

12 LC

Lesson 27

Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” by A. Leslie Harris (from “In *Song of Solomon* Toni Morrison has faced the tale-spinner’s recurring problem” to “carry much of the burden of the myth”), in which A. Leslie Harris presents the concept of mythology as a central structural support for *Song of Solomon*. Students participate in a discussion of Milkman’s journey in the context of other mythical figures before independently exploring how the literary criticism relates to prior analysis of existing unanswered questions. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: Choose a sentence from pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” and analyze how the sentence relates to the novel’s characters, central ideas, or structure.

For homework, students read pages 71-73 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” and annotate for how the article relates to their 12 LC Second Interim Assessment responses. Also, students conduct a brief search into the flight of Daedalus and Icarus.

Standards

| Assessed Standard(s) | |
|-----------------------|---|
| CCRA.R.9 | Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. |
| RI.11-12.1 | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. |
| Addressed Standard(s) | |
| W.1112.9.a, b | <p>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>a. Apply <i>grades 11-12 Reading standards</i> to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).</p> <p>b. Apply <i>grades 11-12 Reading standards</i> to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy [e.g., The Federalist, presidential addresses]”).</p> |
| L.11-12.4.a, b | <p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 11-12 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p> <p>b. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., <i>conceive</i>, <i>conception</i>, <i>conceivable</i>).</p> |

Assessment

File: 12 LC Lesson 27 Date: 6/30/15 Classroom Use: Starting 9/2015

© 2015 Public Consulting Group. This work is licensed under a

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License

Assessment(s)

Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students respond to the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.

- Choose a sentence from pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” and analyze how the sentence relates to the novel’s characters, central ideas, or structure.

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Identify a sentence from pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (e.g., “If we follow Morrison’s lead and concentrate on the growth of Macon Dead, known as Milkman because his mother nursed him too long, we find that her novel is cohesive, following the clear pattern of birth and youth, alienation, quest, confrontation, and reintegration common to mythic heroes as disparate as Moses, Achilles, and Beowulf.” (Harris, p. 70)).
- Analyze how this sentence relates to the novel’s characters, central ideas, or structure (e.g., In this sentence, Harris presents Milkman’s story as a hero’s journey from “birth and youth, alienation, quest, confrontation, and reintegration” (Harris, p. 70). As Milkman’s character develops over the course of the text, he passes through each stage of the hero’s journey. Throughout his youth and young adulthood, Milkman is alienated from all those around him as evidenced by Guitar’s comment, “You don’t live nowhere. Not Not Doctor Street or Southside” (Morrison, p. 103). Milkman embarks on his quest, a journey that he wanted to do on his own with “no input from anybody” (Morrison, p. 220), which further emphasizes his heroic alienation. Finally, Milkman is “reintegrate[ed]” (Harris, p. 70) with his community of ancestors by deciphering the song that tells the history of his family, which makes him “as eager and happy as he had ever been in his life” (Morrison, p. 304). Throughout the novel, Morrison develops Milkman’s character according to the hero’s journey as Harris defines it in “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.”).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- perceptual (adj.) - of, relating to, or involving apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind
- mythopoesis (n.) - the composition or making of myths
- pervasive (adj.) - spread throughout
- assimilation (n.) - the act of adopting (something) as part of a larger thing

Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)

- inexplicable (adj.) - incapable of being accounted for or explained

Additional vocabulary to support English Language Learners (to provide directly)

- myth (n.) - a story that was told in an ancient culture to explain a practice, belief, or natural occurrence
- presupposes (v.) - to be based on the idea that something is true or will happen
- commended (v.) - praised (someone or something) in a serious and often public way
- chronology (n.) - the sequential order in which past events occur
- approximation (n.) - something that is similar to something else
- loitering (v.) - remaining in an area when you do not have a particular reason to be there
- genealogy (n.) - the study of family history

