

## 12 LC

## Lesson 2

## Introduction

In this lesson, students analyze pages 9-15 of *Song of Solomon* (from “The next day a colored baby was born” to “that did nothing to improve either one’s relationship with his father”), in which Morrison introduces the characters of Ruth Foster, her husband Macon Dead, and their children Milkman, Lena, and Corinthians. Students work in groups to analyze how Morrison introduces and develops the character of Ruth. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: How does Morrison introduce and develop Ruth’s character in pages 9-15?

For homework, students read and annotate pages 15-30 of *Song of Solomon*. Also, students develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how Morrison develops the character of Macon Dead and prepare possible answers to their questions for discussion.

## Standards

| Assessed Standard(s)  |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| RL.11-12.3            | Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).   |
| Addressed Standard(s) |   |
| W.<br>11-12.9.a       | Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.<br>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"). |
| L.<br>11-12.4.a       | 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.<br>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.                            |

## Assessment

### 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.

- How does Morrison introduce and develop Ruth's character in pages 9-15?

### High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Analyze how Morrison introduces and develops Ruth's character in pages 9-15 (e.g., Morrison introduces and develops the character of Ruth by describing two activities that help Ruth "get from sunup to sundown" (p. 13): staring at the water mark on her dining room table and nursing her son. Morrison introduces Ruth by describing Ruth's attachment to the water mark on her dining room table, which reminds Ruth of the "affectionate elegance" (p. 12) that defined her life with her father. Morrison's description of how Ruth "looked for the water mark several times during the day" in order to "confirm its presence" and "assure[] her[self] that ... this was life and not a dream" (p. 11) suggests that Ruth is dissatisfied with her relationship with her husband and longs instead for the happier life she previously had with her father. Morrison further develops Ruth's character through her description of Ruth's other "pleasure," nursing her son (p. 13). Morrison's comparison of Ruth's breastfeeding to the "secret power" (p. 13) of spinning straw into "golden thread" (p. 14) suggests that breastfeeding her son makes Ruth feel valid, loved, and powerful unlike how she feels in her relationship with her husband.).

## Vocabulary

**Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)**

- bereft (adj.) - deprived or robbed of the possession or use of something
- malice (n.) - desire to inflict injury, harm, or suffering on another, either because of a hostile impulse or out of deep-seated meanness
- guileless (adj.) - very innocent
- complicity (n.) - the state of being an accomplice; partnership or involvement in wrongdoing

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

- mooring (n.) - a place where a boat or ship can be anchored or moored

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

- gross (n.) - a group of 144 things; 12 dozen
- animated (adj.) - full of life and energy
- flunky (n.) - a person who does small jobs for someone powerful or important
- tenant (n.) - someone who rents or leases a house, apartment, etc., from a landlord
- rechristened (v.) - renamed at a baptism

## Lesson Agenda/Overview

| Student-Facing Agenda   | % of Lesson  |
|---|--|
| <b>Standards &amp; Text:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards: RL.11-12.3, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.4.a</li> <li>• Text: <i>Song of Solomon</i> by Toni Morrison, pages 9-15</li> </ul>                           |  |
| <b>Learning Sequence:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda</li> <li>2. Homework Accountability</li> <li>3. Reading and Discussion</li> <li>4. Quick Write</li> <li>5. Closing</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 5%</li> <li>2. 15%</li> <li>3. 60%</li> <li>4. 15%</li> <li>5. 5%</li> </ol> |

## Materials

File: 12 LC Lesson 2 Date: 6/30/15 Classroom Use: Starting 9/2015  
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- 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.  |
|                                  | <b>Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.</b>         |
|                                  | <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%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and the assessed standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.3. In this lesson, students analyze pages 9-15 of *Song of Solomon* (from “The next day a colored baby was born” to “that did nothing to improve either one’s relationship with his father”), focusing on how Morrison introduces and develops the character of Ruth.

- Students look at the agenda.

### Activity 2: Homework Accountability

15%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Read pages 9-15 of *Song of Solomon* and annotate for how Morrison introduces and develops characters. Also, develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how Morrison introduces and develops characters. Prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.)

Instruct students to form pairs and discuss the questions they developed for homework, specifically focusing on how Morrison introduces and develops characters (RL.11-12.3).

- Student questions may include:

**What does Morrison’s description of how other women feel about Ruth suggest about Ruth?**

- Women either “hate” (p. 9) or feel “sorry for Ruth Foster” (p. 10). These attitudes suggest that Ruth is not a particularly likeable person, and is someone who elicits pity in others.

