

# Assignment 1: Toni Morrison Notes and Annotations



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ **Language and Literature**

## **Assignment 2 Notes and Annotations An Introduction to Toni Morrison**

**We are learning to** understand Toni Morrison's background by **listening to a short video**, reading, and annotating about her contributions to language and literature.

**What I am looking for:**

**Part I: Watch** video: "Remembering Toni Morrison. **Record** 8 facts about Toni Morrison

**Part II: Read/Annotate** "The Making of Toni Morrison" See annotation guide

**Part I: Toni Morrison's Legacy, Power, and Control** [Remembering Toni Morrison, An Iconic American Author](#)

Take  
Notes as  
you listen to  
[Intro video](#)

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Write a 25-30 word summary: Why was Toni Morrison a **legendary** writer?

## Part II: Annotations

### What I am looking for:

As you read, annotate the following using the corresponding colors

- **Circle** and **define** at least 10 **unfamiliar words** (any color)
- Underline **facts** about Morrison's career in **RED**
- **Concepts**: Culture, Creativity, and Communication (highlight in blue)
- **Global Issues** (highlight 10 global issues in green)
- **Allusions** (highlight 5 references to other writers) highlight in yellow

## *The Making of Toni Morrison*

*\*This reading has been modified and adapted by Claude AI*

### *Birth and family history*



Toni Morrison is the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. She is best known for her 11 novels focusing on intimate relationships, especially between men and women. These stories are set against the backdrop of African American culture.

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, on February 18, 1931. She was the second of four children born to Ramah and George Wofford. Her mother's parents, Ardelia and John Solomon Willis, had left Greenville, Alabama, around 1910 after they lost their farm because of debts that they could not repay.

Morrison's father's family left Georgia and moved north to escape sharecropping (a system of farming in which a farmer works on someone else's land and pays the owner a share of the crop) and violence against African Americans in the South. Both families settled in the steel-mill town of Lorain on Lake Erie. Morrison grew up during the Great Depression in the 1930s, a time of severe economic hardship. Her father supported the family by working three jobs for seventeen years.

### *Folklore, music, and history*

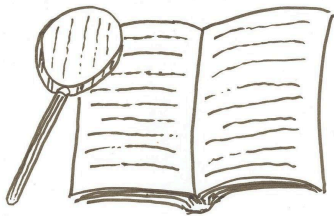
Morrison's childhood was filled with African American folklore, music, rituals, and myths. Her family was, as Morrison says, "intimate with the supernatural" and frequently used visions and signs to predict the future. Morrison sees her writing functioning much like storytelling did in the past. It reminds people about their heritage and shows them their place in the community. She has said that she uses her childhood memories to help her start writing. Her real-life world, therefore, is often included in her novels. Once Morrison learned how to read, it became one of the things in life that she loved spending time doing. When she was in high school, she began to read the works of great authors such as Jane Austen (1775–1817), Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), and the nineteenth-century French writer Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880). Morrison was impressed by the specific way these writers portrayed aspects that they were familiar with. Their talents motivated her to write in such a way about the concepts she was most familiar with, particularly her African American culture.



**Howard University and Teaching Career** In 1949 Morrison went to Howard University in Washington, D.C., to study English. She changed her name to Toni because people at Howard had trouble pronouncing the name Chloe. While at Howard she was a member of the Howard University Players, a theater company that presented plays about the lives of African American people. Morrison received her bachelor of arts degree in English from Howard in 1953. After she received her master's degree in English from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, in 1955, she taught for two years at Texas Southern University in Houston. Then she returned to Howard University to teach.

**Marriage, family, and a career as an editor** While at Howard, Toni met Harold Morrison, a young architect from Jamaica who also taught at the university. The couple married in 1958 and had two sons, Harold (also known as Ford) and Slade, before divorcing in 1964. Then Morrison went to Syracuse, New York, and began working as an editor for a Random House company. She had two small children and free time in the evenings. This environment helped her turn her attention to writing novels.

In 1968 Morrison moved to New York City, where she continued working as an editor for Random House. She eventually became a senior editor and was the only African American woman to have that job in the company. While there she helped to publish books by African American writers, including Toni Cade Bambara (1939–1995), Gayl Jones (1949–), and June Jordan (1936–). She also taught part-time, lectured across the country, and wrote many novels.



### **Morrison's Writing Style**

Morrison is celebrated for writing immersive prose that engages readers' senses, bringing scenes and characters to vivid life. Many readers and critics highlight her attention to sound, smell, taste, and tactile sensations within her lyrical descriptions of people and places. They note her ability to move fluidly between intimately focused sensory moments and broad symbolic meaning.

For instance, sources point to passages in novels like "Beloved" that viscerally capture the felt experience of slavery through brutal scenes where sensory detail plays a key role in realizing Morrison's haunting vision. The texture and intimacy of her language immerses readers within characters' subjective realities. Sensory descriptions in her writing unfold with remarkable precision and resonance. Many readers find the sensual immediacy of her prose enables empathy and compounds the books' emotional weight.

Morrison's dense layering of sensory language, from smells that waft through scenes to the precise feel of weathered wood, produces an immersive fictional dreamscape. She utilizes precise sensory imagery to unlock deeper philosophical meaning.

