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#### SYNOPSIS

**Part I. Chap. 1:** In 1931 in Michigan near Lake Superior, on the day before Ruth Dead gives birth to Macon Dead, Robert Smith, an insurance agent, climbs to the cupola of Mercy Hospital at 3:00 P. M. to demonstrate that he can fly. The event occurs on Not Doctor Street, named for Dr. Foster, Ruth's father, the black physician who settled in town in 1896. Unlike his other patients, who were denied admission to the white hospital, Ruth enters Mercy. Her daughters Lena and Corinthians occupy themselves cutting rose petals from red velvet to sell to a local department store.

The baby's father, also called Macon Dead, moves into the doctor's house when he marries Ruth and continues enlarging his rental property business. When Freddie the janitor peeps into the window and discovers that Ruth is still breastfeeding, he nicknames the baby Milkman. The boy's grandfather, the first Macon Dead, was wrongly named in 1869 by a drunk Union soldier. The grandfather copied on brown paper the name of his daughter, Pilate Dead, who was born without a navel after her mother died in childbirth. At age 12, Pilate placed the naming strip in a brass box and wore it as an earring. Pilate, who had been estranged from her brother since he was 16, returns to town in 1930 to run a wine house. She brings her daughter Reba and granddaughter Hagar.

**Chap. 2:** On the weekly Sunday car ride in father Macon Dead's Packard, he shows off his family to lesser blacks while driving to Honor, a beach community on the lake where he intends to sell summer homes to middle-class blacks. At age 12, Milkman develops a friendship with Guitar, a street-smart orphan teen several years his senior who introduces him to Pilate. To Milkman, his aunt explains how Grandfather Macon Dead was shot on his 150-acre farm north of the Susquehanna, leaving Pilate and her brother to wander the Virginia woods of Montour County. Milkman's father, at age 52, roars indignantly at his son that Pilate's house is off-limits.

The father recalls Circe, a surrogate mother who worked for whites in Danville, Pennsylvania, and the trickery of whites who took his illiterate father's property by making him sign papers he couldn't read. On a wagon moving north, the grandfather had met the woman he married. After revealing this bit of family history, father Macon Dead orders Milkman to begin working in his office.

**Chap. 3:** At age 13, Milkman begins collecting rents and running errands from Sonny's Shop, his father's office, throughout Southside, the black community. Milkman and Guitar skip school and try to buy beer at Feather's pool hall. Feather ousts Milkman because he dislikes the boy's father. At the barber shop, the boys encounter Railroad Tommy and Hospital Tommy. Railroad Tommy warns Milkman that he will

never know the pleasures that whites enjoy. Guitar confides that he has not been able to eat sweets since someone gave him divinity after his father was sliced in half at the sawmill.

At 14, Milkman develops a strut to compensate for a short leg. At age 22, he ponders the enmity between his parents. When his father abuses Ruth for her naivete, Milkman intervenes and knocks him into the radiator while Lena and Corinthians, ages 35 and 36, do nothing. Father Macon Dead comes to Milkman's room to tell him about his frustrations. He discovered that the old doctor sniffed ether and disapproved of his delivery of Ruth's daughters. The doctor refused to lend him money to invest in the Erie Lackawanna Railroad. When the old man died, Macon found Ruth lying naked next to the corpse and kissing his hands.

Milkman confides to Guitar the family's secrets. On the street, he realizes that everyone is hurrying in another direction to listen to the radio. The news relates the death of Emmett Till, a black boy stomped to death in Mississippi on New Year's Eve 1953. Guitar tells Milkman about hunting when he spent summers in the South with his great aunt Florence. Guitar believes that blacks have no opportunity to escape racism.

**Chap. 4:** On December 23, 24-year-old Milkman shops at Rexall Drugs for Christmas gifts. After twelve years with Hagar, who is five years his senior, he is tired of her. He goes to Pilate's house and finds her holding a man at knife point for abusing Reba. Milkman bumps his head against a green sack hanging from the ceiling. Pilate calls the bag her inheritance.

At age 31, Milkman ends his affair with Hagar, causing her to stalk him. Guitar informs Milkman that their attitudes toward justice are different. Milkman chafes at a circumscribed life as his father's underling. When Freddie seeks refuge from the cold in the office, he implies that there is something strange about Guitar's friendship with Empire State, whose description fits that of the murderer of a white schoolboy shortly after Emmett Till's death. For more information, Freddie sends Milkman to Corinthians.