**What kind of a relationship does Morrison establish between Ruth’s children in this passage?**

- Morrison describes Milkman’s desire to “slip by his sisters and avoid their casual malice” (p. 10). This description suggests that Lena and Corinthians are mean to their brother and have a negative relationship with him.

**How does Macon Dead feel about his family? What does this suggest about his character?**

- Morrison describes Macon Dead as filled with “hatred of his wife” and “disappointment” in his daughters (p. 10), suggesting that Macon is unhappy and is a difficult man to please.
- If student discussion is rich, text-dependent, and building toward the assessment prompt, consider extending the discussion beyond the allotted time. Then lead a brief whole-class discussion using any additional Reading and Discussion questions necessary to ensure students are prepared for the assessment. (Key questions in the Reading and Discussion activity are marked with an asterisk\*.)

### Activity 3: Reading and Discussion

60%

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 discuss (W. 11-12.9.a).

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

**How does Morrison describe Ruth in pages 9-15?**

Instruct student groups to refer to pages 9-13 (from “The next day a colored baby was born” to “But it could also be still. Patient, restful, and still”) for evidence to support their responses as they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *bereft* and *malice*.

- 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 *bereft* and *malice* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *gross* and *animated*.
  - Students write the definitions of *gross* and *animated* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

**What connection does Morrison establish between Mr. Smith and Ruth’s son on page 9?**

- Student responses may include:
  - Morrison directly connects her description of Mr. Smith’s flight with her description of the birth of Ruth’s son when she writes, “Mr. Smith had seen the rose petals, heard the music, and leaped on into the air. The next day a colored baby was born inside Mercy for the first time.” This transition links these two events and suggests a relationship between Mr. Smith’s flight, or his death, and the birth of Ruth’s son.
  - Morrison writes, “Mr. Smith’s blue silk wings must have left their mark” and then describes her son Milkman’s disappointment when he discovered he could not fly: “when the little boy discovered, at four, the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier—that only birds and airplanes could fly—he lost all interest in himself.” Mr. Smith’s flight inspires in the boy a similar interest in flight, with similarly disappointing results.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posing the following extension question to deepen students’ understanding:

**What does flying mean to Ruth’s son?**

- Flying is a “gift” to Ruth’s son, but one that he can never have because of the reality that “only birds and airplanes could fly” (p. 9). Morrison’s description of how this knowledge “saddened him and left his imagination so bereft” (p. 9) suggests that the possibility of flight is something that energized him and gave him hope, but because of its impossibility now drains and depresses him.

**\*What does Morrison’s description of the water mark on Ruth’s dining room table suggest about Ruth’s relationship with her father?**

- Morrison's statement that for Ruth, the water mark "was the summation of the affectionate elegance with which she believed her childhood had been surrounded" suggests that Ruth shares her father's need to "distinguish[] his own family from the people among whom they lived" (p. 12), or to feel superior to others. Thus, Ruth treasures the sophistication and grace that she associates with her father.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:

**Why is there a water mark on Ruth's dining room table?**

- There is a water mark, or "cloudy gray circle," on Ruth's dining room table because her father always had a vase of flowers on the table (p. 12).

**\*What does Morrison's description of the water mark on Ruth's dining room table suggest about Ruth's relationship with her husband?**

- Student responses may include:
  - Morrison's description of how Ruth "looked for the water mark several times during the day" in order "to confirm its presence" and "assure[] her[self] ... that this was life and not a dream" (p. 11) suggests that Ruth is dissatisfied with her relationship with her husband, and longs instead for the sort of relationship that she had with her father.
  - In her description of the water mark, Morrison tells the story of how Ruth asked her husband "how he liked the centerpiece" she made (p. 12). Ruth explains to her husband that "Most people ... see it, but they don't see anything beautiful in it" (p. 12). Rather than appreciating the beauty of what Ruth has created, her husband complains about her cooking: "Your chicken is red at the bone" (p. 12). Macon Dead's inability to appreciate the beauty that Ruth sees suggests that he does not understand her, and that they do not share the same values.

