

## 12 LC

## Lesson 24

## Introduction

In this lesson, students analyze the conclusion of *Song of Solomon*, pages 334-337 (from “She wouldn’t set foot on an airplane” to “If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it”). In this excerpt, Milkman and Pilate return to Solomon’s Leap to bury the remains of Milkman’s grandfather, and Guitar confronts Milkman. Students analyze the excerpt by focusing on the structural choices Morrison makes at the end of the novel. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: Analyze how Morrison’s choice to leave the ending ambiguous contributes to the overall meaning or aesthetic impact of the novel.

For homework, students read “Ebos Landing” by Timothy Powell and respond briefly in writing to a prompt. Also, students review their notebooks for recurring central ideas, motifs, and story elements they have consistently noted or found interesting. In addition, students organize or code their notes to identify references to structure, character development, and central ideas. Additionally, students note any remaining questions and observations they may have about the text and be prepared to discuss the questions with the class.

## Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RL.11-12.5	Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
Addressed 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).
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.)
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, b	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. 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> ).

## 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.

- Analyze how Morrison's choice to leave the ending ambiguous contributes to the overall meaning or aesthetic impact of the novel.

**High Performance Response(s)**

A High Performance Response should:

- Analyze how Morrison's choice to leave the ending ambiguous contributes to the overall meaning or aesthetic impact of the novel (e.g., By leaving the ending of the novel ambiguous, Morrison explores what it means to be free and the different ways to achieve freedom. At the end of the novel, Milkman realizes that "[w]ithout ever leaving the ground, [Pilate] could fly" (p. 336). Milkman's new understanding of Pilate suggests that he has learned that it is possible to be free without leaving others behind. Through Pilate's example, Milkman realizes he must also "leap[]" for himself (p. 337). His decision to jump toward Guitar demonstrates that he understands what his great-grandfather, Shalimar, knew: that "if you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it" (p. 337). The meaning of this sentence is ambiguous, but it suggests that Milkman is able to finally "fly," or achieve freedom. By leaving ambiguous what happens next, Morrison shows that whatever happens after the leap "d[oes] not matter" (p. 337) because the real revelation is in Milkman discovering his own path to freedom.).

## Vocabulary

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

- lodestar (n.) - a star that shows the way

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

- interment (n.) - the act of burying a dead person

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

- reconciliation (n.) - the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement
- tourniquets (n.) - bandages, strips of cloth, etc., that are tied tightly around an injured arm or leg to stop or slow the bleeding from a wound
- fleet (adj.) - very fast

## Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<b>Standards &amp; Text:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards: RL.11-12.5, RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.4, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.4.a, b</li> <li>• Text: <i>Song of Solomon</i> by Toni Morrison, pages 334-337</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

- Student copies of the Central Ideas and Motifs Tracking Tool (refer to 12 LC Lesson 3) (optional) —students may need additional blank copies
- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 12 LC Lesson 1) (optional)

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- Copies of “Ebos Landing” by Timothy Powell for each student (<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/ebos-landing>)

## 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.11-12.5. In this lesson, students read the conclusion of *Song of Solomon*, analyzing how Morrison’s choice to leave the ending ambiguous contributes to the meaning and aesthetic impact of the text.

- 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 and annotate pages 334-337 of *Song of Solomon*. Also, develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on the development of characters through the use of language and structural choices, 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 focusing on how Morrison develops characters through the use of language and structural choices (RL.11-12.3, RL.11-12.4, RL.11-12.5).

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- Student questions may include:

**What does Pilate’s reaction to the journey south suggest about her character?**

- Pilate “seem[s] happy now” (p. 334) as opposed to how she felt after Hagar’s death. Also, “[p]eace circle[s]” Pilate (p. 334), suggesting that she has found resolution in the idea of burying her father’s remains at Solomon’s Leap.

