

12 LC

Lesson 7

Introduction

In this lesson, students analyze pages 74-89 of *Song of Solomon* (from “Milkman sat on the edge of his bed” to “‘Somebody should have shot him.’ ‘What for? He was already Dead’”), in which Milkman struggles to make sense of his recent interactions with his family and recalls the incident that gave him his nickname. Students analyze the passage and pay particular attention to how the central ideas of identity and community develop. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: How do the ideas of community and identity interact and build on one another in this excerpt?

For homework, students read and annotate pages 90-112 of *Song of Solomon*. Also, students develop 2-3 questions focused on character development in this excerpt and prepare possible answers for discussion. In addition, students record any new questions that emerge during their reading and write answers to any earlier questions that they have resolved.

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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.
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).
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.

- How do the ideas of community and identity interact and build on one another in this excerpt?

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Analyze how the ideas of community and identity interact and build on one another in the excerpt (e.g., After Macon tells the story of his marriage, Milkman questions his place as a member of the Dead family, viewing his father as a “stranger” or an “alien” (p. 74) and his mother as “too insubstantial, too shadowy for [his] love” (p. 75). In an effort to make sense of his shifting family identity, Milkman sets out to find Guitar and discovers him in Tommy’s Barbershop, where the Southside men are “listening to the radio and muttering and shaking their heads” (p. 80) over the murder of Emmett Till. Milkman, however, has no interest in the death of “[a] young Negro boy [who] had been found stomped to death in Sunflower County, Mississippi” (p. 80). When Guitar tries to put Milkman’s concerns in a larger context by mentioning Till’s murder, Milkman responds, “Yeah, well ... I’m the one in trouble” (p. 88). Milkman’s response demonstrates that while he questions his identity as a member of Macon Dead’s family, he does not share the same concerns or identity as the African-American men in Southside. Therefore, Milkman remains isolated from both his family and his community.).

Vocabulary

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Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- vaporishness (n.) - quality of resembling steam; something insubstantial and transitory
- shrew (n.) - woman of violent temper and speech
- animation (n.) - lively or excited quality

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

- disassociated (adj.) - separated from someone or something
- atrocities (n.) - very cruel or terrible acts or actions

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

- maternal (adj.) - of or relating to a mother
- drudge (n.) - a person who does boring, difficult, or unpleasant work
- frail (adj.) - having less than a normal amount of strength or force; very weak
- deviousness (n.) - quality of being willing to lie and trick people in order to get what is wanted

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RL.11-12.2, RL.11-12.3, W.11-12.9.a, L.11-12.4.a • Text: <i>Song of Solomon</i> by Toni Morrison, pages 74-89 	
Learning Sequence: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda 2. Homework Accountability 3. Reading and Discussion 4. Quick Write 5. Motif Discussion 6. Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5% 2. 15% 3. 45% 4. 15% 5. 15% 6. 5%

Materials

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- 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)

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 standard for this lesson: RL.11-12.2. In this lesson, students analyze pages 74-89, in which Milkman struggles with his identity. Students pay particular attention to how the central ideas of community and identity interact with and build on each other in this excerpt.

- 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 74-89 of *Song of Solomon* and annotate for the development of central ideas. Also, develop 2-3 questions focused on Milkman's character development and prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.)

Instruct students to form pairs and discuss the questions they developed for homework, specifically analyzing Milkman's character development.

- Student questions may include:

What do Milkman's thoughts about his mother on page 75 suggest about his character?

- Student responses may include:
 - Milkman recognizes that he has no "love for his mother," believing that she is "too insubstantial, too shadowy for love." This comment suggests that Milkman does not see Ruth as a real or whole person, and so he cannot love her.
 - Milkman thinks of Ruth as someone who "seem[s] to know a lot and understand very little," words that also describe Milkman. Milkman has just received a great deal of information from his father, but he does not fully understand what his father has shared.
 - Milkman's thoughts about his mother are "new for him. Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own." The new understanding of Ruth as "a separate individual" suggests that until now Milkman has been entirely self-absorbed, able to see others only in relation to himself, not as people with their own concerns.

How does Milkman's memory of being nursed by his mother contribute to his character development?