**Chap. 5:** After six attempts on Milkman's life over six months of stalking, Hagar follows him to Guitar's apartment, where Milkman awaits her. He thinks over his own tailing of his mother a week or so before. At 1:30 A. M., she had taken the train to Fairfield Cemetery to her father's grave, as she did six or seven times a year. Milkman relates the story Macon told him about her love for her father. Ruth adds the fact that Macon deliberately discarded her father's medicine and tells him how Pilate gave her a potion to put in Macon's food to make him love her once more. After Ruth conceived her son, Pilate saved him after Macon tried to cause Ruth to miscarry. Pilate encouraged Ruth to eat cornstarch to satisfy a craving. To save the baby, Pilate girdled Ruth and placed a voodoo doll in Macon's office chair.

Pilate beats Hagar to stop her stalking Milkman. When

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Hagar arrives at Guitar's apartment, she strikes at Milkman with a butcher knife, but only wounds his collarbone. Ruth awaits Hagar at Pilate's house and threatens to kill Hagar if she harms Milkman. Pilate predicts that a woman will save his life. She informs Ruth that she has seen her father since his death.

Pilate explains how she fled to Virginia and lived with migrant workers, who ejected her after they discovered she has no navel. At 15, she lost her virginity and moved on once more to experience more rejection. At each place, she collected a rock. She settled on a job as laundress at a hotel-bordello. In October, she journeyed by wagon to Culpepper, Virginia, where she learned about a colony of black farmers off the Virginia coast. She worked among the islanders for three months. At age 16, she conceived her daughter, but refused to marry the father.

During a vision of her father, Pilate hears him say, "Sing, Sing" and "You just can't fly on off and leave a body." She interprets the message to mean return to Pennsylvania to gather the remains of a man she and her brother killed. For 20 years, she wanders and stops only when her granddaughter is born. Pilate is compassionate, but never smiles. In 1930, she decides to locate her brother to make peace. Through the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Quakers, she finds the address. Although he rejects her, she stays to aid Ruth, who is dying of lovelessness. In 1963, at age 68, she continues to heal and earn her living bootlegging.

**Chap. 6:** Guitar scolds Milkman for rejecting Hagar. He confides to Milkman the formation of the Seven Days, whom he joined the previous Christmas when Empire State was in trouble. The group kills white people to balance the loss of murdered blacks. The secret society started in 1920 to avenge two black soldiers maimed after World War I. Milkman names examples of good white people, but Guitar insists that most whites are unnatural. Because of his job as the Sunday killer, Guitar can't marry or have children. Milkman compares his idealism to that of Malcolm X.

**Chap. 7:** Milkman longs to flee his home, but Macon needs him as a partner in the business. When Milkman mentions the green sack in Pilate's house, Macon meets his son at the park to narrate the rest of the family's story. After he and Pilate left home, they lived with Circe, the midwife who delivered them. She hid them in the third-story storage room of the white people in Danville and had the brass box soldered to gold wire for Pilate to wear in her ear lobe. After two weeks of hiding, the children left.

At the Susquehanna, the two found a man resembling their father. Terrified, they ran to a cave, where their father stood. Early the next morning, Macon killed an elderly white man with a piece of rock from the cave wall and a knife. Under boards covering a shallow pit, he located gray bags of gold nuggets. The two quarreled over the trove; Pilate held him at knife point. He ran outside and fled advancing hunters. Three days later, he returned to an empty cave and no gold.

**Chap. 8:** Guitar, the Sunday man, struggles with the bombing of four little children at a black church. He and Milkman plot how to steal the green sack and split it three ways with Macon. On September 19, 1963, at 1:30 A. M., they creep into Pilate's house and steal the sack. She watches them from an open window.

**Chap. 9:** As of 1961, Corinthians, a 1940 graduate of Bryn Mawr, works as maid and secretary for Michael-Mary Graham, Michigan's poet laureate. On Corinthians's com-

mute by bus, yardman Henry Porter courts her with a friendship card. She is ashamed of his poverty, but clings to their relationship. As she creeps into the house after a tryst, she hears Macon and Milkman discussing the theft of Pilate's sack. Milkman was arrested; Pilate humbled herself before the police and, to get Milkman out of jail, pretended the theft was a prank. She retrieved the sack, which contains bones of the man she called Mr. Solomon. Macon assumes that the gold is still in the cave.

The next morning, Milkman observes Guitar and Railroad Tommy engaged in an unusual handshake. Involved in their cabal are Empire State, Nero, Hospital Tommy, and Porter. The car they ride in is the one that brought Corinthians home. After a two-day drunk, Milkman and Lena have a heated exchange. She accuses him of abusing the family and of breaking up Corinthians's affair with Porter, whom Macon punished by evicting him and garnisheeing his wages.

**Part II. Chapter 10:** Guitar tells how his mother received \$40 from a white man after his father's death at the sawmill. Macon evicted them from their home. Milkman realizes that Guitar's hostility is coming dangerously close to targeting him.