**Why was Lena “civil” (p. 334) to Milkman? What does this civility suggest about the relationship between Milkman and his sisters?**

- Lena acts civil to Milkman “since Corinthians ha[s] moved to a small house in Southside, which she share[s] with Porter” (p. 334). The fact that Corinthians now lives with Porter softens Lena’s attitude toward Milkman. However, she remains as “unforgiving as ever” to Milkman (p. 334), suggesting their relationship has improved but is not completely harmonious.
- 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 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 the questions below for students to discuss. 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 questions to support students throughout this lesson:

**How is the ending of the novel uncertain? How does the ending affect the meaning and beauty of the text?**

Instruct students to refer to pages 334-336 of *Song of Solomon* (from “She wouldn’t set foot on an airplane” to “If I’d a knowed more, I would a loved more”) for evidence to support their responses as they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

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

**How do Milkman’s thoughts about Hagar on page 335 further develop his character?**

- Milkman’s thoughts show a change in Milkman because he now recognizes his mistakes and acknowledges that “regret would always outweigh the things he was proud of having done. Hagar was dead and he had not loved her one bit.” Thus, Milkman takes responsibility for having destroyed Hagar.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** To support student’s understanding, consider posing the following scaffolding questions:

How does the description of Pilate and Milkman’s search “for an area of earth ... large enough” (p. 335) help define the word *interment*? (L.11-12.4.a) How do word parts in the word *interment* confirm this meaning? (L.11-12.4.b)

- Milkman and Pilate “looked ... for an area ... large enough for the interment” and, in the next sentence, Milkman “dug” in that area. The word *interment* also begins with the word parts *in-* and *ter-*, which means “earth,” and ends with *-ment*, which makes a verb into a noun. So the word *interment* likely means “the act of putting in the earth” or “burial.”

**Consider what the repetition of the ginger smell has represented through the text (pp. 184-185, 239, 250-251, 287, and 320). What does the ginger smell represent in this excerpt (p. 332)?**

- Student responses may include:
  - Throughout the text, the ginger smell has represented promise, the promise that “the things [people] hungered for were right at hand” (p. 185), such as the promise of gold for Milkman and Guitar and then the promise of family history in Susan Byrd’s house.
  - In this excerpt, Morrison describes how “[a] deep sigh escaped from the sack” (p. 335) that is filled with Pilate’s father’s bones. “Ginger, a spicy sugared ginger smell, enveloped” Milkman and Pilate (p. 335). The word “sigh” suggests relief or contentment with the “kept promise” to not “fly off and leave a body” (p. 332), or the safe return home for Pilate’s father. Thus, the ginger smell represents the fulfilled promise of returning home.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** To support students' understanding, consider instructing them to reread the excerpts that include the ginger smell, and lead a brief whole-class discussion about what the ginger smell represents in each excerpt.
  - Student responses may include:
    - The ginger smell first appears when Milkman and Guitar are stealing the bag from Pilate's house. Milkman and Guitar think the smell "was the way freedom smelled, or justice, or luxury, or vengeance" (p. 185). The smell represents promise, the promise that "the things [people] hungered for were right at hand" (p. 185).
    - The ginger smell appears when Milkman meets Circe, replacing the stench of decay with a smell that invites Milkman into the house. The smell is "[li]ke ginger root—pleasant, clean, seductive" and Milkman is "[s]urprised and charmed by it" (p. 239), suggesting the promise of information about the gold.
    - The smell appears to Milkman "as he put his foot on the first stone" (p. 250) just below the cave where he hopes the gold is buried. Milkman identifies the ginger smell as the same smell that appeared when he was stealing Pilate's sack "that hung like a kept promise from her ceiling" (p. 251). Thus, Milkman associates the smell with the promise of gold.
    - When Milkman visits with Susan Byrd, "the smell of gingerbread baking" (p. 287) greets him both times. During these visits, Milkman learns important details about his family history, so the smell that once promised freedom through gold now promises freedom through family identity.