Lesson Agenda/Overview

File: 12 LC Lesson 27 Date: 6/30/15 Classroom Use: Starting 9/2015

© 2015 Public Consulting Group. This work is licensed under a

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License

| Student-Facing Agenda | % of Lesson |
|--|--|
| Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: CCRA.R.9, RI.11-12.1, W.11-12.9.a, b, L.11-12.4.a, b Text: “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s <i>Song of Solomon</i>” by A. Leslie Harris, pages 69-71 | |
| Learning Sequence: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda 2. Homework Accountability 3. Reading and Discussion 4. Quick Write 5. Closing | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5% 2. 10% 3. 55% 4. 25% 5. 5% |

Materials

- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 12 LC Lesson 1) (optional)

Learning Sequence

| How to Use the Learning Sequence | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Symbol | Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol |
| 10% | Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take. |
| no symbol | Plain text indicates teacher action. |
| | Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students. |
| | <i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i> |
| ► | Indicates student action(s). |
| 💬 | Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions. |
| ❗ | Indicates instructional notes for the teacher. |

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

File: 12 LC Lesson 27 Date: 6/30/15 Classroom Use: Starting 9/2015

© 2015 Public Consulting Group. This work is licensed under a

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License

Begin by reviewing the agenda and the assessed standards for this lesson: CCRA.R.9 and RI.11-12.1. In this lesson, students read pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” by A. Leslie Harris, engaging in a discussion of Milkman’s journey in the context of other mythical figures before independently exploring how the literary criticism relates to prior analysis of existing unanswered questions.

- Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the first part of the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Respond briefly in writing to the following prompt: To what extent is mercy a central idea of *Song of Solomon*?) Instruct students to form pairs and discuss their responses.

- Student responses may include:
 - Mercy appears as a central idea early in the text with the description of “No Mercy Hospital” (p. 4). The hospital does not admit African-American patients until Milkman’s birth, so the building stands as a reminder of the lack of mercy that African Americans receive throughout the text. Morrison uses Mercy Hospital as backdrop in important moments in the text to reinforce the merciless society that looms over characters in the text. For example, when Macon tells the story of the gold, Milkman and Macon “met in the little public park across the street from Mercy Hospital” (p. 164), a setting that emphasizes the desperation the men have to get the gold and escape their social status.
 - Mercy appears in the text often in relation to troubled characters of the story. Frequent exclamations of “mercy” such as Porter’s cry of “God have mercy. What I’m gonna do?” (p. 26) reflect the struggles of the characters to find compassion and kindness. Pilate exclaims, “I want mercy!” (p. 317) at Hagar’s funeral, asking for compassion for herself and her granddaughter.

-
- Students will be held accountable for the annotations that they made for homework during Activity 3: Reading and Discussion.

Activity 3: Reading and Discussion

55%

File: 12 LC Lesson 27 Date: 6/30/15 Classroom Use: Starting 9/2015

© 2015 Public Consulting Group. This work is licensed under a

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License

Instruct students to form small groups. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss. Instruct students to continue to annotate the text as they read and discuss (W.11-12.9.a, b).

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding question to support students throughout this lesson:

How is Milkman's journey to the south similar to journeys of other mythic people?

Instruct students to read pages 69-70 of "Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" (from "In *Song of Solomon* Toni Morrison has faced the tale-spinner's recurring problem" to "to inform and control her narrative structure") and discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *perceptual*, *mythopoesis*, and *pervasive*.

- Students may be familiar with some of these words. Consider asking students to volunteer definitions before providing them to the group.
 - Students write the definitions of *perceptual*, *mythopoesis*, and *pervasive* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *myth* and *presupposes*.
 - Students write the definitions of *myth* and *presupposes* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

What challenge does Harris say Morrison "faced" (p. 69)? How does Harris say Morrison overcame this challenge?

