

## 12 LC

## Lesson 29

## Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze pages 74-76 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “His quest leads Milkman to Pennsylvania and then to Virginia” to “his past transforms his leap toward Guitar into a triumphant flight”), in which A. Leslie Harris analyzes Milkman’s journey to Pennsylvania and Virginia through the lens of famous mythical heroes. Students participate in a discussion and revisit their analysis to see how their interpretations change or are reinforced by Harris’s literary criticism. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: Review your journal or notebook entries and explain how “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” relates to one of your unresolved questions or a previous Quick Write.

For homework, students review and expand their notes, annotations, and texts to prepare for the

12 LC Performance Assessment. Also, students reread their responses to the 12 LC Second Interim Assessment and prepare to revise and rewrite their response in light of their reading of A. Leslie Harris’s “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.”

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## 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.11-12.9.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., <i>The Federalist</i>, presidential addresses]”).</p>
L.11-12.4.a	<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>

## Assessment

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### 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.

- Review your journal or notebook entries and explain how “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” relates to one of your unresolved questions or a previous Quick Write.
- In 12 LC Lesson 1, students began a journal or notebook of the questions they generated as they read *Song of Solomon*.

### High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Identify an unresolved question or a previous Quick Write response (e.g., the response to the Quick Write prompt in 12 LC Lesson 18, which asks: Analyze how Milkman’s actions in pages 259-281 compare to his actions in pages 238-258. What does this comparison suggest about his development as a character?).
- Analyze how “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” relates to your unresolved question or previous Quick Write (e.g., “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” relates to the Quick Write from 12 LC Lesson 18 because on page 74 Harris argues that Milkman “abandons the search for the missing gold to regain his self esteem.” Harris confirms that Milkman transforms in Virginia as a result of “adapt[ing] to [the men of Shalimar’s] code” during “a midnight cougar hunt” (Harris, p. 74). As in the response to the Lesson 18 Quick Write, Harris asserts that on the hunt, Milkman learns “new skills to measure self-worth—hunting, fighting, and surviving, the only prowess these Virginians acknowledge” (Harris, p. 74), suggesting that Milkman has a better understanding of himself and his self-worth after the hunt.).

## Vocabulary

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

- Edenic (adj.) - paradise-like; a reference to being like the place where Adam and Eve first lived in the Bible
- ambivalent (adj.) - having mixed feelings about someone or something; being unable to choose between the two (usually opposing) courses of action
- stature (n.) - degree of development attained; level of achievement
- nihilism (n.) - total rejection of established laws and institutions
- sterility (n.) - the state of being incapable of producing offspring
- subtlety (n.) - a fine-drawn distinction; refinement of reasoning

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

- reconciliation (n.) - the process of bringing into agreement or harmony

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

- exploits (n.) - exciting acts or actions
- siren (n.) - one of a group of female creatures in Greek mythology whose singing attracted sailors and caused them to sail into dangerous water or toward rocks
- exerts (v.) - causes (force, effort, etc.) to have an effect or to be felt
- rift (n.) - a situation in which two people, groups, etc., no longer have a friendly relationship
- revelations (n.) - usually secret or surprising facts that are made known
- antagonist (n.) - a person who opposes another person
- continuity (n.) - the quality or state of something that does not stop or change as time passes
- affirmation (n.) - the act or instance of saying that something is true in a confident way

## Lesson Agenda/Overview

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Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<b>Standards &amp; Text:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards: CCRA.R.9, RI.11-12.1, W.11-12.9.a, b, L.11-12.4.a</li> <li>Text: “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s <i>Song of Solomon</i>” by A. Leslie Harris, pages 74-76</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. Think-Pair-Share</li> <li>5. Quick Write</li> <li>6. Closing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 5%</li> <li>2. 0%</li> <li>3. 50%</li> <li>4. 20%</li> <li>5. 20%</li> <li>6. 5%</li> </ol>

## Materials

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

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## 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 standards for this lesson: CCRA.R.9 and RI.11-12.1. In this lesson, students read pages 74-76 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” and engage in a discussion about Milkman’s journey in the context of other mythical figures. Students then explore how the literary criticism relates to prior analysis or existing unanswered questions.