**What is in the "snuffbox" (p. 335) that Pilate buries along with her father? How does the snuffbox further develop a central idea in the text?**

- "Sing's snuffbox" contains "the single word Jake ever wrote" (p. 335), which is Pilate's name. The snuffbox develops the central idea of identity because it connects Pilate to her mother, father, and grandfather. The snuffbox is described as "Sing's," which Pilate has just learned is her mother's name. Also in this description, Pilate's father is referred to by his given name, "Jake," rather than "Macon," the name that the drunk white soldier gave him. Jake's given name recalls the story of Solomon, Jake's legendary father who flew away from the spot where Jake is now buried. The names related to the snuffbox connect Pilate to the true identities of her family members.

**\*How does Pilate's "wish" (p. 336) further develop a central idea from the text?**

- Student responses may include:
  - Pilate's "wish" develops the central idea of love. Pilate says that she wishes she'd known more people. She says, "I would of loved 'em all. If I'd a knowed more, I



would a loved more” (p. 336). Pilate’s last words demonstrate her generosity and willingness to love others unconditionally.

- Pilate’s “wish” to have “known more” and “loved more” people also develops the idea of community in the text. Although Pilate has lived on the edge of her community for most of her life, she still has the desire to know and love others and accept them, even if they have not accepted her.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

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Instruct students to refer to pages 336-337 of *Song of Solomon* (from “Milkman bent low to see her face” to “If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it”) 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 *lodestar*.

- 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 *lodestar* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *tourniquets* and *fleet*.
  - Students write the definitions of *tourniquets* and *fleet* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

**How do Morrison’s specific word choices in describing Pilate’s death demonstrate Milkman’s reactions?**

- Student responses may include:
  - Morrison describes how Milkman “pressed his fingers against the skin as if to force the life back in her, back into the place it was escaping from” (p. 336), suggesting that he is desperate to reverse Pilate’s death. The word “force” shows that Milkman is working against something powerful. The word “escaping” suggests that there is little hope for his efforts.
  - Morrison describes how Milkman “[f]rantically ... thought of tourniquets and could even hear the rip of cloth he should have been tearing” (p. 336). The word “frantically” shows how desperate Milkman feels to save Pilate. Morrison

emphasizes his desperation in his paralysis: he can only hear “the rip of cloth” for a tourniquet, but he cannot actually tear the cloth because he is so desperate.

**\*How does the song Milkman sings for Pilate further develop the motif of flight in the text?**

- Milkman singing the song to Pilate demonstrates how much he loves her and does not want her to die and “leave” or fly from him (p. 336). Milkman has come to realize the importance Pilate has had in his life, protecting him and providing for him. Without her, he would have been “choke[d]” and been “yoke[d]” (p. 336) by his father, prison, and his own selfish life choices. In Pilate’s death, Milkman experiences what it feels like to be left behind when someone flies off.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle with this question, consider reminding them of the other excerpts in which this song appears in the text (pp. 5, 9, 49, and 303). Then, consider posing the following scaffolding questions:

**What do the songs “Sugarman” or “Sugargirl” suggest about the motif of flight and the central idea of freedom in the text?**

- The songs are about a person flying off and leaving others behind. The songs are sung from the perspective of the people left behind, so the song develops the central idea of freedom by emphasizing that those who fly off to find freedom leave behind people who are “choke[d]” and “yoke[d]” (p. 336) by their loss of that person or their continued suffering without freedom.

**How does Milkman change the song for Pilate?**

- Milkman changes the lyrics from “Sugarman” to “Sugargirl” (p. 336).

**What does this change in lyrics suggest about the song’s meaning?**

- The change in lyrics changes the song’s meaning from being about a man to being about a woman. Milkman personalizes the song for Pilate, demonstrating how much he does not want her to die and “leave” him (p. 336).

**What is the “shiny” (p. 336) object the bird takes from the grave? What does the bird’s act represent?**

- Student responses should include:
  - The bird takes the snuffbox containing Pilate’s name, as it is the only “shiny” item in the “new grave” (p. 336).

