

12 LC

Lesson 9

Introduction

In this lesson, students continue analyzing *Song of Solomon*, discussing three excerpts from the book: pages 123-126 (from “Milkman leaned against a tree and waited” to “what harm did I do you on my knees?”), 126-129 (from “That was the beginning. Now it was all going to end” to “Like this time when she turned the doorknob of Guitar’s little bachelor room”), and 132-134 (from “When the baby was born the day after she stood in the snow” to “Lena had no idea she could move that fast”). In these excerpts, Milkman learns about the circumstances of his birth from his mother and Hagar attacks Milkman in Guitar’s apartment. Students participate in a group discussion, considering the development of central ideas in the excerpts. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: Choose one of the excerpts discussed in this lesson (pages 123-126, 126-129, or 132-134). How does Morrison’s use of figurative language develop two central ideas in this excerpt?

For homework, students read and annotate pages 134-151 of *Song of Solomon*. Also, students develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how central ideas develop, interact, or build on one another in the text.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.2	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
RL.11-12.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
Addressed Standard(s)	
W. 11-12.9.a	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. 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. 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. 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.

- Choose one of the excerpts discussed in this lesson (pages 123-126, 126-129, or 132-134). How does Morrison's use of figurative language develop two central ideas in this excerpt?

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Identify two central ideas in the excerpt (e.g., Morrison develops the central ideas of love and community on pages 132-134.).
- Analyze how Morrison's use of figurative language develops two central ideas in the excerpt (e.g., Morrison uses figurative language to demonstrate how love is a powerful emotion that forces one to seek out the larger community, even if the community seems "malevolent" (p. 133). When Ruth discovers that Hagar wants to kill Milkman, the "world open[s] up for her like one of her imperial tulips and reveal[s] its evil yellow pistil" (p. 133). This image vividly conveys how dangerous the outside community seems to Ruth compared to her insulated miserable world of "the fourposter bed where Doctor had bubbled and rotted" and "her garden and the fishbowl where her goldfish died" (p. 133). Previously, Ruth had been primarily concerned with her "own misery," but the danger posed to her son makes her leave her home to venture into the community to protect Milkman, "her single triumph" (p. 133). Thus, Morrison uses figurative language to present Ruth's love for Milkman as a powerful force that drives her into the community to preserve this love.).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- wanly (adv.) - in a way that is lacking in forcefulness, competence, or effectiveness
- lethargy (n.) - apathetic or sluggish inactivity
- dissipated (v.) - scattered in various directions; dispersed; dispelled
- forays (n.) - quick, sudden attacks
- manifestation (n.) - one of the forms that something has when it appears or occurs
- malevolent (adj.) - evil; harmful; injurious

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

- inept (adj.) - without skill or aptitude for a particular task

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

- obscene (adj.) - relating to sex in an indecent or offensive way
- thwarted (v.) - prevented (someone) from doing something or stopped (something) from happening

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RL.11-12.2, RL.11-12.4, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.4.a • Text: <i>Song of Solomon</i> by Toni Morrison, pages 113-134 	
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. 15% 3. 60% 4. 15% 5. 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the Central Ideas and Motifs Tracking Tool (refer to 12 LC Lesson 3) (optional)—students may need additional blank copies

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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.
ⓘ	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: RL.11-12.2 and RL.11-12.4. In this lesson, students analyze three excerpts from *Song of Solomon* (pages 123-126, 126-129, and 132-134), focusing on how central ideas interact in these excerpts.

- 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 113-134 of *Song of Solomon* and annotate for the development of central ideas and use of figurative language. Also, develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how central ideas develop, interact, or build on one another in the text, as well as the use of figurative language, and prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.)

Instruct students to form pairs and talk about the discussion questions they developed for homework, specifically analyzing how central ideas develop, interact, or build on one another in this section of the text (RL.11-12.2) as well as the use of figurative language (RL.11-12.4).

- Student questions may include:

How does Morrison’s description of Milkman’s thoughts on page 120 develop the central idea of freedom?

- Morrison develops the central idea of freedom by showing how Milkman views freedom to mean escaping from the circumstances created by his family’s history. Morrison describes how, “[a]bove all [Milkman] wanted to escape what he knew, escape the implications of what he had been told,” demonstrating that Milkman wants to escape his family’s history. Milkman does not want to accept responsibility for what he has been told by others: “None of that was his fault, and he didn’t want to have to think or be or do something about any of it.” Freedom, for Milkman at this point, is about escaping his family’s past and its present obligations.

