

Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

**Beloved**

by Toni Morrison

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# Beloved

## About the Novel and the Author

Now nearly a quarter-century old and firmly in place as an essential work of twentieth-century American literature—“best American novel published in the previous twenty-five years” by the New York Times Book Review in 2006—it’s worth noting that *Beloved* was met with mixed reviews upon its release in 1987; even her winning of the Pulitzer Prize for the novel the following year caused some controversy. By this time, Morrison was an established novelist, but none of her previous works—including masterpieces *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*—had dealt with slavery, a topic that—when dealt with in the grueling and surrealist fashion Morrison brings to *Beloved*—caused considerable stir among readers and literary critics. Time, however, has been on Morrison’s side: after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 (the first black woman to be so honored), she has cemented her place as, perhaps, America’s most important living writer and literary thinker. Though no succeeding work of hers has matched the power and acclaim (and conflict) of *Beloved*, Morrison has since written a number of excellent short works (*Jazz*, *A Mercy*) and literary criticism, as well as branched out into writing opera and children’s books.

# Beloved

## Introductory Lecture

### Historical Context

The events of *Beloved* take place between 1854 and 1874, thereby encompassing the last days of the antebellum South, the Civil War (in passing), and most of the Reconstruction era; that said, the novel's dedication to the nameless "60 million and more" who perished as a result of the slave trade makes clear the work addresses the history and institution of slavery. Thus, The Middle Passage, the term used to describe the forced voyage from Africa to the Americas experienced by millions of slaves, is the underlying concern of and the symbol in the novel, for the months long journey, in which hundreds of captives were chained together and piled on top of one another in stifling and unsanitary conditions, was responsible for much of the death and dehumanization suffered by the imprisoned. It is alluded to and invoked throughout the novel: Sethe's mother, for one, was a survivor; and Beloved's monologue late in Section Two conveys some of the darkest imagery of the transatlantic voyage.

Like many other great works of literature, *Beloved's* plot is grounded in real-world events. Morrison, while working on an anthology of black history, had come across the story of Margaret Garner, a runaway Kentucky slave who, as with Sethe, killed her daughter and attempted to murder her other children in order to spare them from an enslaved life. Morrison deviates in several places from the real-life events—Gardner was tried, returned to the South, and sold back into slavery—but Garner's actions were an "obsession" to the author while writing the novel.

As illustrated by the experiences of Sethe and Paul D., runaway slaves in the United States were not safe from their former slave masters even after successfully making it to Northern states—this is because of the Fugitive Slave Act, what Baby Suggs refers to in the novel as the "Misery." Prior to the passing of this act in 1850 as part of the Missouri Compromise, most Northern states had passed local laws that either weakened the government's role in returning ex-slaves to the South or made such actions voluntary. What made the Fugitive Slave Act different from other federal laws requiring the return of slaves was the enforcement of a severe financial penalty on local law enforcement agents who did not search out and apprehend runaway slaves. Furthermore, any person who aided the escapee was jailed and fined harshly. Thus, when Schoolteacher strides up to 124 Bluestone to take Sethe, he is accompanied by an Ohio police officer, who is obliged to participate in Sethe's capture. Baby Suggs's repeated invocation that "they came in my yard" also has a literal meaning: Southern slave masters and Northern officers could investigate and arrest African Americans with little to no proof of wrongdoing.

Sections of text in which Stamp Paid is featured also allude to oft-misunderstood and misrepresented post-Civil War events and attitudes. There is a general perception, sometimes perpetuated by textbooks, that freed blacks were enfranchised and embraced in the years immediately following the War. Legally, this is only partially true: while the 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution (1865) prohibited slavery, and the 14th Amendment (1868) provided equal protection, due process, and other citizenship rights to all peoples, so-called Black Codes were passed locally and statewide in formerly Confederate states to restrict the voting rights and mobility of freed blacks. During the initial years of Reconstruction, when federal troop presence was strong in southern cities, integration was forced and African Americans were able to achieve a modicum of success in post-Civil War society, including running for office and opening schools and businesses.

However, it was impossible, particularly in rural areas with thin federal presence, to comprehensively enforce equality, and many Southern—and Northern—whites responded viciously to the freeing of slaves. The 1860s and 1870s marked the age of lynchings, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and race riots. Both Stamp and Denver, when recalling Sethe's words to Beloved, refer to horrific acts of violence perpetrated by mobs of angry whites against attempts by African Americans to migrate out of the South or to be educated. Violence and intimidation would be continually implemented by whites in order to maintain political, economic, and social control over the black population. Indeed, for Baby Suggs, the greatest suffering results from her inability to free herself from the system of prejudice—known as institutional racism—that traps her even as she was free. Blacks were all but excluded from high-paying jobs, discouraged from learning, and often outcast to remote locations (124 Bluestone is well outside the city). Even in a “union” state, we learn that African Americans cannot enter a grocery store or attend a carnival with whites. This *de facto segregation*, the separation of races in daily life, was enforced by so-called Jim Crow laws, all but maintaining and reinforcing the ravages of slavery for a century after the Civil War.

**Magic or Magical Realism:** Although it has been called a “genre,” magical realism is more a mode or means of telling a story that incorporates magic, the supernatural, or illogical situations and events among ordinary events and characters in normal settings. Critic Naomi Lindstrom (1994) defined magical realism as a “narrative technique that blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality[...]characterized by an equal acceptance of the ordinary and the extraordinary.”

This blending of realistic and unrealistic elements expresses itself in conflicts of perspective: multiple narrative points of view and the acceptance of the surreal and supernatural along with “rational reality.” The essence of magical realism allows the fantastic to be as acceptable as the mundane to both the characters within the narrative and the reader.

Literature that invites a magical realist interpretation tends to share these elements:

**Hybridity** – Because magic realism blends the fantastic with the rational, other juxtapositions of apparent opposites characteristically appear: urban and rural, northern and southern, past and present, the living and the dead. Notice, for example that, in *Beloved*, Morrison combines the past and present in fluid and contradictory ways: Paul D recalls the chaos of his prison experience just as he attempts to seek a permanent relationship with Sethe; he reminisces on his first experiences with freedom as he returns to Sethe at the novel's end. Likewise, Beloved is repeatedly described as a ghostly or demonic spirit by those outside of 124, but she is a living, breathing adult to those inside of 124—a contradiction exemplified by the fact that she is not signified by her real name but called “Beloved,” the only word on her tombstone.

**Irony Regarding Author's Perspective** – The writer must maintain an objective distance from the narrative, and must neither validate nor question the presence of the supernatural and the irrational. On the one hand, if the narrator intrudes in order to assert the legitimacy of the supernatural, the narrative risks becoming a fantasy, losing its necessary grounding in the ordinary. On the other hand, if the author questions the presence of the supernatural and overly values the rational, the supernatural risks becoming unreal, thus losing its intended impact on the events and characters. For example, in *Beloved*, Morrison never definitively confirms Beloved's presence: some in the community can't decide what she looked like; some can't decide whether she was even human (a child says he saw a “naked woman with fish for hair” in the woods); and some can't decide if she even existed (“first they saw it and then they didn't”). The detached, omnipresent narration neither validates nor critiques these images, choosing instead to integrate them as part of the story world.

**Authorial Reticence** – Morrison's third-person omniscient narrative simply tells the story, allowing the characters to judge one another and themselves, without ever judging them herself. While maintaining a sense of ambiguity—even about whether the titular character Beloved really existed—she does not impose her view. The characters have their voices, and the reader is left to arrive at his or her own interpretation.

**The Supernatural and Natural** – In magical realism, the supernatural simply exists and exerts its influence. The existence or nonexistence of supernatural elements is not an issue—neither a theme nor a source of conflict—in the narrative. The supernatural is in the same way that the ordinary is.

Certain themes also tend to recur in literature that invites a magical realistic interpretation.

- **Terror precludes renewal.** Characters' emotional states, especially those horrors that they dare not face, prevent them from moving forward, growing, and escaping their pasts. In *Beloved*, this is most prevalent in Paul D.'s attempt to remain emotionally detached from people and things: he describes his heart as a “tin box” that is rusted shut, not to be opened. His emotional and sexual encounters with Sethe and Beloved, however, force him to painfully confront the suffering he experienced as a slave.