- Student responses should include:
 - Harris states that Morrison "faced the tale-spinner's recurring problem," namely the challenge of making characters universally accessible so that readers understand her "characters' background or experiences" (p. 69). Morrison had to provide enough information to readers who had no knowledge of American racial politics to ensure the readers could understand Milkman, or "one black man's struggle for identity" (p. 69).
 - Harris argues that "Morrison's success" is because of her "use of myth to show man's constant search for reassurance in myths" (p. 69). Harris suggests that Morrison engages readers in *Song of Solomon* by placing Milkman in his own mythic tale. The mythic structure of Milkman's journey allows readers to better connect

to the story that Morrison tells, because readers are already familiar with how a myth unfolds.

What does Harris present as the function of myth?

- Harris states that according to Mircea Eliade, “myth is sacred history” and the goal of myth is to “explain the origins, destiny, and cultural concerns of a people” (p. 69). Even in an age of “scientific fact,” Harris claims that people depend “on myth for more than entertainment” and that people “are still drawn” to myths, heroes, and supernatural conflicts (p. 69). Myths serve as “agents of stability” that answer the “enduring questions” of the world (p. 69). People connect to mythic stories in order to explain the mysteries of the world and to give meaning to the struggles of humankind.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding questions:

How does the idea that people have “always turned to myth to explain the inexplicable” (p. 69) clarify the meaning of the word *inexplicable*? (L.11-12.4.a) What word parts in the word *inexplicable* confirm this meaning? (L.11-12.4.b)

- According to Harris, people use myths to explain what is difficult to explain, so the word *inexplicable* must mean “difficult to explain.” The word parts *in-*, which means “not,” *explic-*, which looks like “explain,” and *-able*, “which means capable of,” confirm that the word *inexplicable* means “not able to be explained.”

How does Harris describe the type of myth structure Morrison uses?

- Harris states that Morrison “selects one of the oldest and most pervasive mythic themes, the hero and his quest, to inform and control her narrative structure” (p. 70). In Harris’s opinion, Morrison structures the novel towards and around Milkman’s heroic journey and personal growth.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct students to read pages 70-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “In *Song of Solomon* Morrison creates a world both realistic and dreamlike” to “carry much of the burden of the myth”) and discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definition of *assimilation*.

- Students may be familiar with this word. Consider asking students to volunteer a definition before providing one to the group.
 - Students write the definition of *assimilation* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *commended*, *chronology*, *approximation*, *loitering*, and *genealogy*.
 - Students write the definitions of for *commended*, *chronology*, *approximation*, *loitering*, and *genealogy* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the following information on Moses, Achilles, and Beowulf.
 - Moses - the Hebrew prophet who led the Israelites out of Egypt and delivered the Law during their years of wandering in the wilderness
 - Achilles - the greatest Greek warrior in the Trojan War and hero of Homer's Iliad; He killed Hector and was killed when Paris wounded him in the heel, his one vulnerable spot, with an arrow
 - Beowulf - a legendary Geatish warrior and hero of the Old English poem *Beowulf*

How does Milkman's transition into adulthood connect to the idea of a "mythic hero[]" (p. 70)?

- Student responses may include:
 - Milkman's final transition into adulthood ends with Milkman accepting his obligations to his family and community. Harris argues that "by the end of the novel [Milkman] knows himself and his obligations to both present and past, to himself and his world" (p. 70). Milkman's final transition is the "reintegration" portion of the "mythic chronology" (p. 70) as described by Harris. This acceptance of his community and his obligation to the people around him confirms Milkman as a heroic character.
 - Harris argues that the hero's quest ends with the hero becoming "an agent of the social consciousness" (p. 70), an individual who is connected to the community. Morrison uses Milkman's growing connection to the people of Shalimar to illustrate his growing "external coherence" (p. 70) or connection to the larger social community. By building his connections and relationships with his community and family, Milkman fulfills his heroic "obligations to both present and past, to himself and his world" (p. 70).

How does the structure of *Song of Solomon* compare to the structure of myths?