How does Milkman react when he sees the deer on the seal of Michigan on page 122? How does this description convey a symbolic meaning of the seal?

- When Milkman sees the deer on the seal, he wonders if it is a buck or a doe, and remembers Guitar’s statement that “A man shouldn’t [kill a doe].” In remembering Guitar’s words, Milkman feels “something like remorse,” which suggests that Milkman views the seal symbolically: The deer is a symbol of either Hagar or his mother and the wolverine is a symbol of himself. Milkman may feel remorse about how his abandonment of Hagar is killing her as a wolverine might kill a deer. Milkman may also feel remorse for how he is following his mother as a predator stalks its prey.

What do Morrison’s specific word choices used to describe Macon’s reaction to Pilate’s doll suggest about Macon?

- When Macon discovers the doll that Pilate put on his chair to intimidate him into leaving Ruth alone, he “knocked” the doll from the chair and “pushed” it into the bathroom and “doused” it with alcohol and burned it “nine separate” times (p. 132). Morrison’s strong verb choices and her description of Macon burning the doll nine times emphasize how frightened Macon is of the doll and by extension Pilate’s supernatural powers.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

- If student discussion is rich, text-dependent, and building toward the assessment prompt, consider extending the discussions beyond the allotted time. Then lead a brief whole-class discussion using any additional Reading and Discussion questions necessary to ensure

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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 in their groups. Instruct students to continue to annotate the text as they discuss (W.11-12.9.a).

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Students may use their Central Ideas and Motifs Tracking Tools to record the development of central ideas and motifs that they identify and discuss.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding question to support students throughout this lesson:

How do Morrison’s word choices develop two central ideas in these excerpts?

Instruct students to refer to pages 123-126 (from “Milkman leaned against a tree and waited” to “what harm did I do you on my knees?”) for evidence to support their responses as they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definition of *wanly*.

- 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 *wanly* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definition of *obscene*.
 - Students write the definition of *obscene* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

How does Milkman describe his mother when he discovers she is visiting the gravesite of her father? How does his description develop the central idea of identity?

- Student responses should include:
 - Once Milkman discovers why his mother visits the gravesite, the view he has of her from his father is confirmed: “all his father had told him was true. She was a silly, selfish, queer, faintly obscene woman” (p. 123). Milkman takes his father’s view of his mother as a strange woman.

- As Milkman thinks about his strange mother, he feels “abused” and asks himself, “Why couldn’t anybody in his whole family just be normal?” (p. 123), emphasizing that his family’s identities as abnormal individuals “abuse[s]” him or affects his own identity.

***How does Ruth’s use of the word “small” (p. 124) help her explain herself to Milkman? How does her use of language develop the central idea of identity?**

- Student responses should include:
 - Ruth tells her son that she is a “small woman.” She explains, “I don’t mean little; I mean small, and I’m small because I was pressed small.” She tells Milkman that she was “pressed small” by the big house she lived in and by the fact that she was not able to make friends because her schoolmates only wanted to “touch [her] dresses and [her] white silk stockings,” which made her feel different and separate from her peers (p. 124). She explains that her father, despite being the only one “who ever really cared whether [she] lived or died” also made her feel “small” by the way he raised her to be different from her peers (p. 124).
 - Ruth uses the word “small” to explain her identity to Milkman. Ruth’s father’s dominating influence on her life was the only kind of love she knew, so it is difficult for her to give up his love and be her own person. Ruth’s story of how she was “pressed small” shows how her past and her relationship with her father have formed her current identity.

How does Ruth’s explanation of her visit to her father’s gravesite further develop the importance of storytelling in the text?

- Ruth explains her version of her father’s death because she knows that Macon has told Milkman “only what was flattering to him[self]” (p. 124). Ruth’s version of the story contradicts Macon’s version, demonstrating that storytelling is a way for people to craft an identity, a version of themselves that makes them look favorable to others.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct students to refer to pages 126-129 (from “That was the beginning. Now it was all going to end” to “Like this time when she turned the doorknob of Guitar’s little bachelor room”) 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 *lethargy*, *dissipated*, *forays*, and *manifestation*.