- **Time is cyclical instead of linear.** Just as characters are unable to move beyond their private horrors, what has happened in the past is destined to happen again. Characters are rarely, if ever, able to improve their lives. This is particularly true in the story world of *Beloved*, in which continued racism and survivor's guilt has prevented nomadic Paul D. from settling down and Sethe from reconnecting with the community she has shunned. The inclusion of flashbacks throughout the novel convey how the major characters of *Beloved* attempt to both shun and cope with past traumas and how these experiences continue to influence their behaviors.
- Magical realism also often illustrates and acknowledges the **theme of the carnivalesque**. Carnavalesque is a literary mode in which life is portrayed in terms of the humorous, grotesque, and chaotic nature of a carnival (e.g., the Roman Saturnalia, Mardi Gras, etc.). In the carnival, normal social structures are challenged and shattered. Servants are elevated to the role of master. Fools become wise. Kings become beggars. Thus, as is generally true of magical realism, the distinctions between opposites like the rational and the irrational, fantasy and reality, are blurred. In *Beloved*, the carnival scene reflects many of these functions: the oppressed African-American community is able to laugh and enjoy itself at the expense of the white population, and Sethe is able to imagine a future where she breaks free from her isolation and reforms her family. Ironically, the scene presages *Beloved's* arrival and Sethe's dissolution at her hands.

# Beloved

## Objectives

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

1. explain the use of figurative language to expand the major themes of the work.
2. analyze the author's style and the techniques she uses to convey mood.
3. analyze the functions of the novel's structure, including the author's use of internal monologues.
4. trace the development of motifs like the supernatural and their contribution to theme.
5. analyze the significance of the novel within the context of both United States history and contemporary literature.
6. trace the development of complex and intertwining themes in the novel.
7. analyze the use of multiple points of view, including third-person omniscient narrator, and its relation to the novel's major themes.
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
9. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. offer a close reading of *Beloved* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

# Beloved

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Given that *Beloved* is consistently ranked as one of the most significant literary works of the contemporary era, what in its style, structure, and/or perspective makes it a paragon of contemporariness? How, in other words, does it connect to the anxieties of the present era even as it is a work of historical fiction?
2. Trace a motif (e.g., milk, water) across the development of the novel; explain its meaning and significance to the work.
3. Examine allusions to Christian beliefs, including the epigraph and the interpolations of the Songs of Songs during the monologues.
4. Ambiguity is an important component in contemporary fiction; *Beloved* is no exception. Consider how plot, character development, theme, point of view, and style are developed throughout the novel in a manner that does not offer a clear-cut, definitive answer.

# Beloved

## Practice Free-Response Questions

### Practice Free Response Item #1

Carefully read the passage presented halfway through the last section of Part One that begins, “Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one,” and ends, “I took and put my babies where they would be safe.” Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how Morrison’s use of syntax, figurative language, and selection of details expands the reader’s understanding of Sethe’s worldview.

### Practice Free Response Item #2

Carefully read the last section of Part Three of *Beloved* that begins, “There is a loneliness that can be rocked,” and ends, “Beloved.” Then, write a well-reasoned essay in which you explain Morrison’s purpose in choosing to the end novel here and in the stylistic manner presented in the passage. How does this section help the reader understand the overall meaning of the novel?

### Practice Free Response Item #3

Read the second half of section eleven of Part One of *Beloved* that begins, “In Ohio seasons are theatrical,” and ends “Red heart. Red heart. Red heart.” Then, write an essay analyzing how Morrison’s selection of detail and use of figurative language convey Paul D’s emotional and psychological deterioration.

### Practice Free Response Item #4

Read section three of Part Two of *Beloved* that begins, “Beloved is my sister,” and ends, “She is mine.” Then, write a well-reasoned essay discussing how Morrison uses such literary techniques as voice, syntax, and figurative language to characterize the mind state and psychological development of Denver in the wake of Beloved’s arrival.

### Practice Free Response Item #5

Carefully read the first two pages of the fifth section of Part One of *Beloved* that begins, “A fully dressed woman walked out of the water,” and ends, “...roped into the masses of black yarn under her hat.” Then, write a well-reasoned essay analyzing how Morrison uses literary techniques to introduce Beloved and foreshadow her influence on the residents of 124 Bluestone.

### Practice Free Response Item #6

Memories often have a powerful influence on the identity and growth of characters. In a well-organized essay, analyze the impact of memory on characters in *Beloved*, and explain the significance of suffering and coping with the past to the novel's meaning.

### Practice Free Response Item #7

Contemporary novelists often apply multiple points of view to represent challenging themes with greater complexity. In a well-organized essay, analyze the relationship between point of view and theme in *Beloved*, making sure to discuss how Morrison's use of multiple perspectives enhances the literary and thematic qualities of the work.

### Practice Free Response Item #8

Love is a constant pursuit in literary fiction—but often it negatively influences, harms, or otherwise ruins protagonists who seek it. In a well-organized essay, analyze how love is a destructive force over the characters of *Beloved*, and explain the author's purpose in characterizing love this way in light of the work's major themes.

### Practice Free Response Item #9

The supernatural is often invoked by writers of literary fiction in order to convey the weight of past history or to capture the anxieties and preoccupations of a writer's own era. In a well-organized essay, discuss the role of the supernatural in *Beloved* as it relates to the novel's historical and contemporary concerns, making sure to examine Morrison's purpose for including a ghostly presence.

### Practice Free Response Item #10

According to critics George Lakoff and Mark Turner, "Complex metaphors grip us partly because they awake in us the experience and knowledge that form the grounding of those metaphors, partly because they make the coherence of that experience and knowledge resonate, and partly because they lead us to form new coherences in what we know and experience."

In a well-organized essay, analyze how Morrison's use of figurative language in *Beloved* awakens the reader to the experiences and knowledge of the novel's major characters. Be sure to address how the novel's metaphorical content enables the reader to form "new coherences."

### Practice Free Response Item #11

Literary works often imbue particular physical settings with strong narrative and metaphorical value. In a well-organized essay, discuss the thematic significance of a major setting in *Beloved*, explaining how descriptions of, characters' actions within, and/or attitudes expressed about the setting contribute to the novel's literary value. Avoid plot summary

### Practice Free Response Item #12

In some works of literature, the plot is developed in a nonlinear fashion in order to help convey the text's meaning: authors often withhold significant information or details until much later in the book, situate flashbacks at various key points in a novel, and change points of view to provide different perspectives on events. In a well-organized essay, describe how Morrison's use of nonlinear exposition helps convey the major ideas of *Beloved*, making sure to discuss specific instances in the book where events or detail veer from the linear chronology and their thematic purpose.

# Beloved

## Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

### Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 1 – 5

Carefully read the passage three-quarters of the way through the third section of Part One that begins with the narrator's saying, "124 was so full of strong feeling perhaps she was oblivious to loss of anything at all" and ends with, "They were too loud, had too much power for the little house chores he was engaged in—resetting table legs; glazing." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

1. Sethe is described as "color conscious as a hen" because of
  - A. her desire for colorful things.
  - B. the death of her infant child.
  - C. the effect of Paul D's arrival at the house.
  - D. the absence of her sons.
  - E. her work as a cook.
2. Morrison refers repeatedly to the overwhelming strength or noise (e.g., "too loud," "too strong") of the house and of the characters' actions inside of it to convey the
  - A. physical prowess of Sethe and Paul D.
  - B. incongruity and violence of Paul D's singing.
  - C. drab, barren trappings of the house.
  - D. heavy emotions burdening the residents of 124 and their activities.
  - E. emptiness and loneliness of those who remain in the house.
3. The author anthropomorphizes the house in the third paragraph of the passage in order to represent the
  - A. consciousness and memory of Sethe.
  - B. resentment 124's other residents feel toward Sethe.
  - C. slave experiences of Sethe and Paul D.
  - D. spectral presence of her sons.
  - E. harmony and order ruined by Paul D's arrival.
4. The sentence "Things became what they were: drabness looked drab; heat was hot" illuminates Sethe's
  - A. awareness of the barren state of her home.
  - B. pain from the absence of her children.
  - C. reconnection with her feelings.
  - D. increased misery because of Paul D's presence.
  - E. emotional suffering at the hands of the house.

