

What do you get out of the book? Connect to real life or not

AP Literature and Composition

Beloved – Discussion Questions

Use the following questions to prompt your thinking, begin a discussion

1. The address. What does it represent – make a biblical connection if possible?

Psalm 124:

If the LORD had not been on our side—

let Israel say—

if the LORD had not been on our side

when people attacked us,

they would have swallowed us alive

when their anger flared against us;

the flood would have engulfed us,

the torrent would have swept over us,

the raging waters

would have swept us away.

Praise be to the LORD,

who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird

from the fowler's snare;

the snare has been broken,

and we have escaped.

Our help is in the name of the LORD,

the Maker of heaven and earth.

It represents that story of how Sethe and her kids managed to escape and be freed. They couldn't have done it without help (if the Lord had not been by our side), and shows the things Sethe went through to make a good, free life for her children. Morrison chose this verse because it represents the struggles Sethe endured and how she made it.

2. Examine the family relationships. Mother/children. Husbands/wives. Father/children. What is Morrison attempting to illustrate?

She's attempting to illustrate that even though they're free that they aren't really free of their memories. Sethe and Denver's relationship is kind of strained. This is due to the fact that Sethe killed one of her kids and Denver is afraid that she'll do the same to her. Sethe and Paul D.'s relationship is fine until Paul D. gets restless staying at 124 and is told what Sethe did to her child when they were caught. After he leaves Sethe and Beloved's relation gets better towards the end, but causes Denver to be left out and forced to find work. I don't really feel like the kids had a dad. Denver didn't like Paul D. because he took up most of Sethe's time and Halle just disappeared into thin air.

3. In this section, what glimpses into the slave life do we get?

This part is where we get the first flashback of Sweet Home which begins when Paul D. arrives at their house. The original owner was nice and treated the slaves well. But when he died it went to his brother-in-law and the plantation became hell. Sethe also tells of how she got her scars and who stole her milk after she gave birth to her third child.

4. Discuss the role of memory/memories in Part 1. What do people forget? WANT to forget? Cannot forget?

Sethe is trying to forget what she had to do to make it to where she is today. She wants to forget that. Unfortunately she can't seem to forget that and neither can Denver forget what she did to her other daughter. She wants to forget why her sons ran away. She wants to forget what happened to her to cause the "tree" on her back because the memories are so painful. Sethe, in this part of the story, doesn't really remember much about her two sons that fled the house after they encountered the ghost.

5. Reread the scene that results in the death of Sethe's third child. Besides feeling disgust in the death, what does the scene reveal about Slavery?

It reveals that Sethe believes that slavery is worse than anything imaginable. It was so horrible that she would kill her children so they wouldn't have to go through the same awful, painful, degradable things that she did. I concluded that Sethe thought she was doing the right thing and didn't feel any remorse until she realized that her daughter could've lived a slave free life just like the rest of her children.

6. "Chapters" 20-23 are connected through a new narrative style. What is that style? What does each narrator add to this story? Infer why Morrison does this.

This is a style called a stream of consciousness and it shows Sethe's internal thoughts. I thought this was something that made the story have even more layers than it already does. Morrison does this to show what Sethe is thinking about Beloved and going through her thinking as to how she figured out that Beloved is her daughter.

7. How is Beloved changing Sethe and Denver's life? How have the roles changed?

At first Sethe and Denver were excited to have Beloved there. Beloved was always asking about Sethe's life and wanting her to tell her stories about her slave life and how she got free. Beloved even met Sethe everyday after work on their porch to begin with. Then she

started to walk towards her and meet her part way. But when Sethe realizes that Beloved is the reincarnated version of the daughter she killed, things get better for Sethe and worse for Denver. Before, Denver was good friends with Beloved and they were always doing things together but after Sethe realizes who Beloved is Denver starts to get ignored. Sethe is spending all of her money and time with/on Beloved to make up for the fact that she killed her. She wanted to show Beloved that she cared about her and because of that Sethe lost her job, all of their money, and spent it all of expensive stuff. Her and Denver don't do anything together anymore and she's forced to find a job of her own to support her family.

8. In the end, how has Beloved changed Sethe, Denver and Paul D.'s understanding and acceptance of the past?

I think Beloved showed Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. that they didn't need Beloved's acceptance to be happy. Sethe had a hard time letting go of the fact that Beloved is trying to get revenge for her killing her and doesn't realize why Sethe did what she did. Beloved also forced Sethe and Paul D. to look into their past. Because of something Beloved said, it forced Sethe and Paul D. to talk about what happened to Halle and how he witnessed schoolteacher's nephews "milking" Sethe and how he didn't do anything about it. This had such an effect on him that it caused him to go insane.

9. Can you identify a THEME for the novel – one encompassing idea that explains the novel's purpose?

Love is the main theme I find in the novel. While it's not a straightforward theme I feel that it's the most important and is in the whole story. When Sethe killed her daughter and tried to kill her other kids, she did it out of love for them. She didn't want them to grow up in slavery like she did. Then when Denver's older she might be afraid of her mom, but she stills loves her. Paul D., I believe, loves Sethe and only left because he couldn't deal with what Sethe did. Beloved and Sethe have a strange relationship. They love each other and when Sethe realizes she's her daughter, the bond just grows to something unhealthy but is still based on love. Sethe and Denver loved each other and acted like siblings. And everyone loved Baby Suggs. This seems like the most common theme to me and I know it's throughout the whole story.

10. Is this a ghost story or a story of madness? Something else?

I think this story has a little bit of both and something else. Obviously it is a ghost story with the presence of Beloved and the spirit in the beginning that Paul D. scared off, but I think this could also come off a slightly religious. Mainly because some religions don't believe in reincarnation, while some do. The madness in the story I think is all throughout but isn't as obvious. When Sethe killed her daughter, I think it had to be partly because Sethe is slightly off. I don't think anyone, especially a mom could kill a little girl because she doesn't want her to go back to slavery.

Your Questions?