

12 LC

Lesson 26

Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze Toni Morrison's Foreword to *Song of Solomon*, pages xi-xiv (from "I have long despised artists' chatter about muses" to "without ever leaving the ground she could fly. My father laughed"), in which Morrison offers insights into her writing process as well as interpretations of key aspects of her novel. Students work in pairs to analyze Morrison's purpose for writing the Foreword, and consider how the style and content of the Foreword contribute to its power and beauty. Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson: Determine Morrison's purpose for writing the Foreword and analyze how style and content contribute to its power or beauty.

For homework, students respond briefly in writing to the following question: To what extent is mercy a central idea of *Song of Solomon*? Also, students read pages 69-71 of "Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" and annotate for ways in which the article relates to their 12 LC Second Interim Assessment responses.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RI.11-12.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.
Addressed Standard(s)	
W. 11-12.9.b	<p>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>b. Apply <i>grades 11-12 Reading standards</i> to literary nonfiction (e.g., "Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy [e.g., <i>The Federalist</i>, presidential addresses]").</p>
L. 11-12.4.a	<p>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 11-12 reading and content</i>, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <p>a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p>

Assessment

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Assessment(s)

Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students respond to the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.

- Determine Morrison's purpose for writing the Foreword and analyze how style and content contribute to its power or beauty.

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Determine Morrison's purpose for writing the Foreword (e.g., Morrison's intimate tone, which she establishes by writing in the first person and sharing personal details such as her "unmanageable sadness" (p. xi) over her father's death, suggests that one of Morrison's reasons for writing the Foreword is to connect directly with her readers on an emotional level.).
- Analyze how the style and content of the Foreword contribute to its power or beauty (e.g., Morrison's choices to use an intimate tone and share personal information about her father's death contribute to the power of her Foreword because these choices connect her discussion of her novel to a personal and traumatic event in her life. For example, Morrison's final reflection that the "conundrum" at the end of the novel made her father "laugh[]" (p. xiv) contributes to the power of her Foreword because she ends the Foreword, which began as a reflection on her own "unmanageable sadness" (p. xi) at her father's passing, on a note of joy at his continued participation in her life as a muse.).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- locus (n.) - a center or source, as of activities or power
- extemporaneous (adj.) - made up or done without special preparation, usually used to describe public speaking
- cessation (n.) - a temporary or complete stopping; discontinuance
- contrition (n.) - sincere penitence or remorse
- repudiated (v.) - refused to accept or support (something); rejected (something or someone)

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

- muses (n.) - the goddesses or the powers regarded as inspiring a poet, artist, thinker, or the like
- conundrum (n.) - a confusing or difficult problem

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

- protagonist (n.) - the leading character, hero, or heroine of a drama or other literary work
- memento (n.) - something that is kept as a reminder of a person, place, or thing
- witty (adj.) - funny and clever
- de-domesticate (v.) - to make something unrelated to the household or the family
- overtly (adv.) - in a way that is easily seen; not kept secret or hidden
- saga-like (adj.) - like a modern heroic narrative resembling the Icelandic Saga
- inversion (n.) - a change in the position, order, or relationship of things so that they are the opposite of what they had been
- erstwhile (adv.) - in the past

Lesson Agenda/Overview

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Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RI.11-12.6, W.11-12.9.b, L.11-12.4.a Text: <i>Song of Solomon</i> by Toni Morrison, pages xi-xiv 	
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 Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 12 LC Lesson 1) (optional)
- Copies of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” by A. Leslie Harris for each student

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: RI.11-12.6. In this lesson, students read pages xi-xiv of *Song of Solomon* (from “I have long despised artists’ chatter about muses” to “without ever leaving the ground she could fly. My father laughed”) and analyze Morrison’s purpose for writing the Foreword. Students also consider how the style and content of the Foreword contribute to its power and beauty.

- 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 Toni Morrison’s Foreword to *Song of Solomon* and develop 2-3 discussion questions focused on Morrison’s purpose for writing the Foreword and prepare possible answers to your questions for discussion.)

Instruct students to talk in pairs about the discussion questions they developed for homework, specifically focusing on Morrison’s purpose for writing the Foreword (RL.11-12.6).

- Student questions may include:

What does the way in which Morrison begins and ends her Foreword suggest about her purpose?

- Morrison begins and ends her Foreword with reflections on her father. She introduces her father as her “muse[]” on p. xi, and concludes her Foreword with the reflection that her “father laughed” at her novel’s final “conundrum” (p. xiv). Morrison’s choice to begin and end her Foreword with reflections on her father suggests that Morrison sees this Foreword as a way to remember and pay tribute to her father, both as an important figure in her life and in the writing of *Song of Solomon*.

