

12 LC

Lesson 14

Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze *Song of Solomon*, pages 211-216 (from “People behaved much better, were more polite, more understanding when Milkman was drunk” to “Why not take it? He closed the door”), in which Lena confronts Milkman for his treatment of the women of his family. Students engage in a group discussion focusing on how Milkman’s character develops over the course of the excerpt. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: How does the end of Part 1 further develop Milkman’s character?

For homework, students organize and code their notes according to structure, character development, and central ideas in order to prepare for the 12 LC First Interim Assessment. Additionally, students review any outstanding questions that emerged during their reading of Part 1 of *Song of Solomon* and write answers to any earlier questions that they have resolved.

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.11-12.9.a	<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>

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 the end of Part 1 further develop Milkman's character?

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Analyze what the ending of Part 1 suggests about Milkman's character (e.g., Milkman comes to a turning point at the end of Part 1 and metaphorically closes the door on his childhood to go seek his fortune. Lena confronts Milkman and accuses him of being "a sad, pitiful, stupid, selfish, hateful man" (p 216). Lena tells Milkman that he has been "using [], ordering [], judging []" the women of his family and that he has "never asked one of [them] if [they] were tired, or sad" (p. 215). These accusations confirm that Milkman has a childish and selfish disregard for others. Taking Lena's advice, Milkman "close[s] the door" (p. 216), which connects to his earlier thoughts of the "heavy white door on Not Doctor Street" (p. 163) closing behind him and his desire to escape his family obligations. Milkman's willingness to accept Lena's accusations and her advice suggests that Milkman is metaphorically closing the door on his selfish childhood.).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- civility (n.) - courtesy; politeness
- equanimity (n.) - mental or emotional stability or composure, especially under tension or strain; calmness; equilibrium
- garnished (v.) - attached a stoppage of a specified sum from wages to satisfy a creditor or a legal obligation
- splayed (v.) - spread or flared

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

- None.

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

- consecutive (adj.) - following one after the other in a series; following each other without interruption
- sarcasm (n.) - the use of words that mean the opposite of what you really want to say especially in order to insult someone, to show irritation, or to be funny
- evicted (v.) - forced to leave a place

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RL.11-12.3, W.11-12.9.a • Text: <i>Song of Solomon</i> by Toni Morrison, pages 211-216 	
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. 20% 3. 55% 4. 15% 5. 5%

Materials

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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.
	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.
①	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 read and discuss *Song of Solomon*, pages 211-216, focusing on how this excerpt further develops Milkman's character.

- Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

20%

Instruct students to take out their responses to the first part of the previous lesson's homework assignment. (Read the article "The Trickster in African American Literature" by Trudier Harris and respond briefly in writing to the following prompt: How is Pilate similar to a trickster in pages 205-209?)

Instruct students to form pairs and share their responses.

- Pilate demonstrates many of the qualities of a trickster as described in the essay "The Trickster in African American Literature." The way in which she fools the police with

her story of “Mr. Solomon” (Morrison, p. 207) is an example of her succeeding “through indirection and mask-wearing, through playing upon the gullibility of [her] opponents” (Harris, p. 1). Pilate retrieves her sack and helps Milkman and Guitar by convincing the police that she is a poor, religious, old woman. After the exchange with the police, Pilate changes in the car and becomes “tall again” (Morrison, p. 207), showing that for Pilate, the trickster aspect is “a strategy for survival with dignity” in a society controlled by white people (Harris, p. 3).

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct students to take out their responses to the second part of the previous lesson’s homework assignment. (Read and annotate pages 209-216 of *Song of Solomon*. Also, develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how the author develops story elements over the course of the excerpt and prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.)

Instruct students to talk in pairs about questions they developed for homework, focusing on how the author develops story elements over the course of the excerpt (RL.11-12.3).

- Student questions may include:

How do Milkman’s thoughts during his bath further develop his character?

- Milkman’s thoughts evoke his past childhood experiences and his current childlike situation. Milkman remembers when the tub seemed so big that “he could almost swim in it,” and he compares his theft of Pilate’s sack to “a kid on a Halloween trick-or-treat prank” (p. 209). These thoughts reinforce Milkman’s current childlike feelings in his relationship with his family.

