

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: Erin Centa

School: Olentangy High School

Book Title: *Beloved*

Genre: Contemporary Fiction

Author: Toni Morrison

Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

Copyright: 1987

Book Summary and Summary Citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

Sethe, its protagonist, was born a slave and escaped to Ohio, but eighteen years later she is still not free. She has too many memories of Sweet Home, the beautiful farm where so many hideous things happened. And Sethe's new home is haunted by the ghost of her baby, who died nameless and whose tombstone is engraved with a single word: *Beloved*. Filled with bitter poetry and suspense as taut as a rope, *Beloved* is a towering achievement.

<https://www.amazon.com/Beloved-Toni-Morrison/dp/1400033411>

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum blueprints and/or State standards.

The curricular requirements from the College Board for AP English Literature and Composition includes the following statement: "...by the time the student completes AP English Literature and Composition she or he will have studied literature from both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times. The works selected for the course should require careful, deliberative reading that yields multiple meanings." *Beloved* is what many would consider a contemporary classic. Furthermore, texts by Toni Morrison frequently appear on the AP English Literature & Composition Exam's free-response essay question as a suggested text. As such, this contemporary tour-de-force is ideal for study in the AP Literature & Composition course.

Ohio State Standards addressed:

RL.11-12.2 Analyze literary text development. a. Determine two or more themes of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another. b. Produce a thorough analysis of the text

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.11-12.10 By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, building background knowledge and activating prior knowledge in order to make personal, societal, and ethical connections that deepen understanding of complex text.

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form). Reviews should suggest an appropriate grade-level or grade-band.

Review #1 from The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jul/08/fiction.tonimorrison>

One of the reasons *Beloved* is a great novel is that it is equally full of sensations and of meaning. Morrison knows exactly what she wants to do and how to do it, and she exploits every aspect of her subject. The characters are complex. Both stories are dramatic but in contrasting ways, and the past and the present constantly modify each other. Neither half of the novel suffers by contrast to the other. Especially worth noting is Morrison's style, which is graphic, evocative and unwhite without veering toward dialect. Even though Morrison rejects realism, using a heightened diction and a lyrical narrative method returning again and again to particular images and events and adding to them so they are more and more fully described, the reader never doubts the reality of what Morrison reports. Just as Sethe recognises *Beloved* toward the end of the novel, and knows at once that she has known all along who she is, the reader is shocked at the sufferings of the black characters and the brutality of the whites, but knows at once that every torture and cruelty is not only plausible but also representative of many other horrors that go unmentioned in the novel and have gone unmentioned in American history. Harriet Beecher Stowe was accused in her time of exaggerating the cruelties in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and she replied that in fact she whitewashed events to render them publishable. Morrison is her heir, in the sense that she dares to discuss and publish more (though certainly not all) of the truth.

Beloved has held up quite well over the years, despite Morrison being as much a product of her time as any other novelist. The novel seems, for example, more current and compelling than *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. One reason for this is that racist attitudes in the United States change very slowly, but another is that Morrison is far more subtle in her exploration of her ideas than Kundera is. Morrison depicts every incident with such concrete expressiveness that the reader takes it in willingly as truth. She is also entirely matter-of-fact in her assertions - equally so about the presence and identity of the ghost as about the character flaws of the whites. No aspect of the novel is presented as speculation, and so to read on, the reader suspends disbelief. In this, *Beloved* works something like *The Trial* or *The Metamorphosis*. With

a tale, the reader is asked to suspend disbelief completely and at once. If she can't do it, she won't read on; if she does do it, she is in the mood to accept everything the author asserts as true. The bonus of the tale form, for Morrison, is that she is also tapping into a vital store of black folklore that feeds her style as well as her story.

Beloved is one of the few American novels that take every natural element of the novel form and exploit it thoroughly, but in balance with all the other elements. The result is that it is dense but not long, dramatic but not melodramatic, particular and universal, shocking but reassuring, new but at the same time closely connected to the tradition of the novel, and likely to mould or change a reader's sense of the world.

Review #2

https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/11/home/8212.html?_r=1&oref=slogin
'BELOVED' is Toni Morrison's fifth novel, and another triumph. Indeed, Ms. Morrison's versatility and technical and emotional range appear to know no bounds. If there were any doubts about her stature as a pre-eminent American novelist, of her own or any other generation, "Beloved" will put them to rest. In three words or less, it's a hair-raiser.

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

1. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*-Zora Neale Hurston
2. *Invisible Man*-Ralph Ellison
3. *The Bell Jar*-Sylvia Plath
4. *The Sound and the Fury*-William Faulkner

Document any potentially controversial content:

Some scenes of violence and death
References to sex (nothing explicit)

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated Regular At Risk

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Reading Level of this Title (if applicable):

Suggested Professional Literacy Review Sources:

School Library Journal
Horn Book
Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

- VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)
- Library Journal
- Book Links
- Publisher's Weekly
- Booklist
- Kirkus Review
- Wilson Library Catalog
- English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)
- The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)
- Literature for Today's Young Adults

Signatures:

Teacher: Eri Cento Date: 10/22/21
Department Head: Eri Cento Date: 10/22/21
Building Administrator: Keith Caldwell Date: 10/22/21
Curriculum Supervisor: [Signature] Date: 10/23/21