Milkman flies to Pittsburgh and takes the bus to Danville and checks his bag. He buys a car and locates Reverend Cooper, who knows his family. Cooper identifies the brass box that his daddy made into an earring for Pilate and names the Butlers, Circe's white employers, as the whites who murdered Grandfather Macon Dead. Four days later, Cooper's nephew drives Milkman to the farm, where Circe lives alone and tends Weimaraners. She explains that his grandmother was named Sing and came from Charlemagne, Virginia. She identifies Hunters Cave, where the killers dumped Grandfather Macon's body. She believes his original name was Jake.

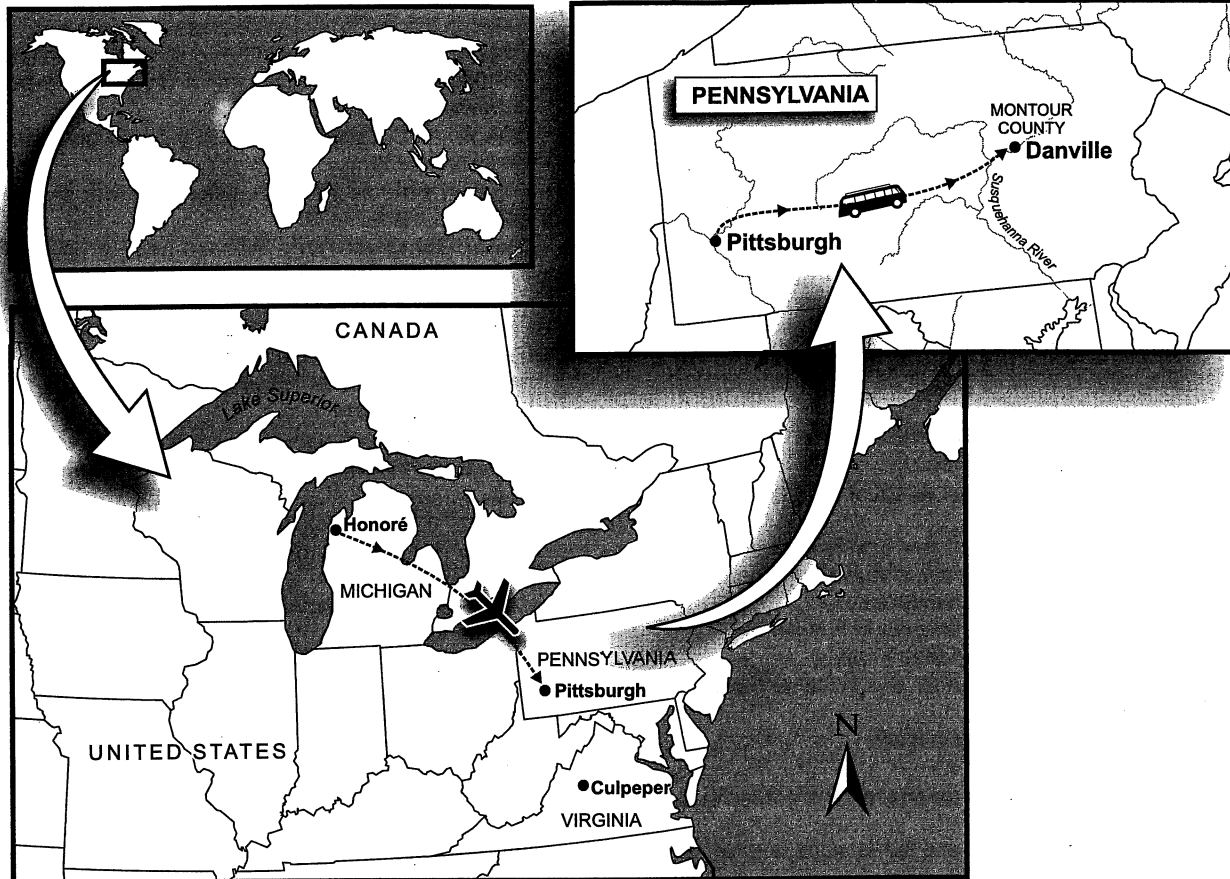
Milkman makes his way to the cave, but finds no gold. He hitches a ride with Fred Garnett and helps an old man move a crate to the depot. Milkman tries to figure out when Pilate came back to the cave and where she could have taken the gold. He heads for Virginia.

**Chap. 11:** Milkman's car breaks down at Shalimar, where he receives Guitar's threatening message. Milkman deduces that Guitar is in trouble. The children playing nearby sing a verse about Solomon's son Jay. Local men envy Milkman's car, which he locks; a man attacks him with a knife. Omar invites him to go hunting. Milkman realizes that his grandparents came from the area.