- The bird flies away with Pilate's name, which was the "single thing Jake ever wrote" (p. 335), and which she has worn her whole adult life as a symbol of her identity. Pilate's name "fl[y]ing away" (p. 336) suggests that even in death, Pilate could fly, or that death was another form of flight for Pilate.

**\*How does Pilate's death develop the central idea of freedom?**

- Pilate's death develops the central idea of freedom because it causes Milkman to develop a new idea of freedom. Milkman realizes "why he loved [Pilate] so," because "[w]ithout ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (p. 336). Milkman sees how freedom might be achieved even if one does not fly off and leave others. He knows that Pilate found freedom in "lov[ing] ... all" (p. 336) the people in her life, protecting Ruth, Milkman, Reba, and Hagar from the men who want to kill them. "Without leaving the ground" or leaving others behind, Pilate was free.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posing the following extension question to deepen students' understanding:

How does Pilate embody Guitar's idea that if you "wanna fly, you got to give up the [stuff] that weighs you down" (p. 179)?

- Student responses may include:
  - In the process of defining herself, Pilate "threw away every assumption she had learned and began at zero" (p. 149). She became a woman who "gave up, apparently, all interest in table manners or hygiene, but acquired a deep concern for and about human relationships" (p. 149). In other words, Pilate gave up social conventions that weighed her down and was therefore able to acquire "a deep concern for" people (p. 149), which was one way that she was able to fly.
  - Pilate also gave up material possessions, which also made her free to fly. Milkman describes her house as "the only one he knew that achieved comfort without one article of comfort in it" (p. 301). He lists all the "article[s] of comfort" Pilate gave up: "No soft worn-down chair, not a cushion or a pillow. No light switch, no water running free," yet Milkman knows "peace was there, energy, singing" (p. 301). Without material possessions, Pilate creates an environment of peace, where she and others could fly free.
- If necessary, direct students to the description of Pilate forming her adult identity on p. 149 and Milkman's description of Pilate's home on p. 301.

**\*Why does it "not matter" (p. 337) what happens between Milkman and Guitar?**

- It does “not matter” whether Guitar or Milkman “would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother” (p. 337), because Milkman is now free. He realizes what his great-grandfather, Shalimar, had: “if you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it” (p. 337). Whether Milkman falls or flies, whether he dies or kills Guitar, Milkman is finally free and therefore able to “fly,” which is more important than whatever events follow his leap.

**\*How does Milkman’s “leap” develop the central idea of freedom?**

- Milkman’s “leap” demonstrates that he is finally free. Throughout the novel, freedom for Milkman has meant flying off and leaving behind his family, Hagar, and his responsibilities. Through his journey south, Milkman has learned to accept his family members and his responsibility to them. Like Pilate, he has learned to “fly” without “leaving the ground” or leaving others behind. Therefore, Milkman is able to “leap” and “*ride*” the air, or “fly” free.

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:

**Analyze how Morrison’s choice to leave the ending ambiguous contributes to the overall meaning or aesthetic impact of the novel.**

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 “Ebos Landing” by Timothy Powell and respond briefly in writing to the following question:

**How does the information in the article “Ebos Landing” further develop central ideas from *Song of Solomon*?**

Also, instruct students to review their notebooks for recurring central ideas, motifs, and story elements in *Song of Solomon* they have consistently noted or found interesting. In addition, instruct students to organize or code their notes to identify references to structure, character development, and central ideas. Also, instruct students to note any remaining questions and observations they may have about the text and be prepared to discuss the questions with the class.

- Students follow along.

## Homework

Read “Ebos Landing” by Timothy Powell and respond briefly in writing to the following question:

**How does the information in the article “Ebos Landing” further develop central ideas from *Song of Solomon*?**

Also, review your notebooks for recurring central ideas, motifs, and story elements in *Song of Solomon* that you have consistently noted or found interesting. In addition, organize or code your notes to identify references to structure, character development, and central ideas. Note any remaining questions and observations you have about the text and be prepared to discuss the questions with the class.