5. Morrison includes the lyrics of Paul D's songs for all of the following reasons EXCEPT
- A. indicate a transition in the section's point of view.
  - B. allude to physical tumult and torment experienced by Paul D.
  - C. compare and contrast the emotional states of Sethe and Paul D.
  - D. suggest Paul D's inability to verbalize emotional or physical pain.
  - E. convey of Sethe and Paul D.

**Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 6 – 15**

Carefully read the ninth section of Part One of *Beloved* that begins, “Sethe moaned,” and ends, “Raised bread, even.” Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

6. In the seventh paragraph of the passage, “The touch of those fingers she knew better than her own” refers to
  - A. Beloved.
  - B. Schoolteacher.
  - C. Denver.
  - D. Paul D.
  - E. Baby Suggs.
  
7. The passage suggests that Sethe “wanted” Paul D because of her
  - A. deep loneliness.
  - B. desire for a sexual partner.
  - C. similar emotions at Sweet Home.
  - D. mistrust of Beloved and Denver’s relationship.
  - E. need to take care of other people.
  
8. Morrison’s use of sentence fragments and interrogative sentences in the inner monologue of the first paragraph has the primary effect of
  - A. conveying Sethe’s self-generated fears.
  - B. expressing Sethe’s madness.
  - C. confirming Sethe’s perseverance.
  - D. emphasizing the inner peace Sethe has obtained.
  - E. suggesting Sethe’s inability to speak for herself.
  
9. “Touch” is repeatedly invoked in this passage to suggest the
  - A. tangible presence of Sethe’s memories.
  - B. intimacy of Beloved and Sethe’s relationship.
  - C. understanding of and sympathy toward Denver’s isolation displayed by Sethe.
  - D. physical nature of Sethe’s desires and frustrations.
  - E. coming tension among Sethe, Denver, and Beloved.
  
10. Morrison repeatedly characterizes Beloved in this passage as
  - A. secretive.
  - B. infantile.
  - C. desiring.
  - D. spectral.
  - E. controlling.

11. The passage states which of the following about Sethe's psychological and emotional state?
- A. She has been detached from and unloving toward her children.
  - B. She continues to cook and clean to appease others.
  - C. She desperately wants Beloved to understand why she killed her child.
  - D. She has sustained Beloved's love, devotion, and trust.
  - E. She is aware of her descent into madness.
12. The passage suggests that Denver has become all of the following EXCEPT
- A. more reflective and aware of the behaviors of Sethe and Beloved.
  - B. more submissive to Sethe and Beloved's demands.
  - C. more sympathetic toward and concerned for Sethe.
  - D. more detached from Sethe and Beloved's interactions.
  - E. more critical of Beloved's presence in 124.
13. The passage suggests the relationship between Sethe and Beloved at this point in the novel is
- A. antagonistic.
  - B. complementary.
  - C. muted.
  - D. parasitic.
  - E. understanding.
14. The speaker's allusion to the "torso hanging in a tree with a sign on it" and "bubbling hot school girls" at the end of the third paragraph of the passage serves primarily to
- A. confirm Sethe's failure in safeguarding Beloved and Denver.
  - B. suggest the reasoning that led Sethe to harm her children.
  - C. emphasize the sacrifices reluctantly made by Sethe.
  - D. symbolize Sethe's deprivation at the hands of slavery.
  - E. describe the cruelty and abuse of racist whites in post-Civil War America.
15. Which of the following quotations most accurately characterizes Sethe's feelings toward her children in this passage?
- A. "Your love is too thick."
  - B. "Love is or it ain't."
  - C. "Don't love her too much. Don't."
  - D. "She considered love a serious disability."
  - E. "Hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize."

**Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 16 – 20**

Carefully read the fifth section of Part Two of *Beloved* that begins, “We played by the creek,” and ends, “You are mine.” Then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

16. Who are the two speakers in the section that starts with “We played by the creek and ends with “A hot thing”?
  - A. Beloved and Denver
  - B. Beloved and Sethe
  - C. Sethe and Denver
  - D. Beloved, Sethe, and Denver
  - E. Sethe, Denver and Halle
  
17. Morrison repeats “You are mine” three times in order to
  - A. repeat the unknown, indecipherable voices heard by Stamp Paid outside of 124.
  - B. convey the possessiveness all three women feel toward one another.
  - C. express Beloved’s desire for Sethe.
  - D. suggest division and detachment among the three women.
  - E. distinguish the identities of each woman.
  
18. Beloved’s tone toward Sethe in this passage grows increasingly
  - A. vengeful.
  - B. loving.
  - C. concerned.
  - D. critical.
  - E. nostalgic.
  
19. The absence of punctuation, quotation marks, and prose forms in this section conveys the
  - A. fragmented feelings of the women of 124 for one another.
  - B. unspeakable thoughts unspoken by the women.
  - C. fusing and merging of their identities.
  - D. appropriation of Beloved by Sethe and Denver.
  - E. denial of the desires and needs of Beloved.
  
20. Which of the following symbols best expresses the unity of Beloved, Sethe, and Denver?
  - A. braids
  - B. creek
  - C. milk
  - D. blood
  - E. clouds

**Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 21 – 25**

Carefully read the last section of Part Three of *Beloved* that begins, “There is a loneliness that can be rocked,” and ends, “Beloved.” Then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

21. The mood of the passage is best described as
  - A. suspenseful.
  - B. elegiac.
  - C. nostalgic.
  - D. reproachful.
  - E. threatening.
  
22. The personification of loneliness in this passage serves primarily to
  - A. distinguish individual suffering from a shared, collective suffering.
  - B. convey the hurt felt by the townspeople from the palpable absence of Beloved.
  - C. relate the feeling of loneliness to the rocking of a child by its mother.
  - D. equate Beloved to the “inside kind” of loneliness.
  - E. express the loneliness that comes from not being able to “pass on” the story.
  
23. In the third repetition of the passage’s refrain, the phrase “pass on” can mean all of the following EXCEPT
  - A. overlook
  - B. forget
  - C. share
  - D. die
  - E. withhold
  
24. In context, the word “disremembered” is best interpreted to mean a/an
  - A. exaggeration of shared memories.
  - B. conscious removal of unpleasant memories.
  - C. confrontation with past suffering.
  - D. failure to forget.
  - E. lingering imprint of a person long after he/she has passed.
  
25. All of the following are examples of irony in the passage EXCEPT the
  - A. use of present-tense verbs to describe Beloved’s presence .
  - B. that those who had “fallen in love with [Beloved]” couldn’t remember her.
  - C. repetition that the narrative was/is “not a story to pass on.”
  - D. statement of Beloved’s name as the last word, even as “nobody anywhere knew her name.”
  - E. the description of the lingering memory of Beloved as “just weather.”