- Students look at the agenda.

### Activity 2: Homework Accountability

0%

- Students will be held accountable for the questions and responses that they generated for homework and for their research on Sybil during Activity 3: Reading and Discussion.

### Activity 3: Reading and Discussion

50%

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 similar to other mythic people's journeys?**

Instruct students to read pages 74-75 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “His quest leads Milkman to Pennsylvania and then to Virginia” to “the logical extension of Milkman’s constant attempts to fly away”) and discuss the following questions in their groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definition of *Edenic*.

- 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 *Edenic* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *exploits*, *siren*, *exerts*, *rift*, *revelations*, and *antagonist*.
  - Students write the definitions of *exploits*, *siren*, *exerts*, *rift*, *revelations*, and *antagonist* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

**How does Milkman's interactions with his “father's boyhood friends” (p. 74) contribute to the mythical structure of *Song of Solomon*?**

- Macon Dead's boyhood friends envision him as “almost superhuman,” and his financial success seems to them to be “an inevitable extension of his youthful exploits and talents” (p. 74). Stories about his family from others' perspectives contribute to Milkman's interest in “continuing the myth, spinning out, to the wonder and delight of his audience” (p. 74). Milkman exaggerates his father's abilities to fulfill the mythical impression his childhood friends have of his father.

**How does Circe's role in Milkman's quest contribute to the mythic quality of the novel?**

- Circe's role as “more a Sibyl than ... siren” (p. 74) contributes to the mythic quality of the novel because she is a bridge between the dead and living, between Milkman and his past. Milkman cannot “reach the dream-like core of his quest” unless he is able to “channel[] his rebelliousness into a quest for his own identity” (p. 74). Harris claims that Milkman's journey toward understanding of his past, his failed relationships, and his future self is similar to other mythic quests.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, remind them of their brief searches into the character of Sibyl from the previous lesson's homework.

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**How does Harris describe Milkman’s journey “south” (p. 74) in mythic terms?**

- Milkman journeys to Virginia to “contact ... the underworld” and gain “knowledge for the living” (p. 74). The further south Milkman goes, the more he abandons his initial quest for gold and focuses instead on “regain[ing] his self-esteem” through “hunting, fishing, and surviving, the only prowess these Virginians acknowledge” (p. 74). In other words, like other mythic heroes, Milkman has to prove himself during tests of “prowess” in order to be accepted by the community.

**How does Harris support her claim that Guitar is Milkman’s “double” (p. 74)?**

- Student responses may include:
  - Harris argues that Milkman and Guitar are doubles because they both confront similar issues about how to be involved in a community. On the one hand, Milkman starts to embrace “the particular virtues and values of the world and the past” (p. 74). On the other hand, Guitar becomes “an extension of the very negations that Milkman has practiced” (p. 74). In other words, Guitar runs from the past, and Milkman runs toward it, but both men are affected by the intersection of past and future.
  - Harris argues that Milkman and Guitar are doubles because both men abandon their families. Like Guitar, Milkman has also “rejected love and ties,” but after Milkman’s experience in the woods, he understands “Guitar’s total commitment to death is only the logical extension of Milkman’s constant attempts to fly away” (p. 75). In this way, Milkman recognizes that his desire to escape his family and responsibilities is the same as Guitar’s commitment to the Seven Days’ violent vengeance. Milkman returns to his family with love and understanding, whereas Guitar substitutes his family with the Seven Days, who exist for murder and revenge.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle with this question, consider reminding them of their discussions of Guitar and Milkman as foils in 12 LC Lessons 8 and 21.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

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Instruct students to read pages 75-76 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “Milkman is still not ready to challenge the enemy” to “his past transforms his leap toward Guitar into a triumphant flight”) and discuss the following questions in their groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *ambivalent*, *stature*, *nihilism*, *sterility*, and *subtlety*.