How do new details about the Seven Days impact Milkman’s understanding of his community?

- Student responses may include:
 - Milkman’s new knowledge about the remaining Seven Days members impacts how he feels about his sister Corinthians dating Porter. The relationship between Corinthians and Porter that Milkman had previously thought was “funny, sweet and a little sad” (p. 211) has now taken on a threatening quality.
 - Through his new knowledge about the Seven Days members, Milkman’s understanding of Guitar changes as well. He realizes that “Guitar could kill, would kill, and probably had killed. The Seven Days was the consequence of this ability,

but not its origin” (p. 210). Milkman’s understanding of his friend is shifting: Guitar is more dangerous than Milkman initially thought.

- If student discussion is rich, text-dependent, and building toward the assessment prompt, consider extending the discussions beyond the allotted time. 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

55%

Instruct students to form pairs. 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:

What does the ending of Part 1 show about Milkman?

Instruct student pairs to read pages 211-214 (from “People behaved much better, were more polite, more understanding when Milkman was drunk” to “It’s good enough for you, but not for her, right?”) 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 *civility* and *equanimity*.

- Students may be familiar with these words. Consider asking students to volunteer definitions before providing them to the group.
 - Students write the definitions of *civility* and *equanimity* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *consecutive* and *sarcasm*.
 - Students write the definitions of *consecutive* and *sarcasm* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

What does Milkman mean when he says that “people behaved much better, were more polite, more understanding” when he was drunk (p. 211)? How does Morrison contradict this statement?

- Milkman suggests that people are nicer and kinder to him when he is drunk, claiming that when people touch him they are “gentle, loving” (p. 211). However, Morrison

provides examples, such as Milkman having his pockets picked or being thrown out of a “house party” (p. 211), which are clearly not gentle or loving. These actions are in contrast with how Milkman views the people around him.

***What does Milkman’s view of other people while drunk demonstrate about his character?**

- Student responses may include:
 - Milkman is both arrogant and naïve in his views. Milkman believes that being drunk does not “change him at all” (p. 211), and he views those who might want to harm him or be upset by his actions while drunk as “more polite” and “more understanding” (p. 211). Milkman’s view is arrogant in the sense the he believes that he is unchanged but that everyone around him acts differently. However, his view is also naïve because Milkman perceives even aggressive people as “gentle, loving” individuals (p. 211).
 - Milkman’s opinion of others while drunk demonstrates a selfish and lazy attitude. Milkman holds little regard for others’ property as demonstrated when he “peed in the kitchen sink” at a house party (p. 211). Milkman also acts apathetic about the men who “picked his pockets” (p. 211), demonstrating that the theft of his money and belongings does not concern him.

Why does Milkman feel like he needs to be “under [the] influence” for three days (p. 211)?

- Milkman has discovered that Corinthians is romantically involved with a member of the Seven Days. His statement, “She was so silly. So silly. Jesus!” (p. 211) indicates that this revelation disturbs Milkman. In order to escape these issues and avoid his responsibilities, Milkman turns to drinking.

What do Lena’s reflections on making roses demonstrate about her character?

- Student responses may include:
 - Lena’s making of the rose petals is a point of personal pride. Lena claims, “I was the one who started making artificial roses. Not Momma. Not Corinthians. Me.” (p. 213) The making of the roses is a personal achievement and something that Lena can point to as her own accomplishment, an activity that she “loved to do” (p. 213).
 - Lena’s rose-petal-making is also an activity she uses to keep herself calm. She says that the activity “kept [her] ... quiet” in the same way that “people in the asylum” are kept from doing “something terrible” by weaving baskets or rugs (p. 213). This

comparison suggests that Lena’s life makes her upset, and she keeps herself from doing “something terrible” by making rose petals.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing the following extension question to deepen students’ understanding:

How do Lena’s reflections on making roses relate to a central idea of the text?

- Lena’s reflections on making roses develop the central idea of escape. Lena creates fake flowers as a way to escape from her life and the violent tendencies that it elicits from her. By making flowers, Lena can escape a life with few joys, a life in which she “didn’t go to college” because she “was afraid of what [her father] might do” to her mother (p. 215).