Milkman joins King Walker, Luther Solomon, Small Boy, and Omar. King outfits Milkman with hunting clothes and rifle. They pass through Ryna's Gulch; Milkman sinks down to rest from the long prowl. Guitar tries to strangle him with a wire; Milkman frightens him off by firing the rifle. At dawn, the hunters meet at King's gas station and skin a bobcat. At breakfast, Vernell tells Milkman about Sing, an Indian girl her grandmother played with. Sing was reared by Heddy Byrd near Solomon's Leap. After Omar suggests lodging with Sweet, Milkman receives kind and loving treatment, including a bath, lotion, and talcum.

**Chap. 12:** Milkman follows the trail of information to the Byrd house, where he meets Susan Byrd and her intrusive friend, Grace Long. Susan's father, Crowell Byrd, had a sister named Sing, who left on a wagon for a Quaker school in Boston. Temporarily sidelined by false information, Milkman ponders his Grandfather Jake. As he is realizing he has left his watch with Grace, he encounters Guitar, who believes

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that Milkman cheated him by shipping the gold from Danville. Milkman explains that Guitar observed him helping a man lift a crate.

That night, Milkman sleeps with Sweet and dreams of flying. While walking around Shalimar, he begins to connect the song of Solomon with his only son Jake and Ryna, the wailing echo in the gulch. The verses explain Jake's relationship with Heddy, who took him to an Indian family. He reconstructs Sing and Crowell's names Indian fashion as Singing Bird and Crow Bird. He determines to get more information from Susan.

**Chap. 13:** Guitar returns Hagar home after her last attempt to kill Milkman. Reba and Pilate engulf her in love, but Hagar takes to her bed for three days. When she sees herself in a mirror, she bathes and goes shopping. Reba pawns a diamond she won to bankroll Hagar's new outfit, makeup, and hairdo. Marcelline gives her a hair appointment for 8:30. Hagar leaves Lilly's Beauty Parlor and stands in the rain. At home, she collapses with fever and dies. Ruth forces Macon to pay for the funeral. Two days later, she seems to be the only mourner. Pilate bursts into the service, followed by Reba, and sings to her "sweet sugar lumpkin."

**Chap. 14:** Susan corrects the lies she told in front of Grace. She tells Milkman about Sing's marriage to Jake, the son of the flying African. Heddy Byrd raised both Sing and Jake. When Solomon flies away, he takes Jake with him and drops him at the porch of the big house, where Heddy finds him. Ryna, grieving for Solomon, loses her mind. Jake gains the name Macon Dead when he registers with the Freed-

man's Bureau before leaving the state.

**Chap. 15:** Milkman returns to Shalimar and Sweet's house, where Guitar has left another message. Milkman and Sweet go to the quarry to swim. He exults at his great grandfather's flight back to Africa. He realizes the value of the information, which is the only "gold" to be recovered. He hurries to Pilate. In the cellar, he realizes that Hagar is dead. He clarifies for Pilate the identity of Sing and the man left behind, the bones that she carried from the cave.

The two return to Solomon's Leap to inter Jake's bones. Corinthians moves into Porter's small house. The people of Shalimar welcome Pilate, who buries her father with the brass box. Guitar shoots her through the neck. As she dies, Milkman sings "Sugargirl don't leave me here." He determines to find another woman like her. With a leap, he wheels toward Guitar.

### TIME LINE

- 1865** April The Civil War ends.
- 1869** A drunken Union soldier misnames Jake "Macon Dead."
- 1891** Macon Dead is born.
- 1895** Bird dies while giving birth to Pilate
- 1896** Dr. Foster settles in Michigan.
- 1907** After white men shoot the elder Macon Dead, Pilate and her brother flee to Circe.  
**two weeks later** Pilate attaches the brass box to her ear.  
Pilate and Macon leave their hiding place in the Butlers' storage room and take shelter in Hunters Cave.