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## Answers with Explanations

1. The sentence prior to the statement in question refers to the “headstone of her baby girl,” a description repeated again at the end of the paragraph as “the last of [her recognition of color]”—Sethe becomes “colorblind” as a result of the death of Beloved (B). Answer (E) is an example of her blindness to color but is not the cause for her shut-down; answers (C) and (D) occur in the years after she is described as such; Answer (A) is erroneous—it is Baby Suggs who expresses a desire for color.
2. Descriptors such as “too loud” or “wild” or “too strong” suggest an intangible weight that is too burdensome to be concealed by the literal movements or style of the characters (A), (B) and the furnishings of 124 (C); because the house and its residents are described as “so full of strong feeling,” it cannot be said that emptiness is racking Sethe, Paul D, and Denver (E). **Answer (D) explains why Sethe has battled with intense feelings, and Paul D. attacks his singing even though he is doing small household chores.**
3. The house is personified as being “full of strong feeling” and having “spite” well before Paul D’s arrival (E) as a result of a series of calamities befalling Sethe, including the absence of her children and her isolation in the house; while Howard and Buglar are absent, they are not dead (D), and there is no indication from this passage that Denver and/or Baby Suggs is angered by Sethe (B). While (C) is a likely explanation of the influence of Paul D’s emotions and behaviors, **answer (A) is the only logical response in this context to describe the author’s specific use of a literary element: the memories of the house are described as “crowded in on” Sethe—internally and externally.**
4. Previous paragraphs in this passage indicated that Sethe was “oblivious to the loss of anything at all,” including her memories of her departed children, colors, her dreams, and so on; however, this characterization is described as occurring before Paul D’s arrival. The quotation describes Sethe the morning after he comes to 124, thereby eliminating (B). Paul D. is described as breaking up and “making room” in the house, thereby relieving Sethe of the oppression of the house and allowing her to feel again—answers (D) and (E) are, therefore, incorrect. While Sethe does become aware of how “barren” her house is (A), **the quotation in the question refers to the “emotions sped to the surface,” with her renewed sense of feeling (C) illustrated by her awareness of sensations (“heat was hot”) and small details, such as Paul D. being a “singing man.”**

5. The predominance of the pronoun “he” and allusions to previously unmentioned ideas of the “prison farm” and “War” indicate that the narrative perspective has moved from Sethe’s internal viewpoint to Paul D’s (A), who surprises Sethe, whose “emotions sped to the surface with his company,” as a “singing man,” with songs as “flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding.” Analysis of the verse, which appear to be chain gang songs or field hollers, and the surrounding text reveals a focus on intense physical labor and violence (B); the lyrics also refer to suicide (“lay my head on the railroad line”) and are described as “having too much power for the little house chores”—suggesting that Paul D is encumbered with greater pains than he is letting on (D). **As the song is described as “nothing like what they sang at Sweet Home,” Morrison clearly establishes different, perhaps unspeakable or unknowable, experiences (E).**
6. As indicated by the directions, the setting is the Clearing; the passage occurs as Sethe, surrounded by Beloved and Denver, feels as though she is being choked and is reflecting on the touch of the people she has known throughout her life. While all of the options are alluded to in the paragraph, details in the passage make it easy to eliminate the options, including Schoolteacher (B), who never actually touched her; Denver (C), who does not physically embrace her mother and, in fact, serves to remind Sethe of the touch she is referring to; and Paul D. (D), who is only referred to in terms of removing the spectral presence in 124. While students would be right in identifying Beloved (A) as the actual source of Sethe’s physical discomfort, Sethe is not yet aware of the meaning of her touch; in fact, Beloved’s massaging after the choking reminds her of “something that now slipped her mind.” **This is revealed, both in the sentence that follows the one quoted in the question and later in the paragraph, to be Baby Suggs (E), whose touch Sethe could distinguish even “if she lay among all the hands of the world.”**
7. The answer to this question can be found by correlating details in the passage to an understanding of Sethe’s present state at the time of the passage. Though Paul D. and Sethe have a physical relationship, “wanted” here refers to Sethe’s desire to live and sustain a long-term relationship with Paul D.; her desire is not sexual in nature (B), nor is solely based on a need to take care of him (E)—her desire to cook for him arises out of the affirmation that she wants a relationship, not because of it. Sethe does express concerns early on that she is veering toward madness, and we do know she misses her children and baby, but loneliness (A) is not identified as a motivating factor for her decision to commit to Paul D.; indeed, her visit to the Clearing is described as a “commemoration” for Halle. The passage does signify Sethe’s immediate mistrust of the two girls’ “sister-like” relationship (D), there is no evidence in the paragraph following her reflections on Paul D. to suggest their behaviors encouraged her to fall in love with him. **Answer (C) works best: Sethe signifies their bond as “trust and rememory,” that “her story was bearable to tell because it was his as well.”**

8. The correct answer to this question details in the passage and the tone conveyed by Morrison’s stylistic elements. Though Sethe is described at peace (D) in the subsequent paragraph, she ends the paragraph in question describing herself as “cut out like a rabbit looking for its mother”—not quite at peace. While it’s not uncommon for authors to use self-questioning and short, staccato sentences to depict a protagonist incapable of voicing her identity (E), Sethe’s goals are more modestly stated in this paragraph: “all she wanted was to go on,” with a “glimpse of happiness.” While such a desire would suggest answer (C), recall that she, in question form, describes herself as “breaking up” and questions whether she had “already got through”—in other words, she wants perseverance, but Morrison’s prose would indicate otherwise. That leaves the question of whether this is insanity or merely doubt: her fragmented examples of relatives who did go insane do suggest madness (B); **however, Her fear of being happy (C), her self-questioning of her ability to cope with her circumstances, more logically aligns with the author’s consumed, fragmented rhetoric.**
9. The question indicates that physical imagery is repeated throughout this section; indeed, the sensation of touch is used to describe Beloved’s interaction with Sethe in the Clearing, Sethe’s memories of Baby Suggs, and Sethe’s meditation on her past and present relationship with Paul D. Answers (B) and (E) are not supported by these descriptions: Sethe “knew less, nothing, about” Beloved at this point; intimacy, not tension, would only come when Beloved’s identity is determined later—that early suspicion, as the text tells us, “dissipated” here. While the text does indicate Sethe’s concern for Denver’s mental wellbeing, students should know that their relationship is detached and impersonal: Denver’s “timid,” “secretive” characteristics are the opposite of Sethe’s more visceral, more emotional state. Thus, answer (D): Sethe’s anguish, as described in her concern over her potential madness, as well as in her reflections of the relationship between Denver and Beloved, is of the mental and emotional kind; touch inspires reflection, not longing. **Only Answer (A) identifies why Sethe is “full of touches”—the death of her infant, Baby Suggs, the “rememory” of her and Paul D’s time at Sweet Home all return to her when she tries to recall whose hands might have choked her.**
10. Remember that the passage is seen from Sethe’s point of view: she does not yet, as Paul D does now and Denver will soon, see Beloved as manipulative (E) or needy (C); in fact, Sethe finds her touch “knowing” and “heavenly.” As such, though Sethe has a hard time relating her touch to a prior experience, Morrison makes Beloved’s presence the very opposite of ghostly (D)—she physically affects Sethe. Answer (A), as indicated in the text, describes Denver, not Beloved. **Answer (B), however, invokes Morrison’s efforts to draw connections between Sethe’s fixation on her dead child and Beloved’s behavior: Beloved is described as “like new milk,” her behavior “like a two-year-old.”**

11. Both the third and fifth paragraphs in the passage reveal the best response to this question. Answer (B) cannot be correct because the passage indicates that the three of them are eating as a result of “gifts of food,” not Sethe’s cooking. At this point in the novel, answer (E) is no longer probable, especially as Sethe is described as a “teething child;” indeed, the perspective focuses on Denver, rather than Sethe. Answer (A) is antithetical to Sethe’s rationale for acting the way she has, for her efforts “came from true love.” Answer (D) is contradicted in the very last line of the passage, in which Beloved’s conscience is described as “uncomprehending everything except that Sethe was the woman who took her face away.” **Answer (C) is repeatedly invoked throughout the passage: Sethe was “trying to make up for the handsaw . . . trying to persuade Beloved...that what she had done was right.”**
12. This passage reveals that Denver has “come of age” and is ready to step out on her own. Her observations in the third paragraph on the psychological torment her mother is experiencing suggests she is now aware of the needs and motivations of others, particularly her mother (A). Moreover, her awareness of her mother’s suffering “shamed and infuriated her,” a clear shift in her feelings toward her mother (C) than her earlier distrust of Sethe suggested. Details in the passage reveal that Beloved and Sethe were largely passive, moving and doing little except watch over one another, while Denver took to “washing, cooking, forcing, cajoling her mother to eat a little now and then” (D). Multiple points in the passage convey Denver’s critical stance toward Beloved: she accuses Beloved of “eating up [Sethe’s] life . . . making her pay for it.” **Only [B] cannot be proven by the passage: while Denver “served them both,” she does so largely to keep the three of them going and nurse her mother; she herself is no longer under Beloved’s sway.**
13. Students should be able to eliminate responses based on the development of their relationship over the course of the novel. While Beloved’s childish, catty behavior does antagonize Sethe (A), Sethe herself dotes over Beloved and rushes to appease her when she expresses discomfort. Muted (C) does, in some way, describe Sethe’s diminution, but this passage clearly expresses Sethe’s desire to tell her story to Beloved; Beloved’s response to Sethe’s explanations, however, is “uncomprehending everything,” conveying a lack of understanding between the two (E). The first paragraph of the passage repeatedly reminds the reader that this is no longer an equal relationship, stating that as Beloved got bigger, Sethe shrank from view. **Indeed, the “thing” that was done was Beloved’s dominance over Sethe, Beloved continually taking Sethe’s physical and emotional strength (D).**