What tone does Morrison establish in the Foreword’s introduction? What does this tone suggest about her purpose for writing the Foreword?

- Student responses should include:
 - Morrison establishes a personal or intimate tone in the opening paragraphs of her Foreword. She writes in the first person from the opening line, “I have long despised” (p. xi), and discloses personal information about her feelings, such as her “unmanageable sadness” (p. xi) over her father’s death. She also shares intimate details about her family members, such as her explanation that “each of [her father’s] four children was convinced that he loved her or him best” (p. xi).
 - Morrison’s personal and intimate tone suggests that her purpose for writing the Foreword is to connect directly with her readers. Additionally, her willingness to discuss personal details about her life indicates that she wants readers to understand where she is coming from.
- 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 pairs. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss. Instruct students to continue to annotate the text as they read and discuss (W. 11-12.9.b).

- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider posting or projecting the following guiding questions to support students throughout this lesson:

How is Morrison’s writing in the Foreword beautiful and powerful?

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Instruct student pairs to read pages xi-xii of *Song of Solomon* (from “I have long despised artists’ chatter about muses” to “taken by the Solomon of the title”) and they discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definition of *locus*.

- Students may be familiar with this word. Consider asking students to volunteer a definition before providing it to the group.
 - Students write the definition of *locus* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *protagonist*, *memento*, *witty*, *de-domesticate*, *overtly*, and *saga-like*.
 - Students write the definitions of *protagonist*, *memento*, *witty*, *de-domesticate*, *overtly*, *chronology*, and *saga-like* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

What does Morrison’s description of her muse suggest about her creative process?

- Student responses should include:
 - Morrison describes her muse as the voice of her dead father. After his death, Morrison “deliberately sought his advice for writing the novel” (p. xii), and his “answer[s]” to her questions were her “muse, insight, inspiration” (p. xii). The description suggests that Morrison’s creative process was inspired by her deceased father, or perhaps guided by a force for which she cannot provide a rational explanation.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding questions:

What words or phrases suggest who the “I” is in the first sentence of the Foreword?

- The “I” in the Foreword is Toni Morrison, because she references “writing *Song of Solomon*” in the second paragraph on p. xi.

How does Toni Morrison’s use of figurative language on page xii clarify the meaning of *muse* in this context? (L.11-12.4.a)

- Morrison’s description of a *muse* as a “bright angel” (p. xii) suggests that a *muse* is a voice that is divinely inspired. Morrison’s description of a *muse* as “the dark finger that guides” (p. xii) suggests that a *muse* like a “finger” points a writer in a direction, but the *muse* is “dark” and therefore difficult to see or invisible.

How does Morrison's discussion of *muses* contribute to the power or beauty of her Foreword?

- Student responses may include:
 - Morrison explains that after her father's death she "deliberately sought his advice for writing the novel" (p. xii). His "answer[s]" to her questions were her "muse, insight, inspiration" (p. xii). The idea that Morrison spoke to her father after his death, and that these conversations served as her creative inspiration for *Song of Solomon*, is powerful because it suggests that this book is a deeply personal one for Morrison.
 - Morrison's discussion of *muses* contributes to the beauty of her Foreword because she uses poetic, figurative language to describe *muses*, such as "the dark finger that guides" and "bright angel" (p. xii). These descriptions emphasize the mysterious and sacred nature of Morrison's inspiration for *Song of Solomon*.

How does Morrison's description of the perspective of *Song of Solomon* relate to her explanation of her muse?

- Morrison states that *Song of Solomon* is written from a masculine perspective and required her to make "a radical shift in imagination from a female locus to a male one" (p. xii). Morrison was able to shift from her feminine perspective to a masculine perspective because of her continued connection to her father, and his answers to her questions about "what ... the men" he knew were "really like" (p. xii).
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing the following extension question to deepen students' understanding:

Do you agree with Morrison's interpretation that her novel is "de-domesticate[d]" (p. xii)? Why or why not? Use evidence from the text to support your response.

- Student responses may include:
 - Morrison's interpretation of her novel as "de-domesticated" is correct because Milkman's main journey or "travel" (p. xii) takes place after he decides to leave his home. Also, Morrison emphasizes the idea of "flight" (p. xii) throughout the novel, suggesting that the major force that drives Milkman is his need to leave home.
 - Morrison's interpretation of her novel as "de-domesticated" is not correct. Although many important events in the novel take place outside of the home, the home still plays an important role in the lives of Morrison's characters. For example, Milkman's visit to Pilate's home is "the first time in his life that he

remembered being completely happy” (p. 47), and “Macon Dead could not leave” Pilate’s house (p. 30).