**Why is the water mark a "mooring" for Ruth (p. 11)?**

- The water mark is a "mooring," or anchor, for Ruth because it reminds her of the time in her life when she was "surrounded" by "affectionate elegance" (p. 12). Now that she is married to a man who does not "see anything beautiful" (p. 12) about the items that she treasures, the water mark helps Ruth retain her connection to the sense of sophistication and superiority that made her feel "alive" as a child (p. 11).
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:



How does Morrison's use of figurative language on page 11 clarify the meaning of the word *mooring* in this context? (L.11-12.4.a)

- Morrison compares Ruth to “a lighthouse keeper drawn to his window to gaze once again at the sea” and “a prisoner automatically searching out the sun as he steps into the yard for his hour of exercise.” In these comparisons, the sea and the sun are representative of the water mark. Therefore, the word *mooring* must mean “an anchor or a checkpoint that serves to ground someone or something and secure it in place.”
- If necessary, define the term *figurative language* as “language that differs from the literal meaning of words and phrases and includes *metaphor*, *simile*, *personification*, and *imagery*.”

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

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Instruct student pairs to refer to pages 13-15 (from “But there was nothing you could do” to “that did nothing to improve either one’s relationship with his father”) for evidence to support their responses as they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *guileless* and *complicity*.

- 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 *guileless* and *complicity* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *flunky*, *tenant*, and *rechristened*.
  - Students write the definitions of *flunky*, *tenant*, and *rechristened* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

**\*How do the feelings Ruth has when she feeds her husband on page 11 compare to the feelings she has when she feeds her son on pages 13-14?**

- Ruth feels absent-minded and indifferent about preparing dinner for her husband. As Morrison describes, Ruth “did not try to make her meals nauseating; she simply didn’t know how not to” and she “forgot the pork” (p. 11). In contrast, feeding her son is a great pleasure of “secret indulgence[]” and a “balm,” or healing force, in Ruth’s life (p. 13). Morrison’s comparison of Ruth’s breastfeeding to the “secret power” (p. 13) of

spinning straw into “golden thread” (p. 14) suggests that the “pleasure” (p. 13) Ruth derives from feeding her son comes from the feeling that she has the power to create something beautiful and valuable from her own body.

**Compare Freddie’s reaction to Ruth’s actions to Ruth’s feelings about her actions.**

- Freddie’s reaction to Ruth’s actions contrasts with Ruth’s own feelings about her actions. Ruth sees the process of feeding her son as her own “secret power” (p. 13), an activity from which she gains feelings of comfort, pleasure, and self worth. Freddie’s “gulps of laughter,” his exclamation “‘When the last time I seen that?’” (p. 14), and the “appreciative” glance he gives Ruth’s son (p. 14) all suggest that he understands Ruth’s actions as odd.

**How does Freddie’s discovery impact Ruth? How does his discovery impact her son?**

- Student responses should include:
  - Freddie’s discovery results in Ruth’s realization that she will “lose fully half of what made her daily life bearable” (p. 14), indicating that Ruth stops nursing her son, and so loses this source of “pleasure” (p. 13). After Freddie’s discovery, “Ruth kept close to home and had no afternoon guests for the better part of two months” (p. 15), which suggests that Ruth feels ashamed of an activity she once took great joy in.
  - When Freddie discovers Ruth breastfeeding her son, Ruth reacts by “dropping her son on the floor” (p. 14). This reaction “confirm[ed] for him what he had begun to suspect—that these afternoons were strange and wrong” (p. 14), suggesting that Freddie’s discovery has a negative impact on Milkman’s relationship with his mother.

**\*What connection does Morrison establish between Ruth’s relationship with her son and her relationship with her husband?**

- Morrison’s description of Ruth’s love for breastfeeding her son establishes that Ruth turns to her son to find the feelings of “pleasure,” love, and “power” (p. 13) that her husband, a man who doesn’t “see anything beautiful” (p. 12) in the life that Ruth values, denies her. Breastfeeding her son provides Ruth with the “bit of balm” that she needs “to get from sunup to sundown” (p. 13).

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

## Activity 4: Quick Write

15%

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

**How does Morrison introduce and develop Ruth's character in pages 9-15?**

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 and annotate pages 15-30 of *Song of Solomon* (from "Macon Dead never knew how it came about" to "Pilate swayed like a willow over her stirring"). Also, instruct students to develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how Morrison develops the character of Macon Dead (RL.11-12.3) and prepare possible answers to their questions for discussion.

- Students follow along.

## Homework

Read and annotate pages 15-30 of *Song of Solomon* (from "Macon Dead never knew how it came about" to "Pilate swayed like a willow over her stirring"). Also, develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how Morrison develops the character of Macon Dead and prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.