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Beloved

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Teaching Unit

Beloved

by Toni Morrison

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Beloved

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. infer information about characters and events when the information is not explicitly stated.
2. discuss Morrison's writing style, which is characterized by numerous descriptive phrases and images.
3. define the listed vocabulary terms from the story.
4. define and cite examples from *Beloved* of the following literary terms:
 - irony
 - folklore
 - symbolism
 - simile
 - personification
 - theme
 - metaphor
5. discuss the significance of names and nicknames in *Beloved*, both of people and places.
6. recognize and discuss the lasting mental effects of slavery on former slaves and their ancestors, as revealed in *Beloved*.
7. identify and compare the two different time-frames in which *Beloved* occurs.
8. explain the term "objective correlative," and how it applies to *Beloved*.
9. discuss the differences in the communication that takes place between black people and between blacks and whites in *Beloved*.
10. discuss the notion of the individual's obligation to the community, as displayed by Stamp Paid, Baby Suggs, and Ella.
11. discuss the progression of matriarchs through three generations of the Suggs family, from Baby Suggs to Denver.
12. identify examples and justifications for retribution in *Beloved*, and how each applies to the characters in the novel.
13. discuss the difference between religion and spirituality, as exemplified by Baby Suggs.

Beloved

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Comment on the significance of the pictures denoting the three sections of the novel.
2. Discuss the bonds between a mother and child. Comment on the difference between mother/son and mother/daughter relationships in *Beloved*.
3. Discuss the idea of “manhood,” and how it applies to *all* of the men of Sweet Home.
4. Why is Sethe apparently indifferent when Howard and Buglar run away?
5. Discuss the role of a mother; give your interpretation of Sethe’s performance as a mother.
6. Comment on the significance of Morrison’s dedication, to “sixty million and more,” in relation to the overall theme of *Beloved* and specifically to the chapter.
7. Discuss Morrison’s portrayal of schoolteacher in contrast with the traditional representation of a teacher (embodied by Lady Jones).
8. Compare indentured servitude and slavery, as represented in *Beloved* by Amy Denver and Sethe.
9. Explain why it is ironic that Mr. Garner took such pleasure in “calling his own niggers men.”
10. Explain Morrison’s idea of “rememory,” as she presents it.
11. List the evidence that Beloved is Sethe’s reincarnated daughter. What other possible explanations are there for Beloved’s identity?
12. Explain the progression of personification of the house at 124 Bluestone Road in the beginning of each of the three major sections of the book.
13. Why do the residents of Lorain, Ohio, accept the supernatural explanation of Beloved so readily? Explain your feelings about the supernatural.

Beloved

Book One (Pages 4 – 49)

Vocabulary

deprivation – prevention from using or enjoying something
devious – underhanded, deceitful; indirect
exorcise – to expel an evil spirit
glittering – sparkling
intolerable – unbearable
luminous – glowing, emitting light
palsied – paralyzed, made helpless
perfunctory – indifferent
pike – a long-snouted fish
pondering – thinking deeply
rebuked – reprimanded, scolded
revulsion – disgust, aversion
spiteful – full of ill will or malice
studded – embedded with
untethered – untied, unrestrained
venom – spite, malice, anger

1. The first line of the book is “124 was spiteful.” Why do you suppose Morrison describes the house and not the ghost residing in it as “spiteful”?

2. What is the significance of the house number “124”?

3. When Sethe learns that her husband witnessed her rape, she is obviously upset that he did not come to her rescue. How does Paul D rationalize Halle's inaction?

4. Why does Beloved get angry when Denver asks her not to tell Sethe who she [Beloved] is?

5. Why does Denver want to keep Sethe ignorant of Beloved's identity?

6. Why does Paul D distrust Beloved?

5. What explanation does Baby Suggs give Mr. Garner for her real name?

6. Why does Morrison describe the men who came to retrieve Sethe as “the four horsemen”?

7. Why did Sethe kill her daughter?

8. Why does Paul D refuse to acknowledge that the picture in the newspaper is of Sethe?

9. When Sethe explains her actions to Paul D, what is his response, and what are the consequences of his reaction?

Book Two (Pages 200 – 217)

1. How does Morrison's story shift stylistically in this section?

2. An important person is largely missing from Sethe's section. Who is it and why?

3. In Denver's section, what does the reader learn about her allegiances to her family members?

4. When Denver was young, she claimed her mother would cut her head off. What does her metaphor represent?

5. Why is there no punctuation in Beloved's section?

6. Beloved's section is extremely confusing. What is she describing?

7. Discuss the "poems" on pages 215 – 217. Who is speaking in each poem?