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- next morning** Macon kills an old white man and finds bags of gold nuggets.  
After a quarrel, Pilate holds Macon at knife point.  
**three days later** Macon returns to the cave to find it empty and the gold gone.
- 1910** Pilate works as laundress at a hotel-bordello.  
**October** Pilate joins a black colony off the Virginia coast.
- 1912** Pilate conceives her child, but refuses to marry the father.
- 1920** The Seven Days form to avenge two black soldiers maimed after World War I.
- 1926** Pilate stops wandering after Reba gives birth to Hagar.
- 1930** Pilate opens a wine house in Michigan and seeks peace with her brother.  
**later** Pilate threatens her brother with a voodoo doll if he harms Ruth's unborn child.
- 1931** Robert Smith, an insurance agent, kills himself while trying to fly.  
**next day** Ruth gives birth to a son, Macon Dead.
- 1935** Freddie the janitor discovers that Ruth breastfeeds the boy and nicknames him Milkman.
- 1939** Corinthians spends her junior year in France.
- 1940** Corinthians graduates from Bryn Mawr.
- 1943** Milkman develops a friendship with Guitar and falls in love with Hagar.
- 1944** Milkman works in his father's office.
- 1945** Milkman develops a strut.
- 1952** Malcolm X begins work as an organizer for the Nation of Islam
- 1953** Milkman knocks his father into the radiator for abusing Ruth.  
**Dec. 31** Emmett Till is killed.
- 1955** **Dec. 23** Milkman shops for Christmas gifts.
- 1959** **July 13–17** A television special with Mike Wallace introduces Malcolm X to the public.
- 1961** Corinthians takes a job as maid and secretary to Michael-Mary Graham, Michigan's poet laureate.
- 1962** Milkman stops seeing Hagar, causing her to stalk him. Freddie implies that there is something strange about Guitar's friendship with Empire State.  
**nearly six months later** Milkman follows Ruth to Fairfield Cemetery.  
**a week later** Hagar stabs Milkman in the collarbone.  
**three days later** Hagar dies of fever.  
**two days later** Ruth is the only outside family member to mourn Hagar.  
**Dec. 25** Guitar joins the Seven Days and rescues Empire State.
- 1963** Guitar confides to Milkman the existence of the Seven Days.  
**Sept. 15** White men bomb a Birmingham church, killing four small black girls.  
**Sept. 19 at 1:30 A. M.** Milkman and Guitar steal the green sack from Pilate's house.  
**3:30 A. M.** Pilate intercedes to get her nephew out of jail.  
Corinthians creeps home after sleeping with Porter.  
**later that morning** Milkman concludes that Guitar, Railroad Tommy, Empire State, Nero, Hospital Tommy, and Porter are members of the Seven Days.

Milkman informs his father of Corinthians's lover. Macon evicts Porter and garnishees his wages.  
**Sept. 21** Lena accuses Milkman of abusing the family. Milkman flies to Pittsburgh and takes the bus to Danville.  
**Sept. 25** Circe tells Milkman that his grandmother was named Sing.  
**that afternoon** Milkman makes his way to Hunters Cave, but finds no gold.  
**later** Guitar observes Milkman helping an old man move a crate to the depot.  
Milkman's car breaks down at Shalimar, where children sing a verse about Solomons's son Jay. A man attacks Milkman with a knife.  
**that night** While Milkman rests from hunting, Guitar tries to strangle him.  
**Sept. 26** at dawn Vernell tells Milkman about Sing, an Indian girl whom Heddy Byrd reared near Solomon's Leap.  
**that night** Milkman lodges with Sweet.  
**Sept. 27** Susan Byrd lies about Crowell Byrd's sister Sing.  
**later** Guitar accuses Milkman of shipping the gold from Danville.  
**that night** Milkman sleeps with Sweet and dreams of flying.  
**Sept. 28** Milkman reconstructs changes in Sing and Crow's names.  
**later** Susan tells Milkman about Sing's marriage to Jake, the flying African who dropped Jake at the big house.  
**that afternoon** Milkman and Sweet go to the quarry to swim.  
**days later** Milkman tells Pilate about Sing and the bones that Pilate carried from the cave. Guitar shoots her through the neck.

### AUTHOR SKETCH

Chloe Anthony "Toni" Morrison received a Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, setting off accolades from around the world. The granddaughter of a Kentucky carpenter and farmer who resettled in Lorain, Ohio, Morrison, born February 18, 1931, learned both sides of the race issue from her deeply divided parents. Her sharecropper father, George Wofford, located good-paying jobs as a shipyard welder in the North, but never learned to like whites. Unlike her racist husband, Morrison's mother, Ramah Willis Wofford, demonstrated more racial tolerance, perhaps because she was better educated than her husband was.

In an ethnically diverse neighborhood in west Cleveland on Lake Erie, Morrison and her siblings got along well with others, even after a landlord set fire to their apartment when Morrison was two years old. From strong bonds with community women, Morrison valued stories and verses about the Underground Railroad and other episodes from black history. In the style of her idol, ballerina Maria Tallchief, Toni excelled and graduated valedictorian from Lorrain High. At Howard University in Washington, D. C., she studied French, English, and Russian fiction, traveled with a university theater group, and profited from contact with two important mentors—poet Sterling Brown and critic Alain Locke. In 1955, she completed a master's degree in English at Cornell and taught humanities and English at Texas Southern and Howard universities



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for ten years.

Morrison married Jamaican architect Harold Morrison in 1957 and bore two sons, Harold Ford and Slade Kevin. In the early 1960s, she joined a writer's consortium and, writing while her children slept, completed a story she had begun in high school which became the kernel for *The Bluest Eye*. After a divorce in 1965, Morrison worked as an editor for Random House in Syracuse and New York City, where she developed works by Angela Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, and Muhammad Ali.