- Student responses may include:
 - Milkman's memory of being nursed by his mother suggests that Milkman is confused about his own history and how it has shaped his identity. He questions what he knows about his past, unable to distinguish reality from illusion. As he walks, he realizes that that "[h]e had remembered something. Or believed he remembered something. Maybe he'd dreamed it and it was the dream he remembered" (p. 77), demonstrating his confusion about his history.
 - Milkman's memory of being nursed by his mother causes him to feel isolated. As Milkman attempts to sort out the confusing memories that are emerging, "[c]old sweat [breaks] out on his neck. People jostle[] him trying to get past the solitary man standing in their way ... He walked on, hardly noticing the people pushing past him, their annoyed, tight faces" (p. 77). Milkman's efforts to unravel his past isolate him from those around him and their current concerns.

- 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

45%

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

How do the central ideas of identity and community interact in this excerpt?

Instruct students to refer to pages 74-80 (from “Milkman sat on the edge of his bed” to “he had slept with others, and was a Northerner visiting the South. His name was Till”) 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 *vaporishness* and *shrew*.

- 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 *vaporishness* and *shrew* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *maternal*, *drudge*, *frail*, and *deviousness*.
 - Students write the definitions of *maternal*, *drudge*, *frail*, and *deviousness* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

***How does Milkman describe his parents after hearing his father’s story? What does this description suggest about Milkman’s identity?**

- Student responses may include:

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- After hearing Macon's story, Milkman feels "disassociated" (p. 74) from the events of Macon's account and from his family, as though he has listened to the story of "a stranger" (p. 74). Milkman describes his father as "[t]he alien who had just walked out of his room" (pp. 74-75), suggesting that his father is someone he no longer recognizes or understands, and that his identity as "Macon Dead's boy" (p. 57) no longer fits him.
- Milkman now views his mother as "frail" and "too insubstantial, too shadowy for love" (p. 75). He realizes for the first time that his identity is quite separate from hers, noting, "Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own" (p. 75). This description demonstrates that until now, Milkman had viewed his mother as an extension of himself and that his identity was closely linked to hers.

How do Milkman's thoughts about love on pages 78-79 convey his understanding of his role in his family?

- Student responses may include:
 - Milkman's thoughts about love suggest that he is uncertain of his role in the family. He admits that he "never loved his mother" (pp. 78-79), but assumes that it is natural and that she should always have loved him. Milkman believes she has an "eternal love of him, love that he didn't even have to earn or deserve," but recognizes that this love is now "decomposing" (p. 79).
 - Milkman also reconsiders the love he has experienced in Pilate's house, which he viewed as "an extension of the love he had come to expect from his mother," but that he now "question[s]" (p. 79). Thus, he is no longer certain of his role within his family and is uncertain about where he belongs or who loves him.
 - Milkman reconsiders his relationship with his sisters, whom he had previously viewed as "the most tolerant and accommodating of all the women he knew" but whom he now describes as having "changed their faces and rimmed their eyes with red and charcoal dust" (p. 79), suggesting a distorted appearance that distances his sisters from him.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:

How does Milkman's description of his feelings towards his father help clarify the meaning of the word *disassociated* (p. 74)? (L.11-12.4.a)

- Milkman describes feeling as though his father is a "stranger" and refers to his father as "[t]he alien who had just walked out of the room," suggesting that he

feels separate and distant from his father. So the word *disassociated* might mean “separated from someone or something.”

***How does Milkman’s search for Guitar demonstrate the contrast between Milkman’s role and Guitar’s role in the community?**

- Milkman’s search for Guitar shows how Milkman is isolated from his community while Guitar is an active member of the community. Milkman walks alone in a crowd of people, “all going in the direction he was coming from” (p. 78), until he reaches Tommy’s Barbershop, where he sees Guitar, along with “several other men,” intently “listening to something” on the radio (p. 79). Guitar, who is part of the group of men, silently directs Milkman to “come in but to be quiet” (p. 79). The gesture suggests that while Guitar is considered an equal to the other men in the barbershop, Milkman remains outside of the community and needs an invitation.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posing the following extension question to deepen students’ understanding:

What does Milkman’s walk “toward Southside” (p. 76) suggest about his relationship with that community?

- Milkman’s walk “toward Southside” suggests that Milkman is not really a part of the community. As Milkman walks he notices everyone else is “going in the direction he was coming from” (p. 78). The description of Milkman, walking through the Southside community, but in the opposite direction of everyone else, suggests that he is isolated and struggling to find his place in the community.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct students to refer to pages 80-83 (from “Railroad Tommy was trying to keep the noise down” to “His animation had died down, leaving its traces in his eyes”) for evidence to support their answers as they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definition of *animation*.

