

Beloved

Curriculum Unit



Beloved

Toni Morrison

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Ellen Johnsmeyer





The Center for Learning

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Introduction

The narrative of the black experience in America has become so familiar to students of the twenty-first century that there is a danger the story might lose its impact. Students often discuss slavery, the Civil War, the failures of Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era with little emotion. Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, brings to life the tumultuous role that slavery played in America's history. The story of Sethe's hardships personalizes the experience of slavery and its aftereffects for every American, but especially, as Morrison's dedication states, for the "sixty million" slaves whose stories were never told.

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Her parents had moved to Ohio from the South to find better opportunities for themselves and for their children. Morrison's parents took great pride in themselves, their family, their heritage, and their work. Her father was a welder in a shipyard; her mother was in the church choir and shared with her children a love of singing and retelling stories of African folklore. Morrison herself loved to read and was a high school honor student who went on to study English at Howard University and Cornell.

After getting her master's degree from Cornell in 1955, Morrison entered the world of academe and taught at Texas Southern University and then at Howard University. Her teaching career began on the cusp of the civil rights movement, and two of her students were Claude Brown, author of *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965), and the political activist Stokely Carmichael.

In 1958, Morrison married Jamaican architect Harold Morrison, and they had two children. The marriage ended in divorce in 1964, and by 1965, Morrison was working as a book editor for Random House. It was through this experience that Morrison began the serious writing that led to her career as a novelist. She nurtured writers like Angela Davis and Toni Cade Bambara in their stories of black women in America, and at night, while her sons were asleep, worked on her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Morrison also continued teaching at the State University of New York, then at Yale and Princeton.

Toni Morrison's literary reputation grew quickly with the publication of *Sula* (1974) and *Song of Solomon* (1977). *Beloved* (1987) won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988, and Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, the first black woman to receive the prize. *The New York Times Book Review* called *Beloved* the best work of American fiction in the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century.

Teacher Notes

The creation of *Beloved* began when Toni Morrison came across the story of Margaret Garner, a former slave who escaped from Kentucky to Ohio in 1851. Garner was accompanied by her children, whom she threatened to kill when her owner tracked her down in Cincinnati. She actually slit the throat of her three-year-old daughter before being restrained and taken back to Kentucky under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Morrison was working as an editor at Random House when she discovered Garner's story among some works recalling three hundred years of black history. She used the story of Margaret Garner to inspire a contemporary slave narrative with Sethe at its center. Sethe's story is a complicated one involving not only race, but also gender; not only slavery, but also freedom; not only the living, but also the dead. Sethe's experiences provide readers with ample opportunity to discuss both universal and classically American themes.

This guide follows the structure of the novel. Discussion questions are provided in a study guide and may be distributed to aid student analysis. You will also want to direct students to keep reading logs of thoughts, questions, and important quotes. Since the impact of the book depends in some part on the fragments of the plot coming together in the end, it may be preferable to assign the entire book before discussing it in class.

Although Morrison does not number the chapters, you may want to have students number them to aid in the assignment and discussion of the reading.

It is most important to prepare students for the raw horror with which the novel describes a life in slavery. The accounts of mammary rape, of life on a chain gang, of beatings and other physical abuse may well cause anxiety in some students. It may help to remind them of other accounts of brutality they have read in novels about war or the Holocaust. The level of disgust generated by experiences of characters in *Beloved* is meant to assert the level of atrocity inherent to the institution of slavery. *Beloved* tells the story of the "sixty million and more" who were its victims.

Answers to handouts will vary unless otherwise indicated. Students may need additional paper to complete some handouts.

Lesson 1

Putting the Novel in Context

Objective

- To understand the political forces that affect Sethe and the other characters

Notes to the Teacher

In this lesson, students are asked to consider the political and social context of the life of a nineteenth-century slave in America. To understand Sethe's choices, it is helpful to consider the forces that controlled her life.

In the first five lines of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the author mentions the year, 1873, asking the reader to pay attention to the time period in which the novel is set. In American history it is a period called Reconstruction. The United States was at work trying to heal the wounds caused by a long Civil War and ending the institution of slavery, which controlled the lives of hundreds of thousands of African Americans living in the Southern states.

A few pages into the novel, Sethe mentions her daughter Denver's birth in 1855. This reference takes the reader to the period before the Civil War when the Southern states relied on the institution of slavery for economic solvency. The eighteen-year period framing the major events of the plot represents a most tumultuous time in American history dominated by the issue of slavery. The lives of enslaved people were controlled by traders, owners, and politicians who supported the institution of selling human beings for profit. Although Emancipation may have ended both the institution and discussion of slavery, the effects of multigenerational enslavement affected individual lives and communities for many years afterward.

For students, it is important to look back at the political realities that created an environment which tolerated the heartlessness and cruelty that was slavery.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 1**. Have students read aloud the brief identifications of experiences which affect the lives of the characters in the novel. Class discussion may provide

an opportunity for students to discuss other things they know about the Middle Passage or the Emancipation Proclamation. Some students may be familiar with other novels dealing with these issues, such as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

2. Have students respond to each of the items as they might affect a slave. Responses may vary.

Suggested Responses:

1. The Middle Passage

Africans who boarded the slave ships lived in fear and despair of ever seeing their homes again. They did not know where they were headed or for what purpose. Some feared they would be eaten by the white men, and many committed suicide by throwing themselves into the ocean and sometimes being eaten by sharks.

2. The Fugitive Slave Act

This act essentially took away all hope of escape for slaves like Sethe. If slaves were caught escaping, they were not protected by any law, and their lives, even if they reached the North, were driven by the fear of recapture.

3. The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad gave enslaved people the only hope of freedom. Without the food, money, and travel assistance the Railroad provided, there was little chance a slave could get north to freedom.

4. The Emancipation Proclamation

The Emancipation had little immediate effect on the lives of slaves, but the excitement the document elicited in Washington, D.C., held out some new hope for the end of slavery. Soon after the publication of the Emancipation Proclamation, some slaves also saw black regiments fighting in the uniform of the Union army.

5. Reconstruction

Former slaves saw their lives changing during Reconstruction as African-American churches and schools were established. Some African Americans held political office; however, most freed slaves faced poverty and a desire to get away from their former owners and find family members who had been separated from them.

Putting *Beloved* in Context

Directions: Slavery was a dominant political issue in the United States during the nineteenth century. Proslavery and antislavery factions argued and compromised to determine political policies that had major effects on the lives of the enslaved. Read the descriptions below. For each item, write a response that reflects how the topic might have affected a slave's life.

1. The Middle Passage

This was the name given to the journey a slave took from Africa to America as part of the transatlantic slave trade. The trip was characterized by cruel practices of branding, beating, and chaining African slaves in crowded quarters on the slave ship.

2. Fugitive Slave Act

This act was passed as part of the Compromise of 1850 and served as a concession to the South. It allowed slave owners to bring back fugitive slaves without entitling them to trial by jury. Generous rewards were posted for those who returned runaways. Frederick Douglass said of the Fugitive Slave Act, "The colored men's rights are less than those of a jackass."

3. Underground Railroad

This was not an actual railroad, but a network of individuals who gave slaves food, shelter, and other assistance in their attempts to attain freedom. Fugitive slaves took great risks hiding in the woods, going for days without food, and continuing even as far as Canada, all the time living with the fear of capture.

4. The Emancipation Proclamation

This document, issued by Abraham Lincoln in 1863, was largely symbolic as it freed only the slaves in states not under Union control. This was meant as a war strategy to limit the manpower of the Confederacy in the same way the Union seized and limited its supplies. The Proclamation also allowed free blacks to enlist in the Union army.

5. Reconstruction

The effort to restore the South and end slavery was marked by the passage of three constitutional amendments. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States in 1865. In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed citizenship to persons born or naturalized in the United States, except for women and Native Americans. The Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1870, declared that the right to vote could not be denied because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Lesson 2

Beating Back the Past

Objectives

- To appreciate the hardships that affect the characters
- To recognize the long-term psychological effects of slavery
- To understand how the events of present time are haunted by the past
- To begin to see the novel's time line

Notes to the Teacher

In this lesson, students begin to make sense out of fragmented events revealed by Sethe and Paul D in their conversations about the past. Paul D's recalling of experiences at Sweet Home and on the chain gang in Alfred, Georgia, indicates to the reader that the characters of Sethe and Paul D have had a long journey of extraordinary hardship in slavery. Toni Morrison's message about slavery here is that its impact did not end with escape or even with emancipation. Ex-slaves faced new hardships and struggled to understand and accept the horrors of their past.

For Sethe, the first of several traumatic events recalled is the experience of having her milk taken by the nephews of schoolteacher. There follows a beating which badly scars her back, the disappearance of her husband Halle, and the return of schoolteacher which ends with infanticide and jail. Paul D's return stimulates the memories of these events, and Beloved's strange appearance provides the catalyst for confronting what happened even further in the past.

Paul D's memories of Sweet Home are equally hard, reminding him of the loss of the other "Sweet Home men," the attempted escape, watching Halle at the butter churn, and the excruciating experience of life on a chain gang. Finding Sethe seems to offer him some stability in a life marked by movement and unrest; however, it also provides a constant reminder of the ways in which a life in slavery has diminished his manhood and caused him to feel ashamed.