14. The descriptions in this question are placed after a string of sentences detailing the ways in which racism crippled oppressed individuals; however, Morrison alludes to such horrific acts not to document their veracity (E) but to convey how Sethe came to see death as superior alternative to such a world. Indeed, Sethe's desire to "persuade Beloved . . . that what she had done was right" suggests she actively sought to keep her children clean, even at the expense of herself (C); her children, after all, are her "best thing." While the graphic references do reflect the legacy of slavery (D), Sethe has "lived through it and gotten over it"—the paragraph clearly indicates her concern was shielding her children. As for Sethe's failure (A) to protect, it might be said the opposite occurred: in avoiding "undreamable dreams," she killed Beloved and kept Denver from the outside world for a decade. **Thus, Answer (B) makes the most sense here: the images of lynchings and mass murder invoke a horror and suffering too great a risk for Sethe to bear; her daughters would not experience what she had been forced to suffer.**
15. Sethe is the speaker of only one of these quotations, though several are about her; that said, identifying the speaker of the quotation is helpful to applying it to the circumstances of the passage. For instance, answer (C) involves Denver's warning Beloved of Sethe, but at this point the question isn't the amount of Sethe's love but her obsession, guilt, and/or reclamation of it; this also removes the plausibility of answer (B). Answer (E), spoken by Baby Suggs at the Clearing, is denied by Sethe in this passage: she wants to sacrifice, not preserve, her identity and freedom in order to protect her children. While love disables Sethe, the quotation in answer (D) is spoken by a townspeople who, to maintain her wits, denies the heavy emotional toll of love; Sethe has the exact opposite approach—an outpouring of emotion. **This is best captured by answer (A), a prescient statement by Paul D. of Sethe's lingering pain over Beloved's death and her inability to forgive herself.**
16. As no speaker is explicitly identified in this section, the reader needs to read closely to recognize allusions to previously described events and/or characterization. Though Halle is referenced ("Daddy is coming for us"), the reader should know that answer (E) is not possible given that the women have shut themselves out from the world; this reference does, however, indicate that Denver has to be one of the speakers, because she is the one character still holding out hope for Halle's return—this eliminates answer (B). While certain portions of the section do feature all three women (D), this is not one of them: the "she" and "her" referred to must be Sethe—given Denver's directives to "don't love her too much" and "don't fall asleep when she braids her hair." As she is spoken about in the third person, Sethe is not a part of the conversation (C). **The best answer is choice (A), which is confirmed by the opening line "We played in the creek," a reference to Denver's childhood pursuits imagining Beloved and references to Beloved's desire and resentment of Sethe.**

17. The refrain “You are mine” is repeated twice in the section; it also comes on the heels of individual monologues in which each woman refers to one of the others as “mine.” In both passages, it is unclear who is, in fact, speaking the line, making it difficult to distinguish one from another (E); the voices have blended and merged, suggesting unity rather than division (D). As a whole the section is the articulation of what Stamp Paid sensed from visiting the house (A)—but these are the internal, inside-the-house thoughts, and they are very clear to the reader. Beloved does express her desire for Sethe at multiple points in this section (C), but, as indicated above, the refrain occurs when all three characters are speaking as one. **Indeed, the fact the refrain is repeated three times, each absent any indicator of who is speaking, makes it clear that all seek to hold on to something tangible in the other (B).**
18. The question asks students to analyze the tone over the course of the passage, not just at the start. Near the start, Beloved is very desiring of Sethe (B), but it is Sethe who maintains a loving tone in response to Beloved (“I will never leave you again”); likewise, it is only Sethe who could be called nostalgic (E), given that she says, “I have found you again; you have come back to me.” Concerned (C) does not accurately reflect Beloved’s tone given that she talks largely in the first person and in directives: “I have your smile,” “you hurt me,” and so on. While Beloved expresses hurt—“You hurt me,” “You left me”—her need for Sethe’s love, to possess Sethe, is clearly more out of loneliness than a desire for revenge (A). **Thus, Answer (D) works best: from the questioning of “Why did you leave me who am you?” to the repetition of “she/you left me,” Beloved continually attempts to make Sethe accountable for her actions.**
19. The presentation of this section should remind students of a poem or song; as such, the answer can be determined by looking at both the form and content. (D) and (E) can be eliminated by evidence in the section: the refrain of “you are mine” and dialogue among the three women does not suggest that Beloved has been possessed by Sethe and Denver; furthermore, Denver and Sethe’s attempts to placate Beloved (e.g., “I will take care of you”) suggest a strong need to fulfill her wishes. While the short, unpunctuated lines suggest a cacophony of thought (A), the dialogue indicates that the women’s feelings for each other are not fragmented: they are intense and equally shared. Likewise, because we know all three are speaking to one another in an intimate fashion, especially right after each has had a separate interior monologue in the preceding sections, the reader can deduce that the thoughts indecipherable to Stamp Paid (B) are very clearly understood by one another. **Only answer (C) captures the purpose of the unattributed lines, the collective voice, and the merging of feelings—to suggest that, isolated from the rest of the world, the women of 124 have joined together in a single sense of being.**

20. Though it helps to recognize motifs that have been developed across the novel, details in the passage can distinguish the correct and incorrect answers. The braids (A) reflect Denver's distrust and fear of her mother's behavior; they are her warning to Beloved, not a sign of shared affection. Both the creek (B) and blood (D) refer to Denver's connection to Beloved: the creek is where Denver "played" with Beloved; the blood refers to Denver's being nursed by Sethe after Sethe kills Beloved. The clouds (E), which may allude to Beloved's earlier monologue on the experiences of the Middle Passage, are here described as "noisy and in the way"; they divide Beloved from Sethe. **The correct answer, milk (C), can be deduced from two key elements: the maternal, life-giving imagery of milk as the means by which a mother nourishes her child; and the ambiguity of the sentences "I have your milk" and "I brought your milk," which could very well refer to all three of the women.**
21. Given that the climax of the novel has already occurred, that the characters have moved on ("they forgot her"), and that the narrator has undertaken a reflective tone, the atmosphere of this last section is not "suspenseful" (A), nor is it "threatening; the passage is more correctly defined as a requiem or an epilogue. Given the desire expressed to "disremember" and the repetition of "This was not a story to pass on," the passage clearly indicates that the narrative is not nostalgic (C). While the details presented in this passage are particularly pessimistic, the author is not judgmental (D) of the peoples' desire to erase the memories; the description of loneliness at the start of the passage and the attempts by characters to forget evoke far more sympathy—or pity—than criticism. **Ultimately, the author's focus on details that reveal the individual suffering of her protagonists and the collective suffering of a culture suggests an overwhelmingly sad, saturnine (B) tangle of existence.**
22. Though the opening paragraph of the passage compares one kind of loneliness to that of a child being rocked, answer (C) merely identifies the literary technique rather than explain its use. Evidence from the passage and the structure of the text make clear that the townspeople sought to remove the memory of Beloved (B); likewise, the source of the loneliness described by Morrison stems not from the desire to forget but the pain of remembering and being (E). Were Beloved to be equated to one of the kinds of loneliness (D), it would make much more sense for her to be compared to the kind that "roams," as this is the one described as "alive" and "from a far-off place." **(A) is the best answer: Morrison sets up a comparison by using parallel syntax ("There is loneliness that..."), refers to the "rocked" loneliness as an "inside kind," and suggests that its opposite, a "spreading thing," has a ship-like motion, alluding to the Middle Passage and slavery.**
23. Note that the refrain has moved from past to present tense: the narrator is talking directly the audience. Morrison has intentionally selected "pass on" for its ambiguity; when substituted for other possible meanings, "pass on" moves from a desire to forget to a need to remember. Thus, paradoxically, the negative becomes the positive: the author does NOT want the reader to let go of the pain of the story, which (A), (B), and (E) express when substituted for "pass on." Pass on can also be used colloquially to refer to a death (D)—the idea that the author is imploring us not to let the story die is, too, a logical response, supported by passage details of whispers in photographs, the wind, and so on. **Thus, where before, when describing the townspeople, the narrator literally suggested not to share the story (C), now it is imperative that the reader does.**