- Harris claims that Morrison uses “myth to underpin [the] narrative” (p. 69) throughout *Song of Solomon*. Milkman’s story “[follows] the clear pattern of birth and youth, alienation, quest, confrontation, and reintegration common to mythic heroes” (p. 70). Milkman’s journey takes him from a “comfortable but loitering and wasted life” (p. 70) in Part 1 of *Song of Solomon* through a quest and confrontation in Part 2. Harris argues that Milkman gains “not only psychological and physical maturation but an approximation of the development of a true hero” (p. 70). Morrison makes Milkman’s story understandable and powerful by structuring it like a hero’s myth.

How does Milkman’s character development throughout *Song of Solomon* relate to the idea of mythic structure?

- Harris states that Milkman’s story in *Song of Solomon* follows a “clear pattern of ... quest, confrontation, and reintegration common to mythic heroes” (p. 70). Like other mythic heroes, Milkman goes on a quest for gold, confronts himself and Guitar in the woods of Virginia, and is reintegrated into the community of Shalimar and his family community in Michigan.

How does the ending of *Song of Solomon* reflect the structure of myth?

- Harris states that the final scene between Milkman and Guitar is “Milkman’s emergence as a champion who understands and will defend his world” (p. 71). As he cannot return a hero “until he defeats the enemy” (p. 71), Milkman becomes a hero by leaping toward Guitar. Milkman’s mythic journey is complete even if the reader never discovers his fate, as “the final battle is both a confrontation and a confirmation” (p. 71) of Milkman’s personal growth and heroic nature.

What does Harris identify as the root of the *Song of Solomon*’s “textual richness” (p. 71)? How is this richness connected to the idea of myth?

- Student responses may include:
 - The “textual richness” of the *Song of Solomon* “derives from a present which spans three generations” and the numerous “digressions, explanations, and expansions” (p. 71) that exist within the text. The reflections and echoes of stories from Milkman, Guitar, Macon, and Pilate expand the world of *Song of Solomon*. Harris argues that these “digressions” together with Milkman’s story create “an interlace, in which the dominant narrative is embellished and enhanced” (p. 71). The stories the characters tell about their past and ancestors enhance or improve the text, making it rich and multi-layered.
 - Harris states that the “the constant themes of myth involve not the ‘why?’ (the causes) but the ‘whence?’ (the groundwork of human nature, belief, and

endeavor)” (p. 69). These “meticulously articulated subplots and images” (p. 71), stories that the characters tell of their past and ancestors, work together to help Milkman and the readers answer questions about the meaning and purpose of human life.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** To support students in their understanding of the elements of myths, consider completing the following annotation and discussion activity:

Instruct student groups to reread pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” and identify and annotate for the elements that Harris presents as common to all myths. Then instruct student groups to examine the progression of Milkman through *Song of Solomon* in relation to the identified qualities of myth.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 4: Quick Write

25%

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

Choose a sentence from pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” and analyze how the sentence relates to the novel’s characters, central ideas, or structure.

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Ask students to use this lesson’s vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses.

- Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.
- Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.

Transition to the independent Quick Write.

- Students independently answer the prompt using evidence from the text.
- See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.
- Consider using the Short Response Rubric to assess students’ writing. Students may use the Short Response Rubric and Checklist to guide their written responses.

Activity 5: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to read pages 71-73 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “The opening pages gives us the mandrel” to “the gold his Aunt Pilate and father stumbled across in a Pennsylvania cave”) and annotate for how the article relates to their 12 LC Second Interim Assessment responses (W.11-12.9.b). Also, instruct students to conduct a brief search into the flight of Daedalus and Icarus.

- Students follow along.

Homework

Read pages 71-73 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “The opening pages gives us the mandrel” to “the gold his Aunt Pilate and father stumbled across in a Pennsylvania cave”) and annotate for how the article relates to your 12 LC Second Interim Assessment response. Also, conduct a brief search into the flight of Daedalus and Icarus.