Students will be helped in this lesson and in the future by having reading logs for reference. Events on the handouts are presented

chronologically to assist in creating a time line from the fragmented stories of the characters.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 2** for students to discuss the events of Sethe's life as recalled in the novel. Students should be reminded that the events do not occur in order in the story but are presented in fragments of rememory based on questions and comments from other characters.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Sethe is forced to think about her mother when Beloved asks Sethe if her mother ever fixed her hair. Suddenly, the memory of her mother's mark as a slave comes back to Sethe.*
2. *Sethe thinks some of her memories of her early years are clouded by her forgetting the African language spoken by her mother and the girl, Nan, who took care of the children.*
3. *Nan is trying to give the young Sethe some knowledge of her heritage by telling her about her mother's experience on the Middle Passage, being taken by the crew, and bearing children she chose to kill.*
4. *Nan tells Sethe that her mother kept her because her father was a black man her mother "put her arms around."*
5. *Sethe remembers seeing her mother's body and looking for the mark to be sure because her mother's face was unrecognizable.*
6. *Sethe chooses Halle as a husband; he is a good man who has worked extra days to buy his mother's freedom from slavery.*
7. *Sethe feels there should be something to celebrate her marriage: a ritual or a meal, dancing and singing. When there is nothing, she steals patches of material to dignify the occasion with a new dress she makes herself.*

8. Mrs. Garner tells Sethe she wants her to be happy with Halle and gives her a gift of the crystal earrings.
 9. The story of how the indentured white girl helps Sethe to deliver her baby is one of the central narratives of the novel because it embraces the story of Denver's birth and Sethe's escape to freedom on the Ohio River.
 10. This is the time when Sethe is whole, because she has her children with her, the strength and companionship of Baby Suggs, the support of a community which includes the Bodwins and Stamp Paid, and the freedom to love.
 11. The Fugitive Slave Act allows school-teacher to take Sethe back to Sweet Home, but she will not go and commits infanticide rather than let her baby suffer a life in slavery.
 12. Sethe will not give up her other daughter while in jail and nurses her there until she is released to Baby Suggs.
2. Distribute **Handout 3**, and have groups of students discuss the chronology of Paul D's life and the ways in which that life demonstrates the scathing inhumanity of slavery. Remind students that the graphic descriptions of beatings, hangings, and burnings here are meant to be hard-hitting so as not to diminish the cruelty and brutality of slavery.

Suggested Responses:

1. Paul D watches as his half brother leaves Sweet Home with tears in his eyes. Paul D yearns for family throughout the book.
2. This experience is cruel on many levels. A bit is a restraint used on horses, reinforcing the idea that slaves were chattel. The bit keeps him from being able to talk to Halle when he watches him losing his mind. Paul D is ashamed of the restraint and tells Sethe he was not planning to tell her about it.
3. Paul D is horrified to watch Sixo tied to a tree and burned. Sixo is laughing and singing. Paul D wishes he could sing too.

4. Paul D has always seen his own worth in the work he contributes to making Sweet Home a successful plantation. Now he hears himself valued as chattel.
 5. Knowing he is being sold farther south, away from any chance of freedom, Paul is driven to try to kill his new owner, Brandywine.
 6. This act highlights the transformation slavery has led to in Paul D. School-teacher has changed him from being a gentle man to being a killer.
 7. Even in its initial fragmented version, the images of Alfred, Georgia, are a myriad of abuse: physical, psychological, and sexual. The experience takes away Paul D's dignity and nearly his sanity.
 8. The power of the whites at the prison in Alfred, Georgia, is in their guns. The sexual abuse constitutes one more attack on the dignity of the black prisoners. It is so offensive as to make Paul D vomit.
3. Have students follow up these handouts with one of the writing activities in Supplementary Materials at the end of this curriculum unit.

The Past Is Present: Sethe

Directions: Although the main characters in *Beloved* wish to forget about the past, the experiences in slavery keep coming back. In fact, the narratives of generations of slaves make up the body of the novel, framed by the love story of Paul D and Sethe years after Emancipation. Discuss how each of the stories below makes up the family history of Sethe's life.

1. Sethe's mother shows her the mark of a circle and a cross on her rib.
2. Nan and her mother speak another language "which would never come back."
3. Sethe's mother threw away all her babies except Sethe.
4. Sethe is named for a black man.
5. Sethe's mother is hanged.
6. Sethe chooses Halle for her husband at Sweet Home.

The Past Is Present: Paul D

Directions: When Paul D arrives at 124 Bluestone, he brings with him a knowledge and understanding of who Sethe was at Sweet Home before her escape. He also brings news of Halle after eighteen years. Paul D serves as a catalyst for Sethe's rememory of her life before her escape to 124. Explain how each of the following events from Paul D's experience deepens the dark portrait of a life in slavery.

1. Paul F is sold off.
2. Paul D is forced to wear a bit.
3. Paul D watches Sixo die.
4. Paul D hears schoolteacher reading his physical worth.
5. Paul D is sold off to an owner in Virginia.
6. Paul D attempts to murder his new owner.
7. Paul D lives on a chain gang in Alfred, Georgia.
8. Paul D witnesses the sexual abuse at the prison.

Lesson 3

Slavery

Objectives

- To recognize the many levels on which slavery was destructive
- To determine modes of resistance in the characters in the novel
- To understand and appreciate the perseverance of the enslaved people
- To explore slavery as a theme in the novel

Notes to the Teacher

Toni Morrison has said that she is always amazed that the bestial treatment of human beings did not produce “a race of beasts.” *Beloved* presents a group of individuals who were treated as beasts, as they attempt to transition to their new status as free people. W. E. B. DuBois first described a double consciousness in the African-American community which did not exist in other immigrant groups. This consciousness resulted from the fact of slavery; any humanity or culture the Africans brought to North America was, according to the critic Bernard Bell, “devalued and marginalized.” There is much to be reconciled for the characters of this novel: their pasts and their presents, their identities as enslaved people and free people, their African heritage and their acquired Western Christianity. DuBois describes the African’s ancestral gift for making sense of life as the reason for the black American’s double consciousness, an existence marked by ambivalence about identity, integration, and social politics.

In this lesson, students examine the many layers of life affected by being enslaved. Incidents in the novel highlight the slave’s loss of control over his or her own life, language, and culture. This discussion is followed by observing the characters in their struggle to find a way to reconcile the parts of their lives that do not make sense. Observing this reconciliation is a particularly significant part of the study of *Beloved*. The resistance to slavery was very often only expressed by an interior voice or one only recognizable to other slaves. White masters interpreted passive resistance as stupidity or stubbornness. Morrison, who sees the novel

as a social document, is intent here on giving a voice to an oppressed people. In Sixo, she creates a character who is determined to find ways to be his own person.

Several of the writing assignments in Supplementary Materials are good follow-ups for this lesson.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 4**. Students can use reading logs to help recall specific events from the novel. Working in groups, students can discuss with examples the many ways in which slavery diminished the lives of those enslaved.

Suggested Responses:

Power

1. *Although Paul D has some authority under Mr. Garner, once schoolteacher comes, his gun is taken away and he is not allowed even the opportunity to offer an opinion. He is diminished to the dependency of a child.*
2. *Halle is driven to insanity, going to the butter churn and smearing his face with butter.*

Dignity

3. *Schoolteacher’s actions seem to strip their humanity.*
4. *These abuses highlight the attitude of Southern whites, the belief that they were dealing with creatures who had no rights, essentially animals.*
5. *Paul D has the same name as his brothers; there is no distinction among them because they are not seen as individual human beings.*

History

6. *Sethe recognizes the loss of her mother’s language, which suggests the loss of her family history and culture.*
7. *The shared history for Sethe and Paul D is the history at Sweet Home. Nothing before that is known.*

Language

8. *Sethe remembers her mother speaking in another language “which would never come back.”*

Family

9. *Nan was the woman assigned to the children when Sethe was a child; she was not a blood relation.*
10. *Baby Suggs’s children were all sold off except Halle. She has no idea where they are. Halle never knew his siblings.*

Culture

11. *Since the slaves were treated as animals, there was no belief in their having a culture. The slaves themselves kept some African culture alive through song.*

Spirituality

12. *Sethe makes herself a wedding dress out of scraps to mark her wedding day.*
13. *Both express the danger in loving something, especially children.*
14. *Baby Suggs becomes a preacher of sorts, teaching the former slaves to love themselves and throw away the shame of slavery.*

2. Distribute **Handout 5**, and have students discuss in groups how Sixo’s behavior represents resistance to the institution of slavery. Through discussion, students can determine whether Sixo’s behavior was an effective resistance and whether it would have been recognized as such. Sixo represents for Morrison the thousands of slaves whose stories of fighting back are never told.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Sixo defies the rules by going off the Sweet Home plantation. He also rejects the bestiality the others are reduced to by finding himself a woman.*
2. *Sixo’s use of the African dialect is a protest against the removal of his history and culture.*
3. *In the first chapter of part 2, Sixo defies schoolteacher by refusing to acknowledge that eating the pig was stealing. Their catechetic exchange is a sign of Sixo’s cleverness in the face of schoolteacher’s pseudoscientific thinking.*
4. *Because Sixo has dared to leave Sweet Home on his journeys to the Thirty Mile Woman, he knows of the “train” and makes arrangements for the escape.*
5. *Sixo will not be taken quietly. He grabs the gun pointed at him, then sings and laughs in defiance of his own fate. This behavior is what leads schoolteacher to call him “unsuitable.”*
6. *Sixo’s ultimate resistance is in death; he will not be taken back into slavery, and he causes enough distraction to allow his woman to escape with their unborn child.*
7. *Sixo’s last word is “Seven-o,” the indication of his unborn child’s escape from slavery in the womb of his mother.*

What Slavery Took Away

Directions: One of Toni Morrison's themes throughout the novel deals with what slavery took away from African Americans. Discuss ways in which each of the following aspects of human life has been denied to the characters in the novel.

Power

1. In what ways is Paul D made powerless during enslavement?

2. What is the result of Halle's powerlessness as he watches the abuse of his wife?

Dignity

3. How does schoolteacher's note taking affect the dignity of the slaves at Sweet Home?

4. What does the physical and sexual abuse of prisoners and women suggest about their human dignity?

5. Why is Paul D's name an abuse of dignity?

History

6. How does the breaking up of tribes and families affect the passing on of African history?

7. What do Sethe and Paul D consider their "shared history"?

Language

8. What does Sethe recall about the way her mother spoke to her?

Family

9. What is the relationship between Sethe and Nan?

10. How were Baby Suggs's children separated from her?

Culture

11. What elements of African culture were acknowledged at Sweet Home?

Spirituality

12. What does Sethe do to compensate for not having a wedding?

13. What attitude do both Paul D and Baby Suggs express about love?

14. Why is Baby Suggs called "holy"?

Defying the System: Sixo, the Wild One

Directions: Read the following information, and discuss how the examples of Sixo's behavior defy the institution of slavery.

Many of the Africans taken as slaves attempted resistance, mainly by escape or death. Women like Sethe's mother would drown their own children rather than allow them a life in slavery. There is one record of an attempted revolt by slaves in Virginia, but it was suppressed, and most slaves were left with only passive resistance as a means of fighting back. This might mean slowing down the work or simply maintaining an interior voice of contradiction to their owners. Sethe, for example, recalls how the slaves at Sweet Home thought schoolteacher was ridiculous for his measuring and note taking.