- 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 *lethargy*, *dissipated*, *forays*, and *manifestation* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definition of *thwarted*.
 - Students write the definition of *thwarted* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

***How do Morrison’s specific word choices develop the central idea of love in pages 126-127?**

- Student responses may include:
 - Morrison describes the bitterness between Milkman’s father and mother “as smooth and fixed as steel” (p. 126), which suggests that Macon and Ruth’s loss of love is a weapon that has been sharpened by their negative interactions over time. This description develops the central idea of love as a strong and potentially dangerous force.
 - Morrison uses the violent images of a clenched fist and a knife to describe Hagar’s emotions regarding her loss of Milkman’s love: “the fist that had been just sitting in her chest since Christmas released its forefinger like the blade of a skinning knife” (p. 127). Hagar’s love for Milkman is violent, as “her heart beat[s] like a gloved fist against her ribs” (p. 127). Through these images, Morrison further develops the central idea of love as a violent and dangerous force.

What is a “graveyard love” (p. 128) according to the excerpt? How does this phrase further develop a central idea?

- Student answers should include:
 - According to the excerpt, “graveyard love” is a love that leads people to their own or another’s death.
 - The concept of graveyard love further develops the central idea that love is dangerous and may even lead to death. The men and women observing Hagar “haunt[ing]” the streets (p. 128), looking to kill Milkman, reflect on different examples of love that have driven men and women to insanity or murder. “The lengths to which lost love drove men and women never surprised” these onlookers, and they are grateful they do not have the same kind of “graveyard” or obsessive love (p. 128).

- The description of “graveyard love” develops the idea of community by showing how the onlookers choose to stay out of the way of Hagar’s “graveyard love.” The onlookers remark that Hagar has been “lifted” by love (p. 129), which is the kind of love that separates her from the community.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:

How do Hagar’s attempts to kill Milkman thus far clarify the meaning of the word *inept* on page 129? (L.11-12.4.a)

- Because Hagar has failed in various ways to kill Milkman, the word *inept* in the phrase “the world’s most inept killer” must mean “unskilled or clumsy.”

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct students to refer to pages 132-134 (from “When the baby was born the day after she stood in the snow” to “Lena had no idea she could move that fast”) for evidence to support their responses as they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definition of *malevolent*.

- 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 *malevolent* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

***How does Morrison describe Milkman in relation to Ruth on pages 132-133? How does this description further develop a central idea in the text?**

- Morrison describes Milkman as an object to Ruth. Ruth first sees Milkman “as a beautiful toy, a respite, a distraction, a physical pleasure” (p. 132). Later, he becomes “a plain on which ... she and her husband fought” (p. 132). In both these instances, Ruth considers Milkman as an object, which further develops the central idea of love by demonstrating how for Ruth love is about possessing others.

***How does Morrison describe Ruth’s reaction to learning that Hagar wants to kill Milkman? How does this description further develop a central idea?**

- Student responses may include:

- Morrison describes Ruth's reaction to learning that Hagar wants to kill Milkman as forcing her to pay attention to the world outside her home. Morrison uses figurative language to describe how the "world open[s] up for [Ruth] like one of her imperial tulips" (p. 133). Ruth had been concerned primarily with her "own misery" (p. 133), but the danger posed to her son makes her see the community around her.
- Ruth's reaction further develops the central idea of love by showing that love can lead one to consider the outside world and therefore become less selfish. Morrison uses figurative language to describe the world like a tulip "reveal[ing] its evil yellow pistil" (p. 133), suggesting that the world seems evil to Ruth, but she is willing to confront it because of her love for Milkman.

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:

Choose one of the excerpts discussed in this lesson (pages 123-126, 126-129, or 132-134). How does Morrison's use of figurative language develop two central ideas in this excerpt?

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 134-151 of *Song of Solomon* (from "Her passions were narrow but deep" to

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“Pilate was making deliberately long to keep Ruth’s mind off Hagar”). Also, instruct students to develop 2-3 discussion questions focusing on how central ideas develop, interact, or build on one another in the text (RL.11-12.2) and prepare possible answers to their questions for discussion.

- Students follow along.

Homework

Read and annotate pages 134-151 of *Song of Solomon* (from “Her passions were narrow but deep” to “Pilate was making deliberately long to keep Ruth’s mind off Hagar”). Also, develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on how central ideas develop, interact, or build on one another in the text and prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.