over one million dollars.

357 At the 1914 convention of the National Negro Business League, Walker said, "I am not merely  
373 satisfied in making money for myself...I want to provide employment for hundreds of women of my race.  
391 I had little or no **opportunity** when I started out in life...I had to make my own living and my own  
413 opportunity! But I made it! That is why I want to say to every Negro woman present, don't sit down and  
434 wait for opportunities to come...Get up and make them!"

444 Walker died on May 25, 1919, at the age of 51. She did not heed doctors' warnings to slow down  
464 her fast-paced life. In her life and in her death Walker generously supported many organizations. One of  
482 the main **recipients** was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

## Understanding

1. What kind of odds did Madame C.J. Walker have to overcome in order to be successful? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. How did she share her success with others? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Why was she so proud of her daughter? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Who or what is a **recipient**? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Summarize Walker's words at the National Negro Business League in one or two sentences (in your own words). \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. What does the word **opportunity** mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. Who were the main consumers of her products? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. Define the word **accomplishment**. \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Writing

Option A: Summarize the story in your own words.

Option B: Write about a goal you really want to accomplish in your life. How could others be affected by what you do?

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