One of Toni Morrison's innovations in the slave narrative is her expression of the slave's interior voice of resistance. Baby Suggs's thoughts reveal her true feelings about the "kindness" of Mr. Garner, who continued to hold her son captive as the price for giving her freedom. Stamp Paid recounts his efforts to reveal the master's infidelity to his wife as a defiance of his Vashti's being abused. In both cases, giving themselves a name, one not on the bill of sale, also constitutes resistance.

Sixo, one of the Sweet Home men, finds ways to demonstrate his defiance of the institution of slavery and as often as possible takes ownership of his own life. Although he never appears directly in the novel, his story is recalled through the memories of Paul D and Sethe. Paul D is especially haunted by pictures of Sixo as a gentle friend, as a risk taker, and as the man who stood up to the degradation of slavery.

1. Sixo walks for seventeen hours, traveling thirty miles to see a woman.
2. Sixo stops speaking English and begins to speak an ancient African language.
3. Sixo confronts schoolteacher's logic after stealing a shoat.
4. Sixo plans the escape.
5. Sixo sings and laughs in the face of death.
6. Sixo is never taken alive.
7. Sixo leaves behind a child.

Lesson 4

Racism

Objectives

- To identify the theme of racism in the novel
- To assess the role of individual characters in portraying racial views

Notes to the Teacher

The idea of racism in America largely derived from the fact that the slaves were black Africans. Whites in the South viewed their slaves as property and treated them as chattel. At one point, schoolteacher thinks about the value a dead animal has as greater than the value of a dead slave since the dead animal can be sold for its skin or its meat.

In light of the power exercised over the African slave, the slave owner saw himself as a superior being. This view helped to justify any action toward the slave as righteous judgment. Schoolteacher, for example, believed he could have saved Sethe from her own violence by keeping her at Sweet Home.

In this lesson, students make observations about the roles of the characters in determining the treatment of race in *Beloved*. Characters represent blacks and whites in the nineteenth-century setting of Kentucky and Ohio. Since the Civil War, which settled some of the issues regarding slavery, is barely mentioned in the novel, the reader is asked to determine views about race through the attitudes of characters who affect the lives of Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. The characters are balanced; neither blacks nor whites are all good or all bad. (Schoolteacher comes closest to being a pure villain.) However, it would have been unrealistic to portray either group as free of all prejudice, even the ardent abolitionists. After completing the handouts, students might consider which characters hold out the best hope for interracial healing over time.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 6**. Students will benefit from working in groups to recall specific behaviors for each of the characters. Several of the characters are not developed and function to represent the generic behavior of “whitepeople.”

Suggested Responses:

1.
 - a. *The schoolteacher viewed the slaves as animals, recorded their “animal characteristics,” and thought of them as creatures to be handled. At one point, he admits a “dead nigger” is worth less than an animal that could be skinned or sold by the pound. His use of the bit is a further demonstration of his view that black slaves were chattel, animals to be controlled.*
 - b. *The Garners are kindly owners, but their goodness does not remove the belief that their slaves are of a lower order. When Sethe asks for a wedding, Mrs. Garner does not respond but smiles and sends her away like a child.*
 - c. *Amy Denver is one of the few positive white characters. She is an indentured person herself and shares an understanding of what Sethe has been through. Amy sees Sethe as foolish but helps her cross the Ohio River to freedom. She helps her deliver her baby, whom Sethe names Denver.*
 - d. *The Bodwins are white abolitionists who are brother and sister. They are kind to Baby Suggs and Sethe, but the detail of their backyard lawn figure belies their actions with an undercurrent of racism.*
 - e. *Sawyer owns the restaurant and gives Sethe a job when she is released from jail. Sethe thinks that he is “all right.”*
2. *Both phrases are unflattering, suggesting the discomfort even the physical appearance of whites presents.*
3. *Toni Morrison portrays white people who represent the negative implications of an institution that dehumanized and enslaved people. Even the whites who are well intentioned or kind are people who subscribe to a view that blacks are inferior to whites.*

4. Although Baby Suggs's opinions express a hardened hatred for whites, even Sethe has some positive experiences she recalls. Denver is learning from Miss Bodwin and working in the home of the white brother and sister, which suggests some hope for a future where blacks and whites can learn and work together.
2. Distribute **Handout 7**. The handout questions direct students to explore the way black Americans of the nineteenth century experienced life before and after the Civil War. The discussion of this experience can be related to the discussion in **Handout 6**.

Suggested Responses:

1. Paul D's heart is hardened to love by his experiences at Sweet Home and in Alfred, Georgia.
2. Baby Suggs let 124 serve as a way station for getting news and for minding the children.
3. Baby Suggs gathers the people of the black community in a ritual for loving themselves after the abuses of slavery.
4. People of the community think there is pride in Baby Suggs because she has her family together; she has a home and enough abundance to host a party.
5. Ella comes to Sethe by the Ohio River after she has delivered Denver. Ella is one of the connections in the Underground Railroad. Ella drives Sethe to Baby Suggs's house.
6. Ella had been raped repeatedly by her owner and his son.
7. Stamp Paid reveals that his wife was forced to be a sexual partner for the plantation master.
8. The community is so outraged by Sethe's behavior that they will not go near the house or talk to Denver and Baby Suggs.
9. Although Denver is not born into slavery, the damage it has done to her family leaves her isolated, lacking confidence, and afraid.
10. The black community was damaged by fear and uncertainty. The people are fragmented because of those who are missing (Halle, Henry, Buglar) and uncertain of what the future holds.
11. At the end of the novel, a conversation with Baby Suggs has Sethe list taking Baby Suggs to freedom, Sethe's release from jail, and her ability to get a job after killing her baby as ways that whites have helped. Baby Suggs remained unforgiving; the numbers of Africans drowned, she said, is greater than all the white men who have lived on earth.
12. Denver fears she will walk where white men want to walk, that they will speak to her and she will have to answer, that they will grab or tie her. Even though she has never lived in slavery, she fears the white man.
13. Baby Suggs said the only bad luck in the world is white people.
14. These ending words are ironic. The story of slavery and its long-reaching aftermath is the one America must never forget.
15. Answers may vary; students may consider Paul D's return to Sethe and Denver's going out into the community. The help offered to her also offers a coming together for the community itself.

Good Whites, Bad Whites

Directions: Although *Beloved* is a slave narrative, white characters make a significant contribution to the theme of race relations after the Civil War. Answer the following questions.

1. What do each of the following characters represent as the white person's view of blacks in the nineteenth century?
 - a. Schoolteacher
 - b. Mr. and Mrs. Garner
 - c. Amy Denver
 - d. Edward Bodwin and Miss Bodwin
 - e. Sawyer
2. Two phrases used to describe white people are "mossy teeth" and "without skin." What does this phrasing suggest about the vision of whites by blacks?
3. What generalizations can be made about whites in Toni Morrison's portrayals?
4. What hope does Morrison hold out for ending the polarization of blacks and whites that resulted from slavery?

The Black Experience

Directions: Discuss each of the following questions as it relates to African-American characters in the novel.

1. Why does Paul D refer to his heart as a tobacco tin?
2. What is Baby Suggs's role at 124 during the time before Emancipation?
3. Why does Baby Suggs gather people of the community in the Clearing?
4. Why does the community turn against Baby Suggs?
5. How does Sethe meet Ella?
6. What was Ella's experience during her time as a slave?
7. What does Stamp Paid tell Paul D about his wife's experience in slavery?

Lesson 5

Motherhood

Objectives

- To recognize the theme of motherhood in *Beloved*
- To note the efforts of mothers to preserve their role
- To understand the damage to the mother and child bond caused by slavery

Notes to the Teacher

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “For no other group in American life is the matter of family . . . more important than to the Negro. Our very survival is bound up in it. . . . No one in all history had to fight against so many physical and psychological horrors to have a family life.”

In this lesson, students follow the female emphasis of the novel, which conveys the burden of being a mother in slavery. Slave owners saw the female slave as a worker first, but slave owners also needed to have female slaves become mothers in order to replenish the labor force. Children were at times conceived as the result of rape by other slaves or forced sexual relations with masters. Children born into slavery were not necessarily cared for by their mothers but by assigned caretakers and were ultimately viewed in the same way as other slaves. They were powerless to determine their own futures; they were property to be bought and sold. A slave mother could not view her children as her own but as the property of her master. A woman’s attitude toward her child was affected by who fathered the child, what kind of bonding occurred between mother and child, and how soon the child was sold. Sethe is asserting her right to claim the child she bore when she kills *Beloved*. In doing so, she asserts a power over herself and her offspring which was denied to the black female by the institution of slavery

In the novel, mothers (*Baby Suggs*, *Sethe*, her mother, and *Ella*) deal with a defining contradiction of desire to love and nurture a child but the necessity of rejecting or losing the child in the context of slavery. Rejecting a child conceived through a rape is a form of resistance, and forgetting a child who has been torn away is a form of psychological preservation.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 8**. The quotations from the novel are designed to facilitate a discussion of motherhood as a theme of the novel. The quotations represent the feelings of several enslaved mothers, pointing out how children provide the greatest source of love for a woman but also her greatest source of hurt.

Suggested Responses:

Part A.

1. *Sethe speaks these words to Paul D early in the novel to describe what she feels was the ultimate insult of slavery. The attack on her by the schoolteacher’s nephews represented an attack on the very center of her identity as a mother.*
2. *Baby Suggs, who has lost all her children but one, extols the relationship between mother and son which brought her to freedom.*
3. *Sethe cherishes her children, an important fact to understanding her act of infanticide. Her children have never been tainted by slavery, which makes them clean. She would rather kill them than see them enslaved.*
4. *Paul D knows the danger of loving and losing. The practice of selling off slave children and breaking up families could be enough to break the spirit of a mother.*
5. *Denver is special because she was born into freedom, because she survived the obstacles posed by her mother’s escape, and because she is the last of Sethe’s children still home. Sethe will love her long past childhood.*

Part B.

1. *Baby Suggs and Sethe both see themselves as mothers. Slavery challenged that identity by defining women as breeders and taking away their children. Sethe refers to herself as her children’s mother and defines herself by her knowledge of their habits. She needs to risk everything to join them in Ohio*

because she has milk for two babies. When the nephews with “mossy teeth” take her milk, she is deeply violated.