### **"Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations"**

The title "Mouth Full of Blood" originates from an essay where Morrison argues for language that accurately depicts the harsh realities of violence rather than euphemisms that obscure suffering. This collection of speeches and essays presents Morrison's thoughts on society, political power, literary power, and the role of the artist in society. The collection of writings brings together

Overall the collection provides a compelling overview of Toni Morrison's perspectives on literature, culture, and society through both fiction and nonfiction writings produced over her esteemed career of speaking truth and giving voice to unheard narratives.

Several essays offer literary analysis and commentary related to her craft as a novelist and the purpose of writing, such as examinations of other African American authors. Additional pieces contain stirring arguments about issues of race, justice, and the impact of language and narratives. Topics explored range from remembrance of the victims of 9/11 to critiques of dehumanizing political rhetoric to reflections on humanity's capacity for both good and evil. Recurring themes involve the duties of citizenship and the complex ethics of inclusion and diversity.

Through her speeches and essays, Morrison championed women's empowerment and highlighted the struggles faced by African American women. She fearlessly critiqued the intersectionality of race and gender, shedding light on the double marginalization experienced by black women. Her essays were an inspiration for many, encouraging women to find their voices and assert their agency against oppressive structures.

Morrison delved into the significance of historical memory and its role in the process of collective healing. She questioned the erasure of painful histories and underscored the necessity of acknowledging past atrocities to move towards reconciliation and understanding. Her essays and speeches became a call for societies to confront their past and actively engage in healing processes.

In her essays, Morrison tackled the harsh realities of socioeconomic disparities and class struggles. She explored the consequences of poverty and the challenges faced by marginalized communities in attaining social and economic mobility. Morrison's keen observations urged readers to contemplate the complexities of privilege and the urgent need for equity and social justice. Morrison acutely examined the impact of colonization on different societies, cultures, and identities, encouraging readers to recognize the interconnectedness of global history and its enduring influence on contemporary issues.

Toni Morrison's essays and speeches exemplify her unwavering dedication to addressing pressing global issues through the powerful medium of literature. Through her exploration of racial injustice, gender inequality, and global consequences of colonialism, Morrison urged readers to confront uncomfortable truths, embrace diversity, and strive for a more just and equitable world. Her essays remain an enduring legacy, inspiring future generations to continue engaging with the complexities of the human experience and the pursuit of social justice on a global scale.

Source: "Toni Morrison Biography." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, [www.notablebiographies.com/Mo-Ni/Morrison-Toni.html](http://www.notablebiographies.com/Mo-Ni/Morrison-Toni.html).

### Class Discussion Questions

1. Morrison's narratives often engage multiple senses. Can you share an example from her writing that struck you for its vivid, sensory-rich descriptions?
- 2.. How does the artistic/ stylistic quality of Morrison's writing contribute to the overall impact of her narratives?
3. Literature, like art, often explores universal themes and global issues. What are some of the issues or themes Morrison explores in her writing and how do these resonate with a diverse audience?
4. How does Morrison use imagery and symbolism to enhance the depth of her stories? Can you think of a particularly powerful symbol from a work of literature you have read?
5. In what ways does Morrison use her essays and speeches as social commentary? Discuss how she addresses themes such as racism, gender inequality, and the impact of history.
6. Discuss how Morrison's craftsmanship and meticulous use of language contribute to the aesthetic appeal of her writing.

**Task Description/Objective** We are learning to discuss our knowledge and understanding of ideas that are conveyed in the text so that we can communicate our interpretation of global issues and concepts.

	Exemplary A	Effective B	Minimal C	Unsatisfactory D
Criterion A: Knowledge Understanding and Interpretation	<p><b>Knowledge/Interpretation</b> There is exemplary knowledge of the text and a persuasive interpretation of its implications in relation to a global issue or concept</p> <p><b>Understanding:</b> There is an exceptional understanding of ideas or issues; references to parts of the text are explicit and clear. ⇒ Contributes to class activities by offering quality ideas ⇒ Actively engages others in class discussions ⇒ Constructively challenges the accuracy and relevance of statements made. ⇒ Effectively identifies and summarizes the main concepts or issues. ⇒ Communicates several times throughout the discussion ⇒ Written reflection has been completed</p>	<p><b>Knowledge/Interpretation</b> There is an effective knowledge of the texts and an adequate interpretation of its implications in relation to a global issue or concept</p> <p><b>Understanding:</b> There is an adequate understanding of the ideas and issues; references to parts of the text are somewhat clear  ⇒ Contributes to class activities by offering quality ideas ⇒ May engage other classmates in the discussion ⇒ Constructively challenges the accuracy and relevance of statements made ⇒ Effectively identifies and summarizes the main concepts or issues. ⇒ Communicates a few times throughout the discussion ⇒ Written reflection has been completed</p>	<p><b>Knowledge/Interpretation</b> There is a minimal knowledge of the text, its implications in relation to a global issue or concept.</p> <p><b>Understanding:</b> Somewhat contributes to the discussion, but there is minimal understanding of issues or concepts as they relate to text.  ⇒ Does not engage others in class discussions ⇒ Does not summarize main concepts or issues. ⇒ Minimally communicates throughout the discussion  ⇒ Written reflection is somewhat complete</p>	<p><b>Knowledge/Interpretation</b> Student is “present” and only takes notes on what other students are saying.</p> <p><b>Understanding:</b> There is a lack of understanding of issues and references to the text are unclear  ⇒ Fails to contribute to class discussion ⇒ Demonstrates little understanding of main points or ⇒ Only communicates through written reflection and does not verbally express ideas.</p>