***How does the “tiny maple tree” relate to Milkman’s character (p. 212)?**

- The “tiny maple tree” represents Milkman’s selfishness and carelessness. Lena explains to Milkman that he urinated on the tree in childhood, but it survives. Lena had forgiven Milkman for his past insensitivity, she “wasn’t mad about it anymore” (p. 214), because the tree continues to live. However, the tree is now dying, and Lena compares Milkman’s treatment of the tree with his treatment of his family. Lena claims that Milkman has been peeing on his family “all [his] life” (p. 214). Lena explains that “there are all kinds of ways to pee on people” (p. 214), suggesting that she is more upset with the metaphoric urination than with Milkman’s childhood accident. Thus, Lena uses the “tiny maple tree” to explain to Milkman how he still acts with a child’s disregard for others.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to read pages 215-216 (from “‘Lena ...’ ‘What do you know about somebody’” to “Why not take it? He closed the door”) for evidence to support their responses as they discuss the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *garnished* and *splayed*.

- 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 *garnished* and *splayed* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definition of *evicted*.

- Students write the definition of *evicted* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

How does Lena describe to Milkman the kind of life the Dead women live?

- Student responses should include:
 - Lena tells Milkman that she and Corinthians spent their entire childhood and most of their adult lives taking care of Milkman. Lena explains that their “girlhood was spent like a found nickel” on Milkman (p. 215). She tells Milkman, “When you slept, we were quiet; when you were hungry, we cooked; when you wanted to play, we entertained you” (p. 215). In other words, their lives have always revolved around serving him.
 - Lena says that Milkman does not know a “single thing” (p. 215) about his sisters and that Milkman has been “laughing at” Lena, Corinthians, and Ruth all of his life. She accuses him of “using [], ordering [], judging []” them for as long as he has been a part of the family (p. 215). Also, he has “never asked one of [them] if [they] were tired, or sad, or wanted a cup of coffee” (p. 215). In Lena’s eyes, Milkman has treated the women in his family carelessly and selfishly.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing the following extension question to deepen students’ understanding:

How does the interaction between Lena and Milkman relate to Milkman’s treatment of women in general?

- Lena accuses Milkman of being “exactly like [their father]” (p. 215). He demonstrates casual disregard for Hagar: he ended their relationship by writing her a thank-you note and giving her money. He also demonstrates a negative view of his mother whom he calls “a silly, selfish, queer, faintly obscene woman” (p. 123). The treatment of Hagar, as well as Lena’s accusations of “judging” his sisters and mother (p. 215), demonstrates that Milkman, like Macon, thinks very little of most women in his life.

*What “good advice” does Lena give to Milkman on pages 215-216?

- Lena tells Milkman that he “will need more than” just his manhood in order to live his life as an adult (p. 215), yet she reminds him that he does not “have anything else” except his manhood (p. 216). In other words, his manhood is not enough to make him a whole person, but he has nothing else to offer, so he is not yet a whole person. Her last piece of advice is that Milkman should “piss[] [his] last in [their] house” and “get out” (p. 216). Lena symbolically throws Milkman out of the house, but given her first

advice, she also pushes him from their home so he can find more in his life than just his manhood.

How does Lena’s “good advice” (p. 216) about what Milkman needs relate to his identity?

- Milkman views himself as a passive individual plagued by “tentativeness, doubt and inauthenticity” (p. 183). Lena, however, threatens Milkman’s identity by suggesting that he is a man like their father, calling Milkman “exactly like him” (p. 215), someone who does not have “anything else” (p. 216) except his manhood to offer the world. Lena tells Milkman that his perception of himself is wrong and he uses the societal privilege of being born a man to control and abuse other people.

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 the end of Part 1 further develop Milkman’s character?

Instruct 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 organize and code their notes according to structure, character development, and central ideas in order to prepare for the 12 LC First Interim Assessment.

Additionally, instruct students to review any outstanding questions that emerged during their reading of Part 1 of *Song of Solomon* and write answers to any earlier questions that they have resolved.

- Students follow along.

Homework

Organize and code your notes according to structure, character development, and central ideas in order to prepare for the 12 LC First Interim Assessment.

Additionally, review any outstanding questions that emerged during your reading of Part 1 of *Song of Solomon* and write answers to any earlier questions that you have resolved.