24. “Disremembered” is the opposite of what Sethe refers to as “rememory”—the intentional act of returning to horrific or regretful past experiences. As such, it is the antithesis of facing past suffering (C); it also does not refer to an “exaggeration” (A), which is what the townspeople do before they put the Beloved incident behind them. (D) and (E) address ironic outcomes of attempts to forget Beloved; however, in context, **“disremembered” is defined in the text as a quick and deliberate forgetting (B).**
25. Morrison applies several layers of cosmic and meta-irony in order to expand the metaphoric power of Beloved to history, slavery, and memory, including by (A) using the present-tense when describing the effect of Beloved’s presence (e.g., “there is a loneliness that can be rocked”; her footprints come and go”); the subtle alteration of the refrain (C) “It was not a story to pass on” to “It is not a story to pass on,” thereby imploring that the meaning of the narrative continue to be meditated upon; and the use of “Beloved” as the final word of the novel, thereby ensuring her immortality. Answer (B) is stated in the text and is a surprising conclusion considering her impact on the residents of 124. **Answer (E) is not itself ironic but a symbol of the unconscious presence of Beloved—that though the visceral nature of tragedy has been buried, the feeling still lingers.**

# Beloved

## Part 1: Chapter 1

1. How does Morrison's personification of the house help reveal both plot and characterization?

*The novel's very first words inform us the house is "spiteful," leading to its abandonment by the children. There is a "ghost," which we know to be that of Sethe's deceased baby girl, and its status as the source of "outrage" suggests that the ghost is persecuting the remaining residents. There is a clear air of resignation: none of the residents has the mobility to leave the house, as all others would be filled with the same "grief." The status of the residents, based on the death of the child, appears to be that of outcasts. The house both creates and reflects their troubles.*

2. Explain the literal and figurative significance of "milk" and the "chokecherry tree" in this chapter.

*Both images refer to Sethe—the former, the breast milk with which she nourished her children; the latter the scars on her back. Details in the passage suggest that, for Sethe, milk represented the maternal bond to her children, the connection she shared with them that transcended the chains of slavery; her refrain of "They took my milk!" in reference to her being raped at the hands of slaveholders suggests that her personal freedom and personhood were intimately tied to her role as a caregiver. The tree scar, a symbol of the horrors of slavery, also conveys Sethe's "sorrow": the reader is told by Sethe that she has "never seen it and never will," suggesting an inability to confront her past.*

3. What is the nature of the relationship between Sethe and Denver?

*Denver's feelings toward Sethe are contradictory in nature, of both great antipathy and great need. On one hand, Denver is described as immature ("girlish") and in need of her mother. Sethe is her only companion, and Denver has not left the house in many years. She is described as "miserable" that Sethe looks away from her and toward Paul D. That said, Denver snaps at Sethe at Paul D.'s presence, clearly out of resentment of her isolation; details at the end of the chapter reveal that she and her sibling played games where they imagined killing Sethe. On the other, Sethe, for her part, is very protective of Denver, rushing to her when she breaks out crying, but there are suggestions that they do not have a loving relationship; her thoughts over the course of the chapter turn to Denver's deceased siblings, not Denver.*

## Part 1: Chapter 2

1. Explain the point of view used by Morrison in *Beloved*. What purpose does it seem to serve?

*The last passages of Chapter 1 and the progression of Chapter 2 reveal use of third-person omniscient—Morrison switches instantaneously from the thoughts of Denver, Sethe, and Paul D. The perspective reveals a tragic irony: though their suffering is private and unshared, each seems to be plagued by the same self-doubt and loneliness. This is especially the case for Paul D and Sethe, who in the wake of their coupling are revealed, based on Morrison’s ping-ponging back and forth between their thoughts, to share the same distrust and deep feelings toward their past and present relationship.*

## Part 1: Chapter 3

1. What, according to the text is *rememory*? How has this concept already defined and influenced the novel?

*Sethe describes rememory as “a picture floating around out there outside my head”—this may be seen as a sort of combination of memory and imagination, something that leaves a powerful, living imprint on the individual. In the context of this chapter, that rememory is Sweet Home, the plantation on which she and Paul D. were enslaved: the reader knows Sethe escaped from Sweet Home, but it is clear that “that place is real” even as she has (physically) moved on. Students should note that the novel has a considerable number of flashbacks at this very early point of the novel—of Sethe’s marriage, pregnancy, and escape; of the baby and Baby Suggs’ deaths; and of Paul D’s recollections of Sweet Home. Rememory, then, coalesces many of the early thematic strands of the novel: Sethe’s attempts to protect her children at the expense of her own personal identity; the singular and shared suffering of characters as well as protection from it; and the inability for the past—be it the ghost or Baby Suggs—to stay in the past.*

2. Why is this chapter—even though it recounts Sethe’s escape from Sweet Home—largely told from Denver’s perspective?

*There are several possible responses, the source of which should be derived from the last words of the chapter, in which Sethe notes her responsibility for “keeping [Denver] from the past that was still waiting for her,” which conveys her fierce protectionism and her belief in the inevitability of Denver’s suffering. Ironically, though, the chapter reveals Sethe has failed in both cases: it is Denver who is particularly enchanted with the story of her birth—even as she knows or cares little of Sethe’s slave experience—who recognizes the “plans” of the ghost, who seems particularly “worn out” by the loneliness of her isolation. In this sense, the “rememory” that Sethe speaks of, and from which she hopes to protect her daughter, has very much been realized by Denver: her imagination “[produces] its own hunger and its own food” and she “easily stepped into the told story” of her past.*

### **Part 1: Chapters 4 – 6**

1. In light of Beloved's appearance at the start of Chapter 5, what is the thematic significance of the carnival scene that immediately precedes it?

*Students should note the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas and images during the carnival scene: an array of roses, albeit ones that are dying; the image of shadows of Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. holding hands, even as the three are physically not; Sethe's cautious optimism toward establishing a new life with her self-conscious awareness. The carnival scene clearly foreshadows what is to come: both promise and tension, life and death (the roses). The Sethe who had felt assurance and love in the holding of hands, sees the carnival instantly dissolve when Beloved arrives; Chapter 5 ends with Denver's possessively caring for and protecting Beloved and Paul D. expressing skepticism toward the newcomer.*

2. What is ironic about Sethe's and Denver's initial reactions to Beloved's presence?

*Sethe, even after Beloved tells her name, draws an idle comparison to the gravestone of her dead child, and yet naively does not establish a connection between the two, even as physical scars suggest a clear connection; Denver, however, recognizes her instantly ("Denver, however, was shaking.") and instantly understands what has happened (telling Sethe that she was not sick, that their dog would not return). Sethe remains unaware of any significance, even as her first reaction. Meanwhile, Denver very quickly resorts to lying to maintain the secret for herself.*

3. After relating Sethe's fragmented memories of her mother in Chapter Six, the text notes that Sethe "was angry, but not certain at what." What is the likely reason for this anger?

*Sethe's early life is described as "painful and lost"; the "rememory" of her mother's clearly is. But the mother's absence is clearly palpable: Sethe longs for Baby Suggs, not only for the maternal companionship, the reader realizes, but to help her decipher the "message that was and had been there all along"—her memories of her mother.*

### **Part 1: Chapters 7 – 8**

1. What does Paul D mean when he describes his inner self as having a "tobacco tin buried in his chest where its heart used to be...its tin rusted shut," and what were the primary reasons for the development of this state of mind?