2. *The taking of children was another indication of the view of slaves as animals who would suffer little pain at the separation from their children. The practice broke the mother-child bond which defines the mother and supports the child.*
 3. *Sethe remembers her mother only from the few times she was nursed by her. Sethe’s motivation for taking any risk to reach Baby Suggs in Ohio is based on her having milk to feed her young baby and the baby she is carrying. Nursing represents the special bond between mothers and their children.*
 4. *The institution of slavery denied and defiled the bond between mother and child. Female slaves were considered workers and breeders. They were often sexually abused by owners (as in Ella’s case), and their children were sold for profit (as in Baby Suggs’s case).*
 5. *It is important to establish Sethe in a positive light before the reader is asked to understand her horrific act of infanticide.*
2. Distribute **Handout 9**. Students can use reading logs to answer these questions individually or in groups. Discussion of the answers should highlight the ways slavery broke the bond between a mother and her children.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Sethe is told that her mother threw overboard all of her children except Sethe. Sethe was the child of a black man whom her mother “put her arms around.”*
2. *Baby Suggs says all of her children have disappeared because they were sold or traded when they were too young for her to remember them.*

3. *Baby Suggs says all she remembers of her first child is that she liked the bottom of burnt bread. She remembers that her children have six different fathers and that her efforts to keep them with her failed except for Halle, who ultimately bought her freedom.*
4. *Ella hated the child she bore as a result of the sexual assault she suffered at the hands of her master and his son. She called the baby “a hairy white thing.” She refused to nurse the baby, who died after five days.*
5. *Sethe is inspired to run when she overhears talk about Henry and Buglar being ready to be sold as slaves.*
6. *When Sethe sees schoolteacher coming to claim her and her children, she tells herself that she will not have any of her own suffering the “dirtying” of the white man. She imagines that she is sending Beloved to her own mother.*
7. *The relationship between Sethe and Beloved is a potent one with the power shifting over time until Beloved controls her mother.*
8. *Slave owners saw little connection between slave mothers and their children, treating them like the calves and foals of their livestock.*

Motherhood

Part A.

Directions: Read the following quotations from *Beloved*. Identify each by telling who said it and what the quotation reveals about slave mothers.

1. “And they took my milk!”
2. “A man ain’t nothing but a man. But a son? Well now, that’s *somebody*.”
3. Sethe’s children are “her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean.”
4. “For a used-to-be slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love.”
5. “Grown don’t mean nothing to a mother. . . . I’ll protect [Denver] while I’m live and I’ll protect her when I ain’t.”

Part B.

Directions: Use the questions below as a basis to discuss what the novel reveals about slavery's effect on the bond between mother and child.

1. What do the quotations in part A suggest about how a slave woman defined herself?
2. Why was the taking and selling of children such a cruel and inhuman consequence of slavery?
3. What role does nursing a baby play in sustaining families in *Beloved*?
4. How did slavery blaspheme the sacredness of motherhood?
5. Why is it important for Sethe to be seen as a good mother in the first part of the novel?

Breaking the Bond

Directions: The irony of the central event in *Beloved* is that a mother would actually kill her own child out of her intense love. Sethe's act of infanticide separates and isolates her from the community and ends her twenty-eight days of happiness and freedom. Stamp Paid tells Paul D that Sethe was trying to "out-hurt the hurter" when she killed her baby rather than have her taken to Sweet Home. Answer each of the following questions, and then discuss how slavery affected the bond between mothers and their children.

1. How does Sethe's mother react to the birth of the children of the white men who have raped her?
2. Why does Baby Suggs say all of her children have disappeared?
3. What does Baby Suggs remember about her lost children?
4. How did Ella view the child she bore?
5. What is it that first inspires Sethe to run from Sweet Home?
6. Why does Sethe feel justified in killing her baby daughter?
7. What does the relationship between Sethe and Beloved indicate about mothering?
8. How did slave owners view the relationship between slave mothers and their children?

Lesson 6

Putting the Pieces Together

Objectives

- To recognize the narrative strategy in the novel
- To become aware of the psychological effects of slavery
- To create a chronology for the events of the plot

Notes to the Teacher

Sethe explains to Denver early in the novel her belief that nothing ever dies. This statement sets the stage for the resurgence of events that happened eighteen years ago and allows the reader to accept the appearance of Beloved. For Sethe and Paul D, the experiences of Sweet Home are so vivid that they color an entire lifespan. For them there is none of the neat logic of chronological time. Sethe admits that the memory of Sweet Home “comes back whether we want it to or not.” A thought, a vision, a sound can bring some past event or person back to life. The reader sees in Sethe’s talk with Denver and Paul D that much of what she has been through is too painful to recall or repeat. Her experiences and those of the others in the novel are a microcosm of the general experience of slavery for the “sixty million and more.”

In this lesson, students examine how certain plot events serve to trigger memories in the characters and how this triggering becomes a narrative strategy for the author. Because memory presents a fragmented reconstruction of the life at Sweet Home, the reader must participate in putting together the story of Sethe’s life there and her escape to freedom. The arrival of Paul D and the appearance of Beloved accelerate Sethe’s rememory. For both Sethe and Paul D, there is psychological pain in revisiting a past life that will not go away. For Denver, there is pain in the isolation she suffers because of her mother’s experience, but there is also a shared suffering because her mother’s stories of escape, beatings, and Denver’s own birth have become her memories as well.

Although the events of the plot are recalled without linear order, Toni Morrison

uses important dates and time references to clarify when each occurred.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 10**. Students should work with a partner or use reading journals individually to recall the memories attached to the plot events listed.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Sethe recalls the price she paid to have a tombstone chiseled with the word Beloved. The novel hinges on Sethe’s ability to accept the consequences of her actions against her child as a resistance to slavery’s oppression, particularly for women.*
2. *Unspeakable horrors made Sweet Home far from what its name suggested. The novel requires the characters to resolve the ambivalent feelings that color the past.*
3. *Sethe recalls making ink so that school-teacher could write things in his book. She did not know at first that he was writing about her and the others, recording their behaviors as if they were animals in a laboratory.*
4. *Sethe recalls making herself a wedding dress to celebrate the occasion of her marriage to Halle as something special. Basic human dignities, like the right to marry, were denied to slaves. Sethe is left to create some way to make the occasion noteworthy.*
5. *Sethe recalls all the slaves she remembers from her early years who got a “wild look” from this barbaric practice. The treatment of black slaves as animals is symbolized by the bit typically used on horses; the story ties into the theme of silence and shame associated with the experience of slavery.*
6. *Paul D recalls Mister, a rooster, looking at him with a bit in his mouth. Paul D was changed, diminished by school-teacher so that he saw himself as less than the chicken who ran freely around the barnyard.*

7. *Sethe recalls first meeting Baby Suggs and enjoying the twenty-eight days of freedom and self-realization. She was part of the community and enjoyed the healing touch of Baby Suggs ministering to her body and nurturing her spirit.*
 8. *Denver remembers going outside of 124 for lessons with Lady Jones until a boy asked her if her mother went to jail for murder.*
2. Distribute **Handout 11**. Students can arrange the events by number using the dates and time references in the text. (For example, Sethe tells Paul D that Baby Suggs died eight years ago.) The activity will give them a linear perception of the events of the plot and help them place the events in a historical context based on the activity of **Handout 10**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Halle buys his mother's freedom from Sweet Home.*
2. *Sethe escapes from Sweet Home.*
3. *Denver is born on the Ohio River.*
4. *Schoolteacher finds Sethe and tries to bring her back to Kentucky.*
5. *Beloved is killed by her mother.*
6. *Harry and Buglar run away.*
7. *Baby Suggs dies.*
8. *Paul D escapes from the prison in Alfred, Georgia.*
9. *Paul D arrives at 124 after eighteen years.*
10. *A young woman named Beloved arrives at 124.*
11. *Denver reaches out to the community for help at 124.*
12. *Beloved is finally driven from the house at 124.*

3. Have students discuss the effectiveness of the plot structure in *Beloved* and identify reasons why a linear presentation would have been less effective. Students should understand that the fragmented plot requires reader engagement and reflects the nature of memory.

A Heart Full of Memories

Directions: Memory drives the plot of *Beloved*, and the reader participates with the characters in the recall of past events. The narrative of Sweet Home is fragmented by the characters' need to remember only as much as they can bear. The story withholds information based on each character's psychological readiness for remembering; thus, the story is able to convey not only the physical but also the psychological consequences of a life in slavery. The reader's questions about Sethe's ghost, her dead baby, and her missing husband are not answered until Sethe herself is ready to deal with the past. Look at the examples of memory fragments given below. Determine how each of the following moments triggers rememory of experiences which advance the plot and heal the characters.

1. The ghost was two years old when she died.
2. Paul D recalls the ghost of a "headless bride" at Sweet Home.
3. Sethe tells Denver about schoolteacher.
4. Beloved asks about the crystal earrings Sethe once owned.
5. Paul D tells Sethe about the bit in his mouth.
6. Paul D tells Sethe about the last time he saw Halle with butter smeared all over his face.
7. Sethe takes Denver and Beloved to the Clearing.
8. Denver confronts Beloved about choking Sethe.

Fragmenting the Plot

Directions: Memory reveals experiences of the characters in *Beloved* in bursts. Sometimes the characters cut off the memory when it seems impossible to bear. The reader must piece together the story dealing with the suffering, the hardship, the loss, and the reconciliation. The events below chronicle Sethe's story. Number them in proper chronological order.

- _____ Paul D arrives at 124 after eighteen years.
- _____ Harry and Buglar run away.
- _____ Baby Suggs dies.
- _____ Denver is born on the Ohio River.
- _____ A young woman named Beloved arrives at 124.
- _____ Beloved is killed by her mother.
- _____ Beloved is finally driven from the house at 124.
- _____ Paul D escapes from the prison in Alfred, Georgia.
- _____ Denver reaches out to the community for help at 124.
- _____ Schoolteacher finds Sethe and tries to bring her back to Kentucky.
- _____ Sethe escapes from Sweet Home.
- _____ Halle buys his mother's freedom from Sweet Home.