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- 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 *ambivalent*, *stature*, *nihilism*, *sterility*, and *subtlety* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *continuity* and *affirmation*.
  - Students write the definitions of *continuity* and *affirmation* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

**Why does Harris believe that Milkman’s “reintegration” (p. 75) into the world following Guitar’s assassination attempt deviates from traditional mythic reintegration?**

- Harrison believes that in a traditional mythic sense, Milkman should leave the woods and have “reconciliation between his father and his aunt” (p. 75). Harris argues that Milkman’s discoveries and his actions on the quest do not quite align, since Milkman “has recognized his own weakness and the values which he tried to deny, but he has not yet fought for them” (p. 75).
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:

**How does Harris’s mention of Milkman’s father and Pilate on page 75 help clarify the meaning of the word *reconciliation*? (L.11-12.4.a)**

- This part of the article describes how Milkman’s own relationship with his parents improves, but the use of the word “although” indicates that the relationship between Macon and Pilate did not improve. *Reconciliation*, therefore, must mean “the process of bringing into harmony or forgiveness.”

**How does Harris argue that Morrison’s ending adheres to a mythic structure?**

- Student responses may include:
  - Harris claims that regardless of the outcomes at the end of the novel, Milkman retains his heroic status. He either “return[s] home the conqueror,” because he physically overtakes Guitar, or “he dies in his last battle,” and his death is a “symbolic affirmation of his and his world’s values” (p. 75). In this way, Milkman will die for love and community because he has come to understand how to “accept” himself and others (p. 76).
  - Milkman is a hero in the same sense that Hector, Achilles, and Beowulf are all heroes: even if Milkman dies, “he has already fought and won his battle” because

the journey has forced him to confront “dragons of despair, nihilism, and sterility” (p. 75). In other words, he does not need to beat his antagonist to be a hero; he has a better understanding of how to beat his own demons, or weaknesses, and this understanding makes him a hero.

**How does Harris support her idea that the novel ends with Milkman’s “triumphant flight” (p. 76)?**

- Harris asserts that “Morrison creates her own myth of those who fumble in their efforts to fly and then soar higher” (p. 75). Milkman finally reaches a point of accepting the “burden of his past” (p. 76); he understands both his own version of flight, which involves “shedding the burden of personal and past responsibilities” (p. 75), and the “Song of Solomon” version of flight, which celebrates “a people’s past” (p. 76). Milkman realizes that it does not matter whether he or Guitar survive the confrontation, as long as he “face[s] Guitar, accept[s] and love[s] him” (p. 76). This confrontation makes his flight triumphant because Milkman accepts and understands the burden of his past.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

#### Activity 4: Think-Pair-Share

20%

Explain to students that they will now engage in a Think-Pair-Share to prepare for this lesson’s Quick Write assessment. Instruct students to independently review previous Quick Writes from the module or unresolved questions in light of A. Leslie Harris’s “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*,” and determine how the reading of the literary criticism impacts their analysis in one of the module Quick Writes or answers one of their unanswered questions.

- Students work independently to revisit previous Quick Writes or unresolved questions.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle to identify a Quick Write or unresolved question, consider posting or projecting the Quick Write prompts from throughout the module.

Instruct students to form pairs and share their ideas about how “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” relates to an unresolved question or a previous Quick Write.

- Students discuss how “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” relates to an unresolved question or a previous Quick Write.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

## Activity 5: Quick Write

**20%**

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

**Review your journal entries and explain how “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” relates to one of your unresolved questions or a previous Quick Write.**

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 6: Closing

**5%**

Provide students with the 12 LC Performance Assessment prompt:

**Revise your original response to the 12 LC Second Interim Assessment prompt, using the literary criticism to further develop or refine your analysis.**

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to review and expand their notes, annotations, and texts to prepare for the 12 LC Performance Assessment. Also, instruct students to reread their responses to the 12 LC Second Interim Assessment and prepare to revise their responses in light of their reading of A. Leslie Harris’s “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.” Students should be prepared to discuss 2-3 ideas for revising their 12 LC Second Interim Assessment.

- Students follow along.

## Homework

Review and expand your notes, annotations, and texts in preparation for the 12 LC Performance Assessment. Also, reread your response to the 12 LC Second Interim Assessment and prepare to revise your response in light of your reading of A. Leslie Harris’s “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.” Be prepared to discuss 2-3 ideas for revising your 12 LC Second Interim Assessment.

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