*The substitution of a beaten metal box for a heart suggests both an emotionless and detached figure, and one who has had his humanity taken from him. The "rusted" nature of the tin indicates Paul's inability and/or unwillingness to confront the experiences that reduced his ability to feel. From the text, we know this perspective to have been the result of a life of torment: of considerable physical suffering at Sweet Home and the prison farm; of years of wandering and hiding; and of constant reminders that he, in spite of his consciousness, was considered subhuman by others. Slavery has robbed him of his personhood.*

2. Explain the significance of the fifth paragraph from the end of the chapter, which starts with “Spores of bluefern,” and ends with “longer, perhaps, than the spore itself,” to the chapter as a whole.

*This particular paragraph, far more lyrical than any other passage in the chapter, is clearly meant to signify the birthing of Denver, which immediately precedes the passage. In that sense, while the chapter retells Sethe’s story, this particular description is symbolic of Denver’s birth: it represents the promise of freedom and potential and the uncertainty of her future—this is realized in the present-day Denver the reader is coming to know, who is needy and immature but also represents the full realization of Sethe’s devotion.*

### **Part 1: Chapters 9 – 11**

1. Compare and contrast Baby Suggs before and after Sethe’s arrival at 124 Bluestone.

*When Sethe arrives in Cincinnati, Baby is characterized as a community leader, priest, and mother: her house serves as a starting point on the Underground Railroad; she preaches a humanist ideology to other freed slaves in the Clearing; and she houses Sethe’s children. After the death of Beloved, Baby Suggs “believed she had lied”: she retreats to her bed, shuts out the outside world, and enters a deep depression as a result of the suffering she has experienced and witnessed.*

2. What, according to the chapter, has caused 124 Bluestone to have a “presence full of spite”?

*Chapter 9 reveals the source of the spite to be all of the members of 124. The vengeful baby is the most prominent source of the ominous mood, but the house is also filled with the shared pain, suffering, and isolation of Baby Suggs and Sethe; this insular behavior, along with the spectral presence, cause Sethe’s sons to “grow furious at the company of the women in the house.” This is further exacerbated by Denver’s fear and resentment of her mother.*

3. How does Paul D’s experience at the prison camp transform him?

*Chapter 10 traces Paul D’s progression from his being shipped from Sweet Home, where he has come to the conclusion that he has been reduced to something less valuable than an animal, to the 86 days he spends on a chain gang in Georgia, where he moves from uncontrollable shaking and near-madness to a disaffected state. Living in a “grave they called quarters,” he has his humanity beaten out of him, to such a degree that when he successfully escapes the prison, he is unable to choose or act upon his freedom. By the time he does make it north, after months of degrading sneaking and hiking, he thoroughly locks away his slave experiences and attempts to forget the past.*

4. What is the symbolic significance of turtles in this portion of the text?

*At the end of Chapter 9, Beloved observes a pair of turtles copulating; at the end of Chapter 11, when Beloved sexually assaults Paul D., she is described as turning “her head over her shoulder the way the turtles had.” Thus, the initial scene serves to foreshadow Beloved’s means by which to remove Paul D., her method not just sex but attacking the “tin box” with which he has kept his emotions hidden. The turtle scene, with the animals attempting to overcome the “gravity of their shields” in order to touch heads, in large part symbolizes both the emotional desires of all of the characters to be loved but also the walls they each have built too—thus, each is “clashing, countered, and mocked” the way the turtles are when attempting intimacy. However, Beloved’s presence has clearly broken these shells, forcing out their “red hearts.”*

5. Morrison ends Chapter 11 with Beloved’s seduction of Paul D. and his screams of “red heart.” How is this phrase symbolic of Paul D’s present emotional state?

*Paul D.—and Sethe as well—have largely refused to feel and to address the suffering they experienced when they were enslaved; Paul D., in fact, refers to his heart as a tobacco tin “rusted shut.” Thus, the forced sexual encounter with Beloved, as well as the growing detachment from Sethe, compromises his armor, forcing him once again to experience the pain, desire, and shame he has tried to hide. Students may see this as a positive—that is, he has reinstigated a connection to his humanity—or as a sign of his dissolution.*

### **Part 1: Chapters 12 – 14**

1. What is the significance of Denver’s retreating so often to the secret field behind the house?

*Friendless, and ignored by her mother, Denver is an isolated and utterly lonely child. The field behind the house is a place where Denver physically separates herself from the other, just as she feels she is always emotionally and psychologically separated from them. The field, then, typifies her loneliness.*

2. Why are learning to read and write so important to Denver?

*In addition to the obvious desire for literacy, reading and writing come to represent for Denver a way to reach out to others beyond the residents of her house. Reading and writing exemplify the connection to another human soul that Denver longs for.*

3. What is Denver’s “original hunger”?

*The hunger is nothing less than a desire to live, to be cared about, and to feel connections to others. “Original” marks her loneliness prior to Beloved’s arrival, something she cannot “go back” to because the newcomer has created a new hunger for her: companionship.*

## Part 1: Chapters 15 – 18

1. The description of Sethe's murder of Beloved is told over the course of three chapters and from three different perspectives. From whose perspective is each chapter told, and what is each character's response to Sethe's killing her child?
  - *Schoolteacher—along with the other white characters present—believes that Sethe has acted subhumanly.*
  - *Stamp Paid believes that Sethe has acted wrongly, but her action was nonetheless understandable.*
  - *Sethe herself believes she made a righteous sacrifice.*
2. What might be the author's purpose for presenting this single act from multiple viewpoints?

*The narrative progresses from those who least understand Sethe to, finally, her own internal viewpoint. By employing various perspectives, the author creates ambiguity and causes the reader to hesitate before outright condemning Sethe. Rather than seeing the act in concrete terms of right and wrong, moral and immoral, the reader is forced to deal uncertainly with an act that, while horrible, is not so easy to condemn.*

3. What does Paul D. mean when he thinks that “more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed”?

*Like much of the surrounding community, Paul D. is most resentful of Sethe's self-righteousness and lack of regret for killing her child. Sethe's actions and attitudes are in stark contrast to Paul D's belief to “love small”: her love and protection for her children is overwhelming, to the degree that she would kill them before they would be harmed by others. Paul D. is both horrified by and uncomprehending of such love.*

## Part 2: Chapter 1

1. How does what Stamp Paid hears outside of 124 Bluestone differ from what is taking place inside of the house?

*Stamp Paid hears a “roaring” of voices when he attempts to enter 124 Bluestone, thereby repelling him. He and the reader discern that these voices reflect the internal chaos and madness experienced by African Americans as a result of intense racism: feelings of anger, guilt, loss, sadness. On the other hand, inside the house things have grown particularly quiet with Paul D.'s departure, and the girls have bonded intimately at the expense of the outside world; the noise Paul D. hears is not heard inside. These voices “surround the house,” but the three women do not hear them.*

2. How does guilt shape how Sethe and Stamp Paid are characterized in this chapter?

*The chapter deals with the fallout of Paul D's departure from 124 and both Stamp Paid's subsequent regret and Sethe's turn inward as a result of these actions. For Stamp Paid, guilt persists for his behavior toward Baby Suggs after Sethe murders her child, for his decision to tell Paul D., for the community's isolation of Sethe. In Sethe's case, the guilt is multifaceted—not only just for killing Beloved, but for Baby Suggs and Denver as well—but it is channeled through a desire to explain herself and receive absolution from her murdered child; her response, unlike Stamp Paid, is to retreat further into herself, evidenced by her locking of the door, and the outside world at the end of the chapter.*

## **Part 2: Chapters 2 – 5**

1. Who is speaking in each of these chapters? To whom?

*Each chapter of this sequence is presented as an internal monologue, the “unspeakable thoughts unspoken” noted at the end of the previous chapter. The order of reflection is Sethe, Denver, and Beloved, with all three speaking to one another in the final sequence.*

2. How does milk function as a symbol throughout this sequence?

*Milk, specifically the breast milk a mother would nurse a child with, represents the maternal love and bond Sethe has with her children. It also represents to Sethe her freedom, her ability to raise her children away from slavery. However, as she is both forced to nurse white children and is raped by Schoolteacher's nephews, the absence of her milk also represents the lasting pain and suffering she experienced as a result of slavery.*