Lesson 7

Life after Slavery

Objectives

- To analyze the attitudes of slave owners
- To compare ways former slaves took control of their lives after slavery
- To recognize the role of community in building a free life

Notes to the Teacher

A central question of Toni Morrison's *Be-loved* asks whether or not the characters of the novel can find meaning in their past experiences in order to reconcile past and present and achieve the psychological freedom that allows them to move on. This question most obviously relates to those characters who are former slaves but bears discussion using the white characters that have enslaved them as well. What rationales drove men like Garner and schoolteacher to feel justified in what they did? Morrison uses many strategies to drive this discussion, including the juxtaposition of the seemingly kind Garner and the villainous schoolteacher. Is one any better than the other, as Sethe at first believes?

In this lesson, students are asked to analyze the attitudes of slave owners, specifically noting the kind of scientific racism that justifies treating black slaves as animals. Morrison deliberately calls the villain “schoolteacher” to suggest his erudite perspective for justifying his beliefs about blacks. Even the kindness and paternalism of Garner are based on a belief that Africans are inferior. For generations brought up with these attitudes, it was difficult to create a free society even after emancipation.

On the part of freed slaves, many defense mechanisms prevented them from moving past the time of the misery. There were fears of whites, of poverty, and even of each other. Paul D and Sethe must resolve their individual and common histories if they are to find their own hearts and the ability to love. The stories of the others—including Baby Suggs, Ella, and Stamp Paid—are meant to indicate what a slow process that resolution might be. If any character represents hope, it is Denver, born

into freedom, seeing the need to seek help, and getting the community to answer in her time of need.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 12**. Allow students time to read and answer the handout questions. Students can work in pairs or small groups, using their reading logs to locate answers.
2. Discuss the answers to the questions with the class as a whole. Ask students for reactions to the idea that Garner and schoolteacher are equal participants in the institution of slavery.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Mr. Garner had a paternal attitude about his slaves, often asking for their opinions and allowing them opportunities to buy freedom, as in the case of Halle buying his mother's freedom with work. Mr. Garner saw his Negroes as men.*
2. *Schoolteacher's name suggests knowledge and education. He represents a scientific racism of the nineteenth century.*
3. *This educated man would write every night in his book and said he preferred the mix of the ink Sethe made. The notes he took were at first viewed as evidence of his scholarship.*
4. *Sethe learns that schoolteacher records the “animal characteristics” of the slaves in his notebook. He measures them and observes them and “teaches” his nephews to view them as chattel.*
5. *The nephews milk her as they would a cow.*
6. *Halle says, “What they say is the same. Loud or soft.” Halle sees no difference between the two owners, since they both represent people who believe in the institution of slavery.*

7. *Answers will vary but may include the blinding economic need for labor, the color of the African skin, the comfort of belief in their own superiority, and other prevailing attitudes of the time.*
3. Distribute **Handout 13**, and allow students to answer the questions in small groups. Again, reading logs will be helpful for locating answers.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Sethe gets to know the other people in her community, learning from them what to do with a day.*
2. *Baby Suggs performs a “fixing ceremony” in the Clearing where she acts as a preacher.*
3. *Baby Suggs does not preach a traditional message about God but instead urges the community to love themselves, their every part, the flesh demeaned by their treatment in slavery. She also preaches against anger: “Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield.”*
4. *Paul D questions his masculinity in the face of a sexual assault in Georgia and his seduction by Beloved. He was called a Sweet Home man by Garner but in freedom cannot find his own manhood.*
5. *Both Stamp Paid and Baby Suggs reject the names given them in slavery and begin to control their independence by taking their own names.*
6. *Baby Suggs suffers from the rejection of a community afraid to be joyful, which leads to her death. Later Sethe almost suffers the same fate until Denver reaches out to the community, and they respond with food and spiritual support.*

The Dehumanization Caused by Slavery

Directions: Read the following quotation from the slave narrative of Mary Prince, and answer the questions.

At length the vendue [auction] master, who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle, arrived, and asked my mother which was the eldest. She said nothing, but pointed to me. . . . I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words—as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts.

—Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, 1831

1. What was Mr. Garner's attitude toward his slaves?
2. What does schoolteacher's name suggest about him?
3. Why is the ink Sethe makes important to schoolteacher?
4. What does Sethe discover about the notebook?
5. How is Sethe punished for her attempted escape?
6. When Sethe discusses the difference between the treatment of slaves by Mr. Garner and the treatment by schoolteacher, what is Halle's reply? What does he mean by his remark?
7. Determine what attitudes you believe allowed kind or well-educated people of the nineteenth century to subscribe to the institution of slavery.

Owning Yourself

Directions: Freed slaves recognized liberty as the important goal, but most encountered major obstacles to living independent lives. They faced poverty and racial discrimination hindering their ability to prosper. After years of being treated as animals and being supervised by whites in all that they did, ex-slaves often found it difficult to get control over their own lives. Discuss the following questions about the freed slaves in *Beloved*.

1. Sethe says, “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another.” During her first twenty-eight days of freedom, what are some things she does to experience freedom?
2. How does Baby Suggs help the black community in Cincinnati learn to love themselves?
3. What is Baby Suggs’s message in the Clearing?
4. How has life in slavery kept Paul D from moving forward?
5. How has Stamp Paid asserted autonomy in freedom?
6. How does the community in *Beloved* figure in reconciling life after slavery?

Lesson 8

The African-American Oral Tradition and Song

Objectives

- To observe patterns of the African-American oral tradition in the style of the novel
- To locate examples of African-American oral tradition in the novel
- To recognize the use of song in the novel as an indicator of humanity in the characters

Notes to the Teacher

“As the great day grew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom.” With these words Booker T. Washington celebrated the role of song in African-American history.

In this lesson, students identify the importance of the oral tradition in African slave culture. Enslaved people were denied access to literacy and therefore expressed emotion and transferred history and culture with their voices. The lesson presents definitions of characteristics generally associated with the African-American oral tradition: call and response, song, improvisation, epithet, and stream of consciousness. Students enhance their recognition of the use of these devices in the novel by matching them to specific events in the story. The fragmented plot which students discussed in Lesson 6 can provide them with examples of the ways in which different characters speak to and comment on one another, suiting the stories to individual needs and amplifying and modifying the narrative.

In Lesson 7, students observed how slaves at Sweet Home had their humanity stripped away by schoolteacher and a society that allowed for half of its states to participate in the institution of slavery. In this lesson, students observe how slaves used oral tradition and song to confirm their humanity, to preserve their history, and to establish their own cultural world. For Paul D, song is a way to gain control of his life at

Sweet Home, at the prison in Alfred, Georgia, and again at 124 Bluestone Road.

Paul’s songs are his own, but they also testify to his participation in the collective experience of slavery. This method of coping with the shame and suffering of slavery is important to Toni Morrison’s concern in the novel for finding meaning in the African-American experience of slavery. The songs also resonate in patterns of music which are associated with black American culture after slavery, such as spirituals and the blues.

Paul D must let go of the silence he has kept for the past eighteen years, just as African Americans must revisit and acknowledge slavery as a part of their collective history. Song allows for an expression of the traumatic and the dangerous facets of an experience of unspeakable psychological and physical brutality.

Procedure

1. Introduce this lesson by discussing the oral tradition in literature. Ask students to recall works of literature that they know which originated in the oral tradition. These may include epics like *The Odyssey* or *Beowulf*, folktales, and folk ballads.
2. Remind students of some characteristics in the oral tradition such as repetition, rhyme, and mnemonic hooks.
3. Distribute **Handout 14**. Read and discuss the terms and definitions associated with the African-American oral tradition. Have students work with partners or in small groups to find examples of the African-American oral tradition in the novel.

Suggested Responses:

Answers will vary but may include the following:

Call and response—*Baby Suggs leading the meetings of former slaves in the Clearing; the pull of the rope when the men escape from the prison at Alfred, Georgia*

Song—Paul D's songs at 124 Bluestone Road and Sixo's song as he burns to death

Improvisation—Paul D changing old songs to suit his new circumstance at 124 Bluestone, improvising about chamomile sap

Epithet—Sethe's "iron eyes," Beloved as "the crawling-already baby," Amy Denver with "hair enough for five heads," Paul D as "the last of the Sweet Home men"

Stream of consciousness—any of the "I am Beloved sections" of part 2

Idiom—ain't, reckon, cuss

4. Distribute **Handout 15**, and have students discuss the questions about Paul D's portrayal as a man of song.

Suggested Responses:

1. For Paul D, singing is essential to survival.
2. The prisoners beat on the rocks as they sing powerful songs in a call and response led by Hi Man. This singing also establishes a sense of community for them.
3. The prisoners garble their words and change sound patterns to yield new meaning.
4. The songs deal with women and children, work, and ordinary objects in their lives.

5. Paul D is no longer pounding rocks. He is doing ordinary chores but still using the songs of the past to put his past life back together.

6. Paul D changes the words to suit the moment and to add a personal element to what is a collective experience.

7. Some of the horrors of slavery were unspeakable. Paul D was treated like an animal, and only song could remind him he was human.

8. Paul D views song as the unifying element of humanity between Sixo and himself.

The African-American Oral Tradition

Directions: African slaves in America had no access to the traditional tools associated with cultural expression. Slaves expressed themselves in the only outlet left to them, the outlet of language. Their voices in song, their figurative expression of life around them as well as the inflection, the tone, and the patterns of speech, became the cultural legacy Toni Morrison relies on in her prose. Study the list of elements of the African-American oral tradition. Locate examples of these elements in the novel.

Term	Definition	Example
Call and response	a system of language which requires a spontaneous interaction between the speaker and listener, creating community through shared experience	
Song	expression in meter and rhymes intended for singing	
Improvisation	extemporaneous composition of song or verse, often relying on repetition and progression	

Term	Definition	Example
Epithet	a word or phrase used repeatedly to describe the attributes of a person or thing	
Stream of consciousness	the reporting of a story through the thoughts of one or several characters as they occur and not in a logical or formulaic order	
Idiom	a linguistic expression associated with a particular language or dialect	

Paul D: A Man of Song

Directions: Sethe describes Paul D as a “singing man” very early in the novel. Answer each of the following questions, and use evidence from Paul D’s story to indicate how song helps him to assert his personhood.