In 1969, Morrison lived outside Nyack, New York, while serving as Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at State University of New York. Four years later, she published *Sula*, followed in 1974 with *The Black Book*, an album of slave biographies, advertising, photos, recipes, patent records and news clippings, one of which evolved into *Beloved*. After teaching at Bard College and Yale University, Morrison published *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and two plays, *Dreaming Emmett* and *Storyville*, a musical. For the publication of *Beloved*, her masterwork, she drew on research from as far away as Brazil and Spain to create the fictional account of Margaret Garner, who, unlike Sethe, was returned to her owner. Subsequent works—*Jazz*, *Playing in the Dark*, and *Paradise*—have settled Toni Morrison more firmly in the cannon of feminist, African-American, and world literature.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

From black female author to world-class Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison has earned her way up the literary ladder to world prominence. For *Song of Solomon*, she earned the National Book Award and Ohioana Book Award in 1975 and an appointment to the National Council on the Arts in 1980 by President Jimmy Carter. The first black woman to publish a Book-of-the-Month-Club focal selection, she also won commendation from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the New York State Governor's Arts Council, City College of New York Langston Hughes Festival, the Anisfield Wolf Book award, and three consecutive Public Library's Books for the Teen Age.

In 1981 Morrison addressed the American Writers' Congress; the end of the 1980s brought the Ritz-Hemingway, National Book, and National Book Critics Circle award nominations and a Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*, which boasted 18 weeks as a bestseller. The selection sparked a spate of honoraria: the Melcher Book award, Robert Kennedy Book award, Tanner Lecturer at the University of Michigan, Robert Goheen Professorship in creative writing, women's studies, and African studies at Princeton, Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author award, City of New York Mayor's Award of Honor for Art and Culture, Elmer Holmes Bobst Award in Arts and Letters, and fourteen honorary degrees, including doctorates from Spelman, Oberlin, Dartmouth, Bryn Mawr, Columbia, and Yale, and the MLA Commonwealth Award.

The 1990s, her best decade, showered Morrison with the Chianti Ruffino Antico Fattore International Literary Prize and her starring moment as the eighth woman to receive a Nobel prize, which carried a purse of \$825,000. The first American to receive the award since John Steinbeck in 1962, Morrison wowed the selection committee, who noted her debt to Faulkner and the African-American canon and concluded: "The lasting impression is, nevertheless, sympathy, humanity, of the kind that is always based on profound humor." With

typical humility, Morrison thanked the public for their love and support and promised a sequel to *Beloved*. The 1998 film version, starring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover, brought rave reviews for its verisimilitude and faithfulness to the novel.

In summer 1997, *Song of Solomon* came under attack after its assignment to the eleventh grade Advanced Placement English class of David Flood, Leonardtown, Maryland. A parent, Bernice Williamson, complained to Dr. Edward Weiland that the book should be banned. A committee of parents and educators deliberated and recommended keeping the book on the reading list during the regular school. It remains in the school library, sparking letters to the editor, newspaper articles, mention on C-SPAN, and a front-page story in the *Washington Post*.

### OTHER WORKS BY TONI MORRISON

*Beloved* (1987)  
*The Big Box* (1999)  
*The Black Book* (1974)  
*The Bluest Eye* (1969)  
*The Dancing Mind* (1997)  
*Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, and Conversations* (1999)  
*Dreaming Emmett* (1986)  
*Jazz* (1992)  
*Paradise* (1997)  
*Racing Justice* (1992)  
*Sula* (1973)  
*Tar Baby* (1981)

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### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the impact of spousal abuse on children
2. To account for a yearning for independence
3. To interpret social and community customs and lore
4. To contrast the morality and stability of family members
5. To discuss the themes of longing and curiosity
6. To explain the main events in time order
7. To analyze choices and lifestyles that isolate
8. To describe contrasting value systems
9. To describe elements of atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze the effectiveness of myth and song in narrative

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain how greed and suspicion destroy Macon's homelife
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title
3. To account for Hagar's decline and death
4. To summarize episodes of Milkman's journey south
5. To justify Pilate and Reba's mourning for Hagar
6. To predict how Milkman will cope with a stalker
7. To summarize the childhood sufferings of Guitar, Freddie, and Lena
8. To discuss the implications of the name in the brass snuffbox
9. To summarize the roles of Ruth, Circe, Sweet, and Vernell
10. To list events caused by suspicion, cruelty, and exploitation
11. To characterize the idealism of the Seven Days
12. To analyze details, particularly the sack, cave, rock collection, and missing navel

### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Toni Morrison's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

**character name** a method of displaying or revealing character traits, attributes, or attitudes through the choice of symbolic names, which may contain a descriptive term, for example, Guitar, the boy who wanted to play a stringed instrument, and Milkman, the boy whose mother sublimated her sexual desire by breastfeeding her son until age four. The superstitious method by which people named children from the Bible affects the lives of Corinthians, Pilate, and Reba. Street nicknames also mark Sweet, Hospital Tommy, and Railroad Tommy. More damaging is the offhand joke of a drunken Union soldier who names Jake "Macon Dead," a name that survives through three generations.