3. Why does Morrison have all three women invoke the refrain “she is mine”?

*Beloved, Denver, and Sethe are each attempting to possess another in order to make themselves whole again: for Sethe, it is the family and free life she only briefly experienced before the murder; for Denver, the love and companionship she has lacked; and Beloved, the need for vengeance over Sethe. For each, the others are an extension of herself: “I am not separate from her...her face is my own,” Beloved says in her soliloquy. This is not ownership as Sethe experienced it as a slave, but a freedom to love fully and without cessation.*

4. What does Beloved's monologue describe? What is the "hot thing"? How does this description connect to Sethe?

*Images in Beloved's scattered monologue convey the experiences of slaves as they were transported from Africa to America via the Middle Passage—this includes the squalid conditions, the overwhelming death, and the inhumane horrors experienced by those who survived the trip. In essence, the chapter presents Beloved as both the survivor of the Middle Passage and Sethe's daughter. In this sense, the "hot thing" may represent the sensation of pain and ensuing death, or it may be a representation of Beloved's needy love for Sethe and the desire for her mother's milk.*

5. Explain the stylistic elements of Beloved's monologue and Morrison's purpose in constructing the chapter this way.

*The chapter contains no punctuation; ideas are distinguished by gaps and spaces on the page. The chapter is entirely in present tense; only the first-person pronoun is capitalized. The jerkiness and lack of specific narration suggest, in part, an inability to fully express the horrors experienced by those forced into the transatlantic slave trade. It also expresses, through use of "crouching" imagery and incoherent thinking, the abandonment felt by a child. The chapter is intentionally incoherent, because none of the characters in the novel—whether Sethe or the black community as a whole—knows how to join these fragments or overcome the wounds of their experiences.*

## **Part 2: Chapters 6 & 7**

1. Why, at this point in the novel, does Morrison choose to focus on Paul D.'s failure to escape Sweet Home?

*Paul D. notes that "starting with the plan, everything had [gone wrong]": it is the failure to escape slavery that sets in motion a series of events—including his experiences on the prison farm and his failures with Sethe—that increasingly harm his personhood. Prior to the failure, life at Sweet Home under the Garners presents at least the illusion of individuality and respect; when, however, he learns his worth, and when he suffers physically as a result of the prison farm and the bit, he suffers one dehumanizing infliction after another. These memories helped build the "tobacco tin" he repeatedly refers to his heart as, but Sethe and Beloved have forced him to face what has broken him.*

2. What does Paul D's designation of Beloved as "reminding me of something...something, look like, I'm supposed to remember" suggest about her symbolic role in the novel?

*Paul D. had never encountered Beloved physically prior to her arrival at 124 Bluestone, so it is not a specific memory that Beloved represents but that of a physical embodiment of the past: the slave experience, the details of which are noted at the end of Chapter 7 of this Part ("fired feet, laughing dead men...neck jewelry...Halle in the butter..."). It is Beloved that forces him—and Sethe—to return to a suppressed past that he has not fully dealt with or can fully understand.*

### **Part 3: Chapter 1**

1. How have Beloved's, Sethe's, and Denver's roles changed in the months following their retreat from the outside world?

*Early in this chapter, Denver notes that the “players were altered.” Indeed, Sethe becomes more and more like a “teething child,” while Beloved, apparently pregnant, chides her and bosses her around. Denver, in large part out of necessity, has matured significantly, leaving the house, seeking employment, and ultimately making the connection with the community that drives Beloved out of the house.*

2. What is ironic about the community's confrontation with Beloved at the end of the chapter?

*The townspeople go to 124 Bluestone to exorcise the house of the ghost but instead have to subdue Sethe, who mistakes Bodwin for Schoolteacher and attempts to kill him; the community prevents Sethe's retribution, saving her from destruction, but they do not actually confront Beloved—some aren't even sure they see her. It should be noted that the last paragraph is told from Beloved's perspective, and she has a curious perspective on the events, one which includes several references (e.g., “hill,” “man without skin”) to her earlier monologue. Beloved disappears on her own accord, though the townspeople, having envisioned their former selves at 124, are an incoherent “pile.”*

### **Part 3: Chapters 2 – 3**

1. How has Paul D.'s narrative changed from earlier chapters?

*Paul D. shares the remaining fragments of his enslavement during the Civil War and his freedom and wanderings thereafter; he has, to a certain degree, filled in the holes in his life and can move forward, with Sethe, toward “some kind of tomorrow.” The recognition of his own humanity, coupled with the tenderness shown by Sethe on Sweet Home when he was punished, allows him to “put his story next to hers.”*

2. In what ways is the novel's ending ambiguous?

*The last line of dialogue from a character prior to the coda is Sethe: “Me? Me?” she asks, with no description of her tone of voice. This yields multiple possible interpretations: it could be a denial or negation of self (Beloved, now gone, being her “best thing”), a striving to reconnect with her individuality, or a critique of her own behaviors and attitudes. It is impossible to say: Sethe, laying in bed when Paul D arrives, seems to be physically or mentally ill, and her spirit is defeated in a similar way to Baby Suggs' after the murder of Sethe's child. Paul D's presence, his desire to take care of her, however, may promise rebirth.*

# Beloved

## Part 1: Chapter 1

1. How does Morrison's personification of the house help reveal both plot and characterization?

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2. Explain the literal and figurative significance of "milk" and the "chokecherry tree" in this chapter.

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3. What is the nature of the relationship between Sethe and Denver?

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## Part 1: Chapter 2

1. Explain the point of view used by Morrison in *Beloved*. What purpose does it seem to serve?

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**Part 1: Chapter 3**

1. What, according to the text is *rememory*? How has this concept already defined and influenced the novel?

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2. Why is this chapter—even though it recounts Sethe’s escape from Sweet Home—largely told from Denver’s perspective?

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**Part 1: Chapters 4 – 6**

1. In light of Beloved’s appearance at the start of Chapter 5, what is the thematic significance of the carnival scene that immediately precedes it?

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2. What is ironic about Sethe’s and Denver’s initial reactions to Beloved’s presence?

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3. After relating Sethe’s fragmented memories of her mother in Chapter Six, the text notes that Sethe “was angry, but not certain at what.” What is the likely reason for this anger?

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**Part 1: Chapters 9 – 11**

1. Compare and contrast Baby Suggs before and after Sethe's arrival at 124 Bluestone.

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2. What, according to the chapter, has caused 124 Bluestone to have a "presence full of spite"?

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3. How does Paul D's experience at the prison camp transform him?

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4. What is the symbolic significance of turtles in this portion of the text?

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5. Morrison ends Chapter 11 with Beloved's seduction of Paul D. and his screams of "red heart." How is this phrase symbolic of Paul D's present emotional state?

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**Part 1: Chapters 12 – 14**

1. What is the significance of Denver's retreating so often to the secret field behind the house?

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2. Why are learning to read and write so important to Denver?

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3. What is Denver's "original hunger"?

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**Part 1: Chapters 15 – 18**

1. The description of Sethe's murder of Beloved is told over the course of three chapters and from three different perspectives. From whose perspective is each chapter told, and what is each character's response to Sethe's killing her child?

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2. What might be the author's purpose for presenting this single act from multiple viewpoints?

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3. What does Paul D. mean when he thinks that "more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed"?

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**Part 2: Chapter 1**

1. How does what Stamp Paid hears outside of 124 Bluestone differ from what is taking place inside of the house?

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2. In what ways is the novel's ending ambiguous?

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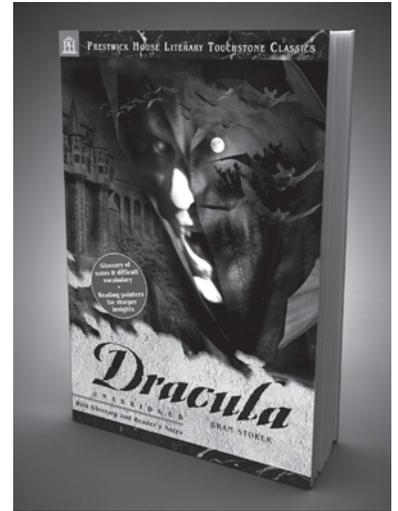
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