1. At the house on Bluestone Road, Paul D counts singing with walking, eating, and sleeping. Why are these activities linked together?
2. How do members of the chain gang in Alfred, Georgia, use song to cope with the brutality of their lives?
3. How do the prisoners keep the messages of their songs from the masters and the bosses?
4. What are the subjects of the songs sung by the prisoners of Alfred, Georgia?
5. Why does Toni Morrison describe Paul D’s songs as too loud and powerful for 124 Bluestone Road?
6. How does Paul D make the songs he sings his own?
7. When Paul D reveals to Sethe that he has never told anyone about his experience with the bit in his mouth, he adds that he “sang it sometimes.” What does this statement suggest about the power of song?
8. Why does Paul D feel he should have sung something to go with Sixo’s tune when they were captured by schoolteacher?

Lesson 9

Stylistic Elements in *Beloved*

Objectives

- To recognize the motifs in the author's style
- To analyze the functions of the title character
- To write a critical essay on character

Notes to the Teacher

Toni Morrison has said that the main difference between the writings of white Americans and those of black Americans is in the black writer's use of coded language. In *Beloved*, it is important to look, as the character Ella does, for the "holes" in the stories which constitute the plot. The way in which the narrative unfolds, the language of it, is as important as the plot events themselves.

Morrison has described the first lines of *Beloved* as abrupt, a way of snatching the reader into the world of the characters of the novel in the way slavery abruptly threw a population from one place to another. She asks the reader to participate in the novel by listening to the interior voices of Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. She asks the reader to weigh the moral choices the characters make based on what their experiences have been, particularly as they relate to slavery. For example, Sethe commits an unspeakable act in killing her child. The reader is asked to understand her act and the shame she suffers because of it against the backdrop of a life in slavery at Sweet Home.

In this lesson, students examine the stylistic elements that contribute to Morrison's artistic achievement in the novel. Previous lessons have allowed students to examine the narrative strategies presented by a fragmented plot, the linguistic elements of the African-American oral tradition, and thematic messages regarding motherhood, race, and love. The handouts in Lesson 9 direct students to consider the effects of combining the layered language of biblical allusion with patterns of imagery and symbolism. Students come to appreciate the impact of graphic descriptions amidst lyrical prose.

Procedure

1. Review with students the definitions of *image*, *symbol*, and *motif*.
2. Distribute **Handout 16**. Have students complete the questions in small groups, using reading logs.

Suggested Responses:

Part A.

1.
 - a. *The epigraph to the novel sets the tone for the irony and ambiguity with which the title character functions.*
 - b. *The image of the horsemen is used to describe the arrival of schoolteacher and his men to reclaim the escaped Sethe; it is an allusion to the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation.*
 - c. *The phrase "putting down one's sword" is used by Baby Suggs in her meetings at the Clearing. It comes from the Book of Ezekiel and refers to making peace with enemies. This concept and its wording appear in Negro spirituals.*
2.
 - a. *Denver's birth represents the beginning of life outside of slavery.*
 - b. *Beloved arrives out of the river and helps Sethe to a second chance as a mother to her murdered daughter.*
 - c. *Paul D escapes with the other inmates when a rainstorm collapses the earth around them and allows them to escape to a new life in freedom.*
3. *Paul D starts to feel his heart again when he is seduced by Beloved.*
4. *Breasts, milk, and butter figure prominently in the events associated with Sethe's escape and her efforts to reconcile with her past life in slavery.*
5. *Denver goes outside to the community to seek help for her mother, but also to answer her own yearning to learn. She goes to the person who taught her to read and write, and she finds her redemption through her teacher, Lady Jones.*

Part B.

Morrison means for the graphic accounts of physical and sexual abuse to be equal to their real horror. Her contrast of lyrical and graphic language heightens the effect for the reader.

3. Distribute **Handout 17**. Allow students time to complete part A either individually or in groups. Discuss the various roles assigned to the title character before students complete the writing assignment in part B. Allow students sufficient time to assess the character and write their essays.

Suggested Responses, Part A:

1. *Beloved is twenty years old when she arrives but has traits associated with a baby: she loves sweets, sleeps a great deal, requires attention, loses a tooth. Sethe comes to believe she is her murdered daughter.*
2. *Denver also comes to believe Beloved is her sister, the murdered baby. In the stream of consciousness passage of part 2, Beloved extends her sisterhood to the whole population of women who suffered in slavery.*
3. *Beloved arrives at 124 with no past history, without lines in her hands, and yet with mysterious knowledge and control over the other characters.*
4. *In the stream of consciousness account in part 2, Beloved refers to a life in Africa ended when "men without skin" put her on a crowded slave ship.*
5. *Beloved arrives soon after Paul D and may be claiming and punishing her mother by seducing him. Beloved eventually drains the life force from Sethe as well.*
6. *Beloved forces Sethe to confront her past and come to a point of resolution over her shameful acts. She also forces the community back into Sethe's and Denver's life.*

Motifs in *Beloved*

Part A.

Directions: A motif is an underlying pattern of images or symbols created by repeated variations of the element. Consider the following motifs in the novel.

1. The Bible

African slaves were introduced to Christianity by their European captors. Ironically, slave owners often used the Bible to justify the institution of slavery and encouraged their slaves to participate in the prayer, song, and biblical readings of Christian belief. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison uses biblical allusions as a motif for sacrifice and redemption.

Explain the following allusions found in *Beloved*.

a. *Romans 9:25*

b. Four horsemen

c. Putting down one's sword

2. Water

Water is often used as a symbol of rebirth.

Discuss the use of water as an image of rebirth in the following episodes in *Beloved*.

a. Denver's birth on the Ohio River

b. Beloved's arrival at 124 Bluestone

c. Paul D's escape from Alfred, Georgia

3. The Tobacco Tin

For Paul D, the experiences of slavery have hardened his heart so that he refers to it as being locked in a rusted tobacco tin. He has not allowed himself to feel hurt or loved.

What causes the tobacco tin of Paul's heart to break open?

4. Motherhood

A central concern of the novel is the defining properties of motherhood. This theme is reinforced by many of the images in the story. For example, the book has twenty-eight chapters, and Sethe's interval of happy freedom after her escape lasts twenty-eight days. These numbers correspond to a woman's reproductive cycle. The address of 124 can represent the four children Sethe bore, with the third child missing.

What other symbols of motherhood are significant in Sethe's story?

5. Language

The characters of *Beloved* are sustained by the stories they tell and the songs they sing. Sethe's most desperate act is described as "unspeakable." Denver turns language off and becomes deaf and dumb rather than hear the story of the infant death.

How does language figure in Denver's redemption?

Part B.

Directions: The use of images, symbols, and motifs lends a lyrical quality to the writing in *Beloved*. That lyrical quality is sometimes broken with harsh images of physical violence and sexual abuse. Reread one of the following passages, and decide what purpose the contrast between the lyrical description and the graphic account might serve. Summarize your ideas on a separate piece of paper.

1. Sethe's memory of the beautiful trees at Sweet Home and the accompanying memory of men hanging from them
2. Paul D's memory of his first days at the Alfred, Georgia, prison
3. Sethe's memory of the people with bits in their mouths
4. Stamp Paid's finding the ribbon with a bit of hair and scalp on it
5. Sixo's death in the fire

Who Is Beloved?

Part A.

Directions: Beloved is the title character, yet her role in the story is ambiguous. Consider the various relationships that form around Beloved to determine how her character functions in the novel, and discuss the following roles.

1. Sethe's daughter
2. Denver's sister
3. A ghost
4. The women of the Middle Passage
5. The female demon
6. The healer

Part B.

Directions: Determine the role or roles of Beloved as the title character in the novel. Consider the possibility that the character may serve multiple functions. Write an essay in which you defend your analysis based on passages and events in the narrative.

Lesson 10

The Slave Narrative

Objectives

- To recognize characteristics of the slave narrative genre
- To observe one of the author's sources for *Beloved*

Notes to the Teacher

The African-American literary tradition begins with the slave narratives. More than a hundred of these published works exist, the most famous of which is the work of Frederick Douglass. Douglass was born into slavery and escaped to the North in 1838. As a houseboy, Douglass was taught to read, and after his escape, he became an important speaker for the Abolitionist cause. His *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* was published in 1845 when he was twenty-seven years old.

The work of Frederick Douglass represents the conflict that exists in the message of the slave narratives. The works are often formulaic recounts of a life in slavery and then in freedom. They convey the suffering of those in bondage but are meant to be political writings to convince a middle-class Northern audience that slavery must be abolished. The writings were constrained by political necessity so as not to offend the intended audience. The writings are framed and authenticated by introductions written by white writers, and the graphic details of physical and sexual abuse are minimized.

Toni Morrison's neo-slave narrative seeks to "rip that veil" which hid the real horror of slavery and stifled the interior voice of those in bondage. In *Beloved*, the characters expose their physical hurting and their haunting emotional suffering. The damage of slavery does not end with freedom but continues in the uncertainty of how to create a life in freedom.

In this lesson, students read a selection from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and analyze the ways in which it differs from Morrison's work.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 18**, and assign students to read the selection from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
2. Distribute **Handout 19**, and have students answer the questions about the selection. Have students discuss ways in which Morrison's work is different from that of Douglass.

Suggested Responses:

Part A.

1. *Covey lived a life of deception.*
2. *Douglass believes Covey deceived himself into believing he is a man of God.*
3. *Covey believed that having slave children increased his wealth.*
4. *The children born to Caroline belonged to Covey.*
5. *Douglass says that his "natural elasticity was crushed, [his] intellect languished, . . . the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died."*
6. *Douglass says hope and fear kept him from killing himself or Covey.*
7. *The taking of children from their mothers, the amount of work in all weathers, and Douglass's nearness to suicide might convince a Northerner of the cruelties of slavery.*
8. *Sethe also feared that her sons would be taken from her. Paul D envied the rooster named Mister the way Douglass envied the ships on the Chesapeake Bay.*
9. *Douglass feels there is something unfair about their freedom of movement.*
10. *Douglass says that "all boys are bound to someone."*

Part B.