## SONG OF SOLOMON

**round character** a realistic being who possesses a complex or multifaceted array of traits. Milkman displays a variety of positive characteristics, notably friendship, love, energy, curiosity, and family loyalty. His weaknesses—egotism, lying, greed, and false love—cause much of his difficulty. By allowing curiosity and family loyalty to lead him south to learn more about the past, he redeems himself and elucidates Pilate's imperfect understanding of the cave and her father's death and appearances of the ghost.

**symbol** a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship and implies more than the literal meaning of the word or words, such as a brass snuffbox with the strip of paper containing Pilate's name. Much of the novel focuses on the worth of names and their applicability to people and places. When Pilate reaches an understanding of her father's death and her grandfather's ability to fly, she is able to bury her "inheritance" along with the snuffbox and die quietly in Milkman's arms.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

*Song of Solomon* contrasts the home town of Milkman Dead and his family with the bucolic Virginia village where Solomon, Ryna, Heddy Byrd, Singing Bird, and Crow Bird lived. Virtually isolated from the black community called Southside, Milkman lives in the house built by his grandfather, Dr. Foster, the only black physician in a Michigan town near Lake Superior. Once paired with Guitar, a street-wise teen, Milkman gains greater freedom to explore and acquires access to the haunts of working-class black people, particularly the barber shop. The two boys' attempt to enter Feather's pool room indicates that the reputation of Milkman's father, Macon Dead, closes doors to the son of the town's prominent black land agent.

Apart from boyish wandering in Blood Bank and Not Doctor Street, Milkman finds true welcome and love at the home of his bootlegger aunt Pilate and his cousins Reba and Hagar. The peculiar smell of the wine house, collected bottles and containers, and the spare furnishings indicate a family that cares little about creature comforts. When Ruth comes to visit she finds three beds, just like the trios of furniture in "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." After Milkman rushes back to tell Pilate the family's history, one knock on the head sends him down stone steps to her cellar prison, where she conducts an illicit, but appreciated business.

During his first 31 years, Milkman has two adventures beyond town before setting out for Danville. In childhood, he goes on Sunday drives in the family Packard to Honor, the lakeside vacation community from which father Macon hopes to reap monetary return. While observing Ruth, Milkman takes a train to Fairfield and locates her returning from paying respects to her father's grave, a trek that she repeats six or seven times a year. Both episodes reveal the family's unhappiness under the thumb of Macon, who counts his blessings in money and property.

The most important shift in Milkman's life occurs when he travels south to escape the stifling town atmosphere that has immured him in Sonny's Shop, the unofficial name of his father's realty office. Journeying by plane and bus to locate the cache of gold that Pilate supposedly left in Hunters Cave outside Danville, Pennsylvania, Milkman enters a series of new and challenging environments, including the welcoming home of Reverend Cooper and the bizarre mansion in which Circe tends Weimarers while the chandelier crashes to the

floor and rooms enter the same limbo that draws the old midwife toward death. His progress toward Shalimar, the black community that clings to legends of Solomon, the flying African, plunges Milkman into a welter of children's games, a local bobcat hunt in Ryna's Gulch, a country store, Vernell's kitchen, and the loving arms of Sweet. Baptized in the waters of the quarry, Milkman exults in the environment of family ties and multigenerational history. It is fitting that he bring Pilate back to Solomon's Leap to share in the joy of self-discovery.

### CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

#### Fiction

William Armstrong, *Souther*  
Avi, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*  
Toni Cade Bambara, "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird"  
Forrest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*  
Karen Cushman, *The Midwife's Apprentice* and *Catherine, Called Birdy*  
Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*  
Jean Craighead George, *Julie of the Wolves*  
Kaye Gibbons, *Ellen Foster*  
Alex Haley, *Queen*  
Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly*  
Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees*  
Lois Lowry, *The Giver*  
Robert Newton Peck, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*  
Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*  
Cynthia Rylant, *Missing May*  
Ruth White, *Belle Prater's Boy*

#### Play

Jane Wagner, *J. T.*  
Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*

#### Poem

"Between the World and Me," Richard Wright

#### Essay

"Coretta Scott King Award,"  
<[www.ala.org/srrt/cking/ckawgd.html](http://www.ala.org/srrt/cking/ckawgd.html)>