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

***What does the discussion about Till demonstrate about the Southside community's concerns?**

- Student responses may include:
 - The men's discussion of Till's murder suggests that the Southside community is concerned about justice for African Americans. Porter's prediction that the murder might not be reported in the paper because "[t]hey don't put that kind of news in no white paper" (p. 80) demonstrates the belief that injustice is so deep that white papers do not care enough to report about an African-American murder by racists in Mississippi. Porter suggests that if the police catch the murderers, whites will "give 'em a big party and a medal" (p. 82), again emphasizing the belief that justice for Till is unlikely. Guitar supports this position when he claims, "Ain't no law for no colored man except the ones sends him to the chair" (p. 82), meaning that interactions between law enforcement and African Americans are limited to instances when judges condemn African Americans to death, using the electric chair.
 - The men's discussion of Till's murder suggests that the Southside community is disturbed by the lack of respect for African Americans. Freddie's observation, "Ain't no black men in Bilbo country" conveys his belief that whites (the people in "Bilbo country") do not view African-American males as "men" (p. 81).
 - The men's discussion of Till's murder suggests that the members of the Southside community have concerns regarding their own safety, even though they are expected to ensure America's safety. One of the men comments that Till's father may have served in the army "in the Pacific somewhere" and if he wasn't wounded in action, "them crackers will see to it" (p. 82). The comment reflects the men's belief that whites will continue to inflict violence on African Americans, no matter what sacrifices they make to serve their country.

What do the men's "tales" (p. 82) suggest about the role of storytelling in the Southside community?

- Student responses may include:
 - The men use storytelling to turn "atrocities" resulting from encounters with bigoted whites into humorous tales that cause them to laugh "uproariously" (p. 82), allowing them to distance themselves from the prejudicial events that are so painful.
 - The men use storytelling to regain some of the respect damaged in the "humiliat[ing]" encounters with bigots (p. 82). The men's accounts of the "atrocities" they have experienced include stories "about the speed with which

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they had run, the pose they had assumed, the ruse they had invented to escape or decrease some threat to their manliness” (p. 82) The stories display the men’s abilities to use wit or strength in dangerous and humiliating situations with prejudiced white adversaries.

- The men use storytelling to teach others how to survive the “atrocities” of racial confrontations (p. 82). Through storytelling, the men are able to share what they have learned about surviving in a hostile, bigoted environment by assuming a “pose,” or false impression, or inventing a “ruse,” or trick, to escape a dangerous situation (p. 82).
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:

How does the description of the events the men relate in their stories help clarify the meaning of the word *atrocities* (p. 82)? (L.11-12.4.a)

- The men’s stories, evoked by the reference to “them soldiers in 1918,” are a “litany of personal humiliation, outrage, and anger” that posed “some threat to their manliness, their humanness,” so the word *atrocities* must mean “very cruel or terrible acts or actions.”

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct students to refer to pages 83-88 (from “Milkman waited until he could get his attention” to “I ain’t going home, Guitar. Hear me?”) for evidence to support their responses as they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

How does this excerpt further develop the relationship between Milkman and Guitar?

- Student responses may include:
 - This excerpt develops the close friendship between Milkman and Guitar. Guitar empathizes with Milkman as Milkman explains the fight at his house, saying, “I can understand how you feel” (p. 84). Additionally, Guitar validates Milkman’s response to his father’s attack on Ruth, acknowledging, “A man shouldn’t do that. You couldn’t help what you felt” (p. 85).
 - The conversation suggests that Milkman views Guitar as a useful support, but he is not interested in Guitar as an individual with separate concerns or interests. When Guitar begins to explain his source of sympathy by telling a story about when he was a boy in Florida, Milkman complains, “[D]o we have to hear about Alabama

again?” (p. 84). His response indicates that he has heard similar stories earlier but has not listened carefully enough to know where Guitar spent his childhood.

How does Guitar’s story about hunting develop a central idea in the text?

- Guitar’s story about hunting develops the central idea of identity by providing a more complex consideration of what it means to be a man, which is a concern for Milkman as he seeks to understand his identity. Guitar agrees with Milkman that it is wrong to harm a helpless creature; speaking of the doe he killed, Guitar reflects, “A man shouldn’t do that” (p. 85). Rather than feeling pride and accomplishment as a hunter, Guitar confesses, “I felt ... bad” (p. 85). Guitar’s story suggests that being a “man” includes the risk of resorting to unnecessary violence.