1. *Mr. Covey's strength was lying.*
2. *All of his educational and religious values were based in a lie.*
3. *To avoid embarrassment, Covey would try to sing the hymn.*
4. *I was forced to cry out in desperation at the sight of ships moving freely.*
5. *I will try to put up with the hardships of slavery until I can be free.*

Frederick Douglass

Directions: Frederick Douglass was born into slavery and escaped in 1838. The story of his life in bondage was published in 1845 when he was twenty-seven. In chapter 10, Douglass describes one of his lowest points while enslaved. After living for seventeen years as a houseboy, he was suddenly put out to work in the fields without any experience or training. Read the following passage in which he describes his year with Thomas Covey.

From Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Mr. Covey's *forte* consisted in his power to deceive. His life was devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions. Every thing he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty. He would make a short prayer in the morning, and a long prayer at night; and, strange as it may seem, few men would at times appear more devotional than he. The exercises of his family devotions were always commenced with singing; and, as he was a very poor singer himself, the duty of raising the hymn generally came upon me. He would read his hymn, and nod at me to commence. I would at times do so; at others, I would not. My noncompliance would almost always produce much confusion. To show himself independent of me, he would start and stagger through with his hymn in the most discordant manner. In this state of mind, he prayed with more than ordinary spirit. Poor man! such was his disposition, and success at deceiving, I do verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God; and this, too, at a time when he may be said to have been guilty of compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery. The facts in the case are these: Mr. Covey was a poor man; he was just commencing in life; he was only able to buy one slave; and, shocking as is the fact, he bought her, as he said, for a *breeder*. This woman was named Caroline. Mr. Covey bought her from Mr. Thomas Lowe, about six miles from St. Michael's. She was a large, able-bodied woman, about twenty years old. She had already given birth to one child, which proved her to be just what he wanted. After buying her, he hired a married man of Mr. Samuel Harrison, to live with him one year; and him he used to fasten up with her every night! The result was, that, at the end of the year, the miserable woman gave birth to twins. At this result Mr. Covey seemed to be highly pleased, both with the man and the wretched woman. Such was his joy, and that of his wife, that nothing they could do for Caroline during her confinement was too good, or too hard, to be done. The children were regarded as being quite an addition to his wealth.

If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow, too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!

Sunday was my only leisure time. I spent this in a sort of beastlike stupor, between sleep and wake, under some large tree. At times I would rise up, a flash of energetic freedom would dart through my soul, accompanied with a faint beam of hope, that flickered for a moment, and then vanished. I sank down again, mourning over my wretched condition. I was sometimes prompted to take my life, and that of Covey, but was prevented by a combination of hope and fear. My sufferings on this plantation seem now like a dream rather than a stern reality.

Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the lofty banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. The sight of these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships: —

“You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll. Go on, go on. O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it. I had as well die with ague as the fever. I have only one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing. Only think of it; one hundred miles straight north, and I am free! Try it? Yes! God helping me, I will. It cannot be that I shall live and die a slave. I will take to the water. This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom. The steamboats steered in a north-east course from North Point. I will do the same; and when I get to the head of the bay, I will turn my canoe adrift, and walk straight through Delaware into Pennsylvania. When I get there, I shall not be required to have a pass; I can travel without being disturbed. Let but the first opportunity offer, and, come what will, I am off. Meanwhile, I will try to bear up under the yoke. I am not the only slave in the world. Why should I fret? I can bear as much as any of them. Besides, I am but a boy, and all boys are bound to some one. It may be that my misery in slavery will only increase my happiness when I get free. There is a better day coming.”¹

¹Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845; reprint, New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005), 61-64.

The Douglass Narrative

Part A.

Directions: Answer the following questions based on your reading of the selection from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

1. How does Frederick Douglass characterize the life of Thomas Covey?
2. How does Douglass account for Covey's ability to be a slaveholder and a man of religion?
3. How did Covey feel he added to his wealth?
4. What role did the woman named Caroline play in increasing Covey's holdings?
5. In what three ways does Douglass feel he changed after living with Covey?
6. What prevented Douglass from killing himself or killing Covey during this time?
7. What details in the narrative might convince a Northerner of the cruelties of life in bondage?

8. What elements in this selection reflect Sethe's and Paul D's experience at Sweet Home?

9. How does Douglass describe his feelings about the ships in Chesapeake Bay?

10. How does Douglass rationalize a hope for future freedom?

Part B.

Directions: The diction and syntax of Frederick Douglass's narrative suggest formality. He resists the graphic details of Toni Morrison's narrative and creates distance from the horrors of a life in slavery with the use of figurative language and imagery. Rewrite the following sentences with a more informal style.

1. "Mr. Covey's *forte* consisted in his power to deceive."

2. "Every thing he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive."

3. "To show himself independent of me, he would start and stagger through with his hymn in the most discordant manner."

4. "My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships."

5. "Meanwhile, I will try to bear up under the yoke."

Study Guide

Directions: Answer each of the following questions to demonstrate an understanding of the story. Be able to discuss your answers in class.

Part 1

1. How does Toni Morrison personify Sethe's house in the very opening of the book? What is the effect of this personification?
2. What signs of a ghost in the house does Morrison mention at the very start of the novel?
3. What fragmentary details about the ghost does Sethe reveal in the first chapter?
4. Why is the baby ghost referred to as Beloved?
5. Where does Paul D come from when he arrives at 124 Bluestone Road?
6. How does the ghost react to Paul D's arrival at 124?
7. What feelings does Paul D's arrival bring out in Denver?
8. What was the relationship between Denver and the indentured servant, Amy Denver?
9. What importance does the trip to the carnival hold for Paul D?
10. In what ways is the arrival of Beloved mysterious?
11. What does Sethe mean by "rememory"?
12. What role did Baby Suggs play in the Cincinnati community?

13. How did Denver learn of her mother's terrible act of infanticide?

14. How does Beloved force open the "tobacco tin" of Paul D's heart?

15. What role does Stamp Paid play in Sethe's journey?

Part 2

16. How does Stamp Paid feel the black community failed Baby Suggs?

17. Why does Stamp Paid carry the knot of hair with a ribbon around it?

18. After the playful skating episode, how does Sethe change her perceptions of family?

19. What did Halle suggest would happen to their sons if they stayed at Sweet Home?

20. What effect do the stream of consciousness chapters create?

21. Why did Stamp Paid change his name?

Part 3

22. How has the mood of playfulness changed at 124 Bluestone?

23. What does Denver do to rescue her mother?

24. How do Janey Wagon and Ella view Beloved?

25. What do Paul D and Sethe discover is the route to freedom?

Study Guide Answer Key

Part 1

1. Toni Morrison describes 124 Bluestone Road as spiteful. The effect is to make the house a living part of the story.
2. There are many manifestations of the ghost in the house, including shattered mirrors, tiny handprints in a cake, turned-over slop jars, sour air, and moving furniture.
3. The ghost is a two-year-old baby who died when her throat was cut. She does not understand what happened and is full of rage which she brings to the house. Sethe says if the ghost would appear to her, she could explain.
4. The seven-letter word was all Sethe could get from the stonecutter for ten minutes of sexual favors. She wonders if for half an hour's intimacy she could have gotten "Dearly" put on the stone as well.
5. Paul D was one of the men at the Sweet Home plantation, but Sethe has not seen him for eighteen years, since the night of her escape.
6. The ghost is disturbed by the intimacy Paul D shares with Sethe. It pitches the house about but is finally exorcised by Paul D's command to leave the house.
7. Denver feels lonely and isolated by not being part of the Sweet Home history Sethe and Paul D share.
8. Amy helped Sethe to deliver her baby on the Ohio River. Sethe named her daughter for a white girl who became an assisting angel in Sethe's escape.
9. Paul D sees the shadow of three people holding hands as they leave the carnival and feels a familial intimacy he has been missing all his life.
10. Beloved just appears in front of the house at 124 Bluestone. Sethe reacts by needing to relieve herself in a gush of water, the girl is thirsty and sleepy, and her neck appears too weak to support her head. Her questions suggest that she knows something of Sethe's past.
11. Sethe and Paul D have tried to suppress traumatic memories of schoolteacher and Sweet Home, but the memories come back to haunt them.
12. Baby Suggs was a spiritual advisor and center of communication in the community.
13. A boy at Lady Jones's school asked Denver about her mother being put away for murder. Denver moved into a world of silence after this.
14. Beloved seduces Paul D when he moves out to the barn, forcing him to deal with feelings and emotions he has suppressed.
15. Stamp Paid was a conductor on the Underground Railroad. He brought Sethe and Denver to Baby Suggs. He is also the person who tells Paul D about Sethe's act of infanticide.

Part 2

16. The community isolated Baby Suggs and her family because they resented her generosity and rejected Sethe's shameful act of killing her child.
17. Stamp Paid carries the knot of hair as a reminder of the past horrors of slavery and all of its aftereffects.

18. Sethe begins to recognize Beloved as her daughter and sees an image of three figures similar to the one Paul D saw after the carnival. However, the three figures in her world are Beloved, Denver, and herself.
19. Sethe remembers the conversation with Halle when he made it clear to her that the boys might be sold.
20. The stream of consciousness style in part 2 conveys the interior voices of three important characters. The technique also blends history and visual images that layer the personalities of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved.
21. After his wife was raped by the master, Stamp Paid felt he needed to change his identity in order to move forward.

Part 3

22. The house is now described as “quiet.” Denver recognizes that Beloved is sucking the life and energy out of Sethe, and they are all starving.
23. Denver goes out of 124 to the community, back to Lady Jones, who was once her teacher.
24. Both Janey and Ella see Beloved as a ghost of the past. They feel she must be driven away rather than be allowed to reclaim the victims of slavery.
25. Paul D and Sethe come to some peace when they have confronted the past and allowed themselves to feel love.

Writing Activities

Directions: Choose one or more prompts to address. Write well-developed responses.

Personal Response

1. What are the stories passed down in your family? Recount something you have learned through your family's oral history.
2. Describe what you believe are your parents' expectations for you. Do they affect how you perform in school or your future career path? How have these expectations been conveyed to you?
3. Reflect on the people whom you view as controlling your life. They might include parents, teachers, coaches, clergy, or other authority figures. How do you react to the behaviors they require of you? Are there ways for you to express resistance to their authority?
4. What do you feel is a mother's role in the lives of her children? What things can she do to help them become thriving adults? What things should she not do?
5. How important is loving yourself? How is your self-image affected by others? by society? by the media?
6. What evidence do you see of racial healing in American society? What government policies have affected that healing? What personal experiences have made you aware of race? What opportunities do you have to contribute to a positive racial climate in America?