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to read pages xii-xiv of *Song of Solomon* (from “I have written, elsewhere and at some length” to “without ever leaving the ground she could fly. My father laughed”) and discuss the following questions in groups before sharing out with the class.

Provide students with the definitions of *extemporaneous*, *cessation*, *contrition*, and *repudiated*.

- 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 *extemporaneous*, *cessation*, *contrition*, and *repudiated* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider providing students with the definitions of *inversion* and *erstwhile*.
 - Students write the definitions of *inversion* and *erstwhile* on their copies of the text or in a vocabulary journal.

***What does Morrison’s analysis of the first sentence of *Song of Solomon* suggest about her writing style?**

- Morrison’s word-by-word breakdown of her first sentence suggests that her writing style is heavily detailed and filled with indirect information. For example, Morrison explains that her choice to begin her first sentence with “North Carolina” and end with “Lake Superior” (p. xiii) places the reader in a specific historical time and place by suggesting the south to north travel of “black immigration” (p. xiii).

What does Morrison’s discussion of “flight” and “mercy” (p. xiii) suggest about her purpose for writing the Foreword?

- Morrison’s discussion of “flight” and “mercy” as central terms in her novel provides the reader with a framework for understanding key events and characters. As Morrison describes, “mercy” is the “unspoken wish of the novel’s population” (p. xiii), while “flight” can be understood as “escape or confrontation” (p. xiii). Morrison’s choice to provide the reader with an explanation of two key terms in her novel suggests that she wrote the Foreword in order to illustrate how a reader might approach an analysis of her novel.

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Why did Morrison’s “father laugh[.]” (p. xiv)?

- Morrison explains that her “father laughed” because, despite Morrison’s intention to write a “stereotypically male narrative” (p. xii), she has actually written a story that celebrates the power of women. In her story, the hero, Milkman, initially rejects the importance of women and the home only to find that the freedom or “flight” (p. xii) he has been searching for can be found there all along.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider posing the following scaffolding question:

How does Morrison’s explanation “without ever leaving the ground [Pilate] could fly” (p. xiv) clarify the meaning of *conundrum* in this context? (L.11-12.4.a)

- Morrison’s reference to the realization that “without ever leaving the ground [Pilate] could fly” (p. xiv) as a *conundrum* suggests that *conundrum* means a confusing or difficult problem, because it does not seem possible that a person could fly without leaving the ground.

*How does Morrison’s final thought on page xiv contribute to the power or beauty of her Foreword?

- Student responses may include:
 - Morrison begins and ends her Foreword with reflections on her father. She introduces her father as her “muse[.]” on p. xi, and concludes her Foreword with the reflection that her “father laughed” at her novel’s final “conundrum” (p. xiv). Morrison’s choice to begin and end her Foreword with reflections on her father contributes to the power of her Foreword, because it reminds the reader that Morrison’s connection to her father served as the inspiration for this novel.
 - Morrison’s reflection that the “conundrum” at the end of the novel made her father “laugh[.]” (p. xiv) contributes to the beauty of her Foreword, because she ends on a note of joy, or happiness. This choice is particularly beautiful in light of her statement that her novel was born out of “unmanageable sadness” (p. xii), because it suggests that even in a moment of extreme grief, Morrison has found joy in writing *Song of Solomon*.

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:

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Determine Morrison’s purpose for writing the Foreword and analyze how style and content contribute to its power or beauty.

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 respond briefly in writing to the following question, using evidence from throughout the text.

To what extent is mercy a central idea of *Song of Solomon*?

Also, instruct students to read pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “In *Song of Solomon* Toni Morrison has faced the tale-spinner’s recurring problem” to “carry much of the burden of the myth”). Explain to students that they will revise their 12 LC Second Interim Assessment responses from Lesson 25 after they read the literary criticism essay “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.” Instruct students to annotate pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” for ideas that relate to their 12 LC Second Interim Assessment responses.

- Students follow along.
- **Differentiation Consideration:** In Lessons 27-29, students read and analyze a piece of literary criticism. Teachers who feel their students are not yet ready for this challenge may choose to move directly on to the 12 LC Performance Assessment after Lesson 26. Students may use the 12 LC Performance Assessment as an opportunity to work on writing revisions (W.11-12.5) and may incorporate ideas from Toni Morrison’s Foreword to *Song of Solomon* where appropriate.

Homework

Respond briefly in writing to the following question, using evidence from throughout the text:

To what extent is mercy a central idea of *Song of Solomon*?

Read pages 69-71 of “Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (from “In *Song of Solomon* Toni Morrison has faced the tale-spinner’s recurring problem” to “carry much of the burden of the myth”) and annotate for ideas that relate to your 12 LC Second Interim Assessment response.