***What does Milkman’s response to the Till’s murder suggest about his identity as a member of the Southside community?**

- Milkman’s response to Till’s murder suggests that his identity as a member of the Southside community is superficial. When Guitar uses the example of Till to demonstrate why Milkman should not let “things ... get[] to [him],” Milkman dismisses Till’s murder, saying, “I’m the one in trouble” (p. 88). Milkman focuses instead on his recent fight with his father and his dislike of his last name. Milkman’s inability to understand his own problems in relation to the broader community suggests that he is not really part of the Southside community and is unable to view its problems and concerns as his own.

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 do the ideas of community and identity interact and build on one another 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.

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- 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: Motif Discussion

15%

Instruct students to form small groups. Instruct students to refer to the text, their Quick Writes, and their notes to identify and explain the function of motifs that they have noticed throughout the text so far.

- If necessary, remind students that a *motif* is “an image or concept that is repeated throughout a work of literature. Motifs may have symbolic meaning or contribute to the development of central ideas in a text.”
- Student responses may include:
 - Flight: Robert Smith decides to “fly away on [his] own wings” (pp. 2, 6-7, 9); Pilate sings, “O Sugarman done fly away” (pp. 6, 49); Milkman expresses an initial interest in flying as a small boy (pp. 8-9). The motif of flight emphasizes one way in which the characters in the novel seek to escape the pressures of life in a racist society.
 - Naming: the history of “Not Doctor Street” (pp. 2-5); the explanation for “No Mercy Hospital” (p. 4); the story of how Milkman got his name (pp. 13-17); the story of how Macon’s father got the family name “Dead” (pp. 18, 53-54); the tradition of using “the blind selection of names from the Bible for every child other than the first male” in Macon’s family (p. 18); the story of Pilate’s name (pp. 18-19); Milkman’s feelings about his name when he first meets Pilate and wonders “why he was suddenly so defensive—so possessive about his name” (p. 38); Guitar’s explanation for how he got his name (p. 45). The motif of naming develops the central idea of identity: names are central to understanding the history and character of both places and people in the novel.
 - Storytelling: the stories the poor tell Mr. Smith to avoid making insurance payments (p. 8); the reference to “the secret power Rumpelstiltskin had given Ruth” when she is nursing Milkman (p. 13); Pilate’s story about her childhood with Macon, when they “just walked around and lived in them woods” (pp. 40-43); Pilate’s story about the man who died when he fell off the imaginary cliff (p. 41); the story of Reba’s diamond (pp. 46-47); Macon’s story of his childhood (pp. 51-52); Macon’s use of the story about the farmer who saved a snake as a warning against getting

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close to Pilate (p. 54); Guitar's story about why he does not like sweets (p. 61); Ruth's use of a dinnertime story to anger Macon (pp. 64-67); Macon's use of his story about Ruth and her father to gain Milkman's support (pp. 70-74); the "tales of atrocities" or stories the men in the barbershop tell (p. 82); Guitar's story about hunting the deer (pp. 84-85)). The motif of storytelling develops multiple central ideas throughout the novel, including freedom and identity. Storytelling also demonstrates the power of language and develops the central idea of identity by emphasizing the importance of knowing one's own history and the history of one's community.

- The supernatural: the women say Milkman will "see ghosts" because Ruth did not dry his caul and make "him some tea from it to drink" (pp. 9-10); Pilate's account of her father's death and how he "came back one day" (pp. 40-43); Pilate's story about the man who "felt like he was about to fall off a cliff," even though he was standing in his own kitchen (p. 41). The motif of the supernatural suggests multiple realities and ways of understanding the world.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle to identify or trace motifs, consider providing groups of students a motif and asking them to trace that motif throughout the text.

Instruct students to note Morrison's use of motifs as they continue reading the novel. Students will have opportunities throughout the module to consider the function of motifs in the novel.

Activity 6: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to read and annotate pages 90-112 of *Song of Solomon* (from "Once again he did his Christmas shopping" to "He flashed his gold merrily and was gone"). Also, instruct students to develop 2-3 questions focused on character development in this excerpt (RL.11-12.3) and prepare possible responses to their questions for discussion.

Additionally, remind students to record any new questions that emerge during their reading and to write answers to any earlier questions that they have resolved.

- Students follow along.

Homework

Read and annotate pages 90-112 of *Song of Solomon* (from “Once again he did his Christmas shopping” to “He flashed his gold merrily and was gone”). Also, develop 2-3 questions focused on character development in this excerpt and prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.

Additionally, record any new questions that emerge during your reading and write answers to any earlier questions that you have resolved.