Research

Historic Context

1. Visit the Library of Congress Web site "Voices from the Days of Slavery" (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/>), which includes interviews with former slaves recounting their experiences and their songs. Choose one of the narratives to present in class.
2. Many of the arguments used by slave owners to defend their peculiar institution came from the Bible. Use databases of primary documents like *The History Resource Center* to find some of these arguments. What makes the arguments credible? What flaws exist in the logic of these arguments?
3. Read President Barack Obama's speech on race, "A More Perfect Union," which was delivered on March 18, 2008, at the Constitution Center in Philadelphia. (The complete transcript is available on many Web sites.) After reading the speech, make a chart which outlines contemporary issues that are rooted in the racial history of America.

Literary Context

1. Research the life of one of the following figures, and determine how the person was influenced by the institution of slavery: Phyllis Whitney, Sojourner Truth, Ignatius Sancho, James Forten, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Ida Wells. Write a paper that chronicles the contributions to American society made by individual slaves.
2. Read selections from a slave narrative other than that by Frederick Douglass, such as the narratives of Harriet Jacobs or Olaudah Equiano. Write a response to the selection that describes the tone of the narrative.

Literary Criticism and Analysis

1. Find the book reviews of *Beloved* written by Margaret Atwood and Walter Clemons. Discuss what these reviewers see as Toni Morrison's major accomplishment in this novel.
2. The epigraph to *Beloved* is from the Bible, *Romans 9:25*: "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." This was written by St. Paul. Read the whole of chapter 9 to understand the lines in context. Explain how Paul's contemplation on the ways God allows evil into human life suits Morrison's purpose in *Beloved*.
3. The Middle Passage broke up families and tribes, separating Africans of different backgrounds from their languages, their families, and their cultures. Write an essay that discusses the ways a fragmented family and cultural history affect the characters in *Beloved*.
4. William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Write an essay that discusses how the past experiences of characters in *Beloved* contribute to the meaning of the work.
5. In works of literature, characters often commit extreme acts ending in someone's death. Discuss the motivation that guides Sethe to kill her own daughter. Relate that motivation to the theme of the novel. Use specific evidence from the novel to support your ideas.
6. Power is often the subject of stories in which a single character or group of characters control the lives of others. Discuss how power issues affect the lives of the characters in *Beloved*.
7. Symbols serve some functional purposes in a story but carry special significance because of the meaning that surrounds them. Discuss how Toni Morrison uses water, trees, and the tobacco tin as symbols.

Objective Test

Directions: Choose the letter that best completes each statement.

- _____ 1. The opening line of the novel *Beloved* is an example of the author's use of
 - a. allegory.
 - b. personification.
 - c. rhetorical question.
 - d. metaphor.

- _____ 2. In the opening paragraphs, the reader learns that the sons who lived in the house at 124 Bluestone now
 - a. are married and have established households of their own.
 - b. are dead.
 - c. have run away.
 - d. are slaves.

- _____ 3. The ghost in the house on Bluestone Road is described by Sethe as being
 - a. a very young child when she died.
 - b. a child who was loved.
 - c. a child who was not able to talk much.
 - d. all of the above.

- _____ 4. Sethe wishes she could add to a tombstone the word
 - a. greatly.
 - b. dearly.
 - c. baby.
 - d. always.

- _____ 5. The arrival of Paul D at 124 Bluestone Road also begins the descriptions of life
 - a. at Sweet Home.
 - b. in slavery.
 - c. during the Middle Passage.
 - d. a and b only.

- _____ 6. All of the following are true of Sweet Home except
 - a. Denver was a happy child.
 - b. Sethe was the only young black woman.
 - c. Schoolteacher was a cruel overseer.
 - d. Mr. Garner referred to his slaves as "men."

- _____ 7. When Paul D comes in the house at 124 Bluestone, he
 - a. decides he will move in with Sethe and Denver.
 - b. tells Sethe that he cannot stay because he is married.
 - c. says he is only interested in seeing Baby Suggs.
 - d. drives the baby ghost out of the house.

- _____ 8. What effect does the intimacy between Paul D and Sethe have on Denver?
 - a. She imagines a new family unit for the three of them.
 - b. She feels isolated by never having known Sweet Home.
 - c. She urges Paul D to tell stories she can learn from.
 - d. She feels proud of her family history.

- _____ 9. Sethe took Denver's name from
- the town the girl was born in.
 - a label on a crate in the wagon Sethe escaped on.
 - the indentured servant who helped in Denver's birth.
 - the street address for the Sweet Home ranch.
- _____ 10. When Denver, Paul D, and Sethe return from the carnival, a woman appears outside the house who is described as
- exhausted and well dressed.
 - thirsty and sleepy.
 - wet and shallow breathing.
 - all of the above.
- _____ 11. Beloved's character seems at once realistic and fantastic because
- Beloved has uncanny knowledge about Sethe's past.
 - Beloved reveals nothing about herself or where she came from.
 - Beloved pays unusual attention to Sethe.
 - Beloved looks so much like Denver.
- _____ 12. Sethe is haunted by a past life in slavery which included all of the following except
- physical and sexual abuse.
 - a husband named Halle.
 - making ink for schoolteacher.
 - a role as a preacher.
- _____ 13. Paul D escaped from the prison in Alfred, Georgia, when
- a flood collapsed the ground around the cells.
 - he killed a guard with his bare hands.
 - the chain gang ran during the night.
 - he was aided by native Americans he met up with.
- _____ 14. Sethe's relationship with Amy Denver begins
- at Sweet Home.
 - in Cincinnati.
 - in prison.
 - on the Ohio River.
- _____ 15. Beloved becomes a catalyst for Paul D's connection to his memories and emotions when she
- grows closer to Sethe and Denver.
 - drives him out of Sethe's house.
 - talks about Sethe's past at Sweet Home.
 - seduces him.
- _____ 16. The permanent reminder of Sethe's experience in slavery is
- the house on Bluestone Road.
 - a scar on her back.
 - her iron-colored eyes.
 - the curl of hair with red ribbon.

- _____ 17. Baby Suggs was rejected by the community in Cincinnati because
- she pretended to be a preacher.
 - her generosity was viewed as pride.
 - her granddaughter was dead.
 - her son had purchased her freedom.
- _____ 18. Stamp Paid first meets Sethe when he helps her cross the Ohio River in his role as
- conductor for the Underground Railroad.
 - Cincinnati community leader.
 - newspaper reporter.
 - father of Amy Denver.
- _____ 19. Sethe, Baby Suggs, and Ella all represent the experience of
- uneducated women in the nineteenth century.
 - women who rejected their children.
 - happiness in freedom after being slaves.
 - women who suffered in lives of slavery.
- _____ 20. In the story of the escape from Sweet Home, Paul D reveals that he
- allowed Sixo to die.
 - tried to kill schoolteacher.
 - had a bit put in his mouth.
 - was sexually abused.
- _____ 21. The love between Paul D and Sethe is only possible when
- Paul D stops drinking.
 - Sethe and Paul D in some way reconcile with their pasts.
 - the community intervenes in bringing the two together.
 - Paul admits his affair with Beloved.
- _____ 22. The stream of consciousness passages that Beloved uses to tell her story also reference the experience of
- African women in the Middle Passage.
 - African slaves during the Civil War.
 - Sethe during Reconstruction.
 - indentured servants in the South.
- _____ 23. Although Denver suffers from isolation through much of the novel, she becomes the heroine by
- making special connections to Beloved.
 - explaining Sethe's infanticide to Paul D.
 - going to school to learn how to read and write.
 - getting help from the community to save Sethe.
- _____ 24. When Mr. Bodwin drives up to 124 in the last scenes of the novel, Sethe is remembering
- her escape from Sweet Home.
 - the day schoolteacher came to 124.
 - the day Paul D arrived at 124.
 - the meetings Baby Suggs held in the Clearing.

- _____ 25. Although the characters are moving forward at the end of the novel, uncertainties that still haunt them include
- what became of Halle after Paul D saw him.
 - where Beloved came from.
 - why Sethe rejected Denver.
 - why schoolteacher came to Ohio.
- _____ 26. The style of *Beloved* is characterized by
- the mimicking of nineteenth-century prose.
 - the use of allegory.
 - elements of realism and the supernatural.
 - abrupt sentence patterns.
- _____ 27. The African-American oral tradition is reflected in the novel with
- call and response.
 - African hymns.
 - long set speeches.
 - all of the above.
- _____ 28. The fragmenting of the plot in the novel helps to convey the
- shifting changes in the way Sethe thinks about Paul D.
 - way characters relate to one another.
 - difficulty of reconciling memories of the past.
 - patterns of culture for former slaves.
- _____ 29. The roles of Amy Denver, the Bodwins, and the Garners are meant to portray the
- ways white people functioned in the lives of black slaves.
 - heroic efforts of whites to end slavery.
 - hatred between races in the nineteenth century.
 - middle-class social structure during the Reconstruction period.
- _____ 30. The graphic descriptions of life at Sweet Home and in the prison in Georgia are used to
- shock the reader.
 - convey the reality of life in slavery.
 - recall some famous events in history.
 - make the plot more interesting.

Objective Test Answer Key

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. b | 16. b |
| 2. c | 17. b |
| 3. d | 18. a |
| 4. b | 19. d |
| 5. d | 20. c |
| 6. a | 21. b |
| 7. d | 22. a |
| 8. b | 23. d |
| 9. c | 24. b |
| 10. d | 25. a |
| 11. a | 26. c |
| 12. d | 27. a |
| 13. a | 28. c |
| 14. d | 29. a |
| 15. d | 30. b |

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Beloved

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Entire Unit

- RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
- RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
- RL.9-10.9 Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).
- RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- RL.11-12.10 By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

- RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).
- RI.9-10.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
- RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RI.11-12.9 Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (including The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address) for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.
- RI.11-12.10 By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
- W.9-10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
- W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- W.9-10.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- W.9-10.9a Apply *grades 9–10 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., “Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]”).

- W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
- W.11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
- W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- W.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.
- W.11-12.9a Apply *grades 11–12 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).
- L.9-10.6 Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.
- L.11-12.6 Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

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