#### Nonfiction

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*  
Judith Berck, *No Place to Be: Voices of Homeless Children*  
Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*  
Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

#### CD-ROM

*American Journey: The African-American Experience* (Primary Source Media)

#### Internet

"Charlotte Blake Alston,"  
<[www.pewarts.org/94/Alston/main.html](http://www.pewarts.org/94/Alston/main.html)>  
"The Death of Emmett Till,"  
<[members.nbci.com/elstongunn/till.html](http://members.nbci.com/elstongunn/till.html)>  
"Erie Lackawanna," <[www.customtrains.com/el.htm](http://www.customtrains.com/el.htm)>  
"The Fathers May Soar,"  
<[spiny.com/naomi/thesis/blues.html](http://spiny.com/naomi/thesis/blues.html)>  
"The Legend of the Flying Africans,"  
<[www.oxy.edu/~tigger/flight/fly.htm](http://www.oxy.edu/~tigger/flight/fly.htm)>  
"The People Could Fly," <[chss2.montclair.edu/schwartzl/TMSp01/flying\\_african.htm](http://chss2.montclair.edu/schwartzl/TMSp01/flying_african.htm)>

#### Videos/DVDs

*Beloved*  
*Daughters of the Dust*  
*The Education of Little Tree*  
*Ordinary People*  
*Queen*

## SONG OF SOLOMON

Sounder

### THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *Song of Solomon* should include these aspects:

#### Themes

- poverty
- family
- snobbery
- greed
- loss
- survival
- racism
- violence
- self-esteem
- myth
- logic
- escapism

#### Motifs

- coping with family dysfunction
- seeking comfort in family history
- investigating a mystery
- fleeing smothering love

### MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the novel. Explain each in context. Part, chapter, and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Philadelphia, where Father Divine reigned, wasn't all that far away. (Part I, Chap. 1, p. 6)  
*(Father Divine, the professional name of George Baker Divine, founded the Peace Mission Cult, a religious movement that placed him in the position of God's incarnation on earth. His following grew during the 1930s and 1940s, when he provided food and lodging for the poor at low cost. He died on September 10, 1965, leaving his wife, Mother Divine, to continue the mission.)*
2. Did he come with a caul? (Part I, Chap. 1, p. 6)  
*(Superstition clings to the fetal membrane that protects the tender cranium of an unborn child. The tissue usually disintegrates during birth. Children born with the caul intact prompt midwives and mothers to think of them as marked for clairvoyance or special protection.)*
3. Yep. Caught the eagle too. (Part I, Chap. 1, p. 24)  
*(Freddie reports to Macon that Henry Porter went to work and picked up his pay. Macon takes advantage of the news to demand that Porter hand over his rent.)*
4. Huh! I'd forgotten that woman's name. That was it, Circe. (Part I, Chap. 2, p. 52)  
*(The old Virginia midwife who delivered Sing's last child bears the name of an enchantress in Homer's Odyssey. The Greek Circe enchanted male visitors to her home and turned them into pigs. Odysseus eludes her charm by carrying a moly, an herb that frees him of danger.)*
5. He favored it, believed it was polio, and felt secretly connected to the late President Roosevelt for that reason. Even when everybody was raving about Truman because he had set up a Committee on Civil Rights. (Part I, Chap. 3, p. 62)  
*(Franklin Delano Roosevelt was 39 years old in 1921, when he contracted paralytic polio and lost the use of his legs. He began the first of three presidential terms in*

*1932 and remained in office until his death in office on April 12, 1945, in Warm Springs, Georgia. His vice president, Harry S. Truman, succeeded him as president.)*

6. Corpus Domini Nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam. (Part I, Chap. 4, p. 65)  
*(As the priest, Father Padrew, distributes the host or consecrated wafer or bread into the mouths of Catholic worshippers, he speaks the blessing, "May the body of our lord Jesus Christ watch over your spirit.")*
7. His name was Till. (Part I, Chap. 3, p. 80)  
*(On August 28, 1955, whites abducted, shot, and beat to death Emmett Louis Till, a 14-year-old black from Chicago, who was visiting family in Money, Mississippi. Authorities found his badly decomposed remains three days later in the Tallahatchie River. The court acquitted two white suspects. Whites gave as a justification the fact that the boy had whistled at a white woman. Till became a martyr to the civil rights cause.)*
8. What about if you was roaming the streets and met up with Orval Faubus? (Part I, Chap. 4, p. 101)  
*(Arkansas governor Orval Eugene Faubus became a symbol of corrupt, racist government in September 1957, when he called out the National Guard to block the integration of Little Rock Central High School. Forced by court injunction and federal troops to comply with national laws, Faubus earned the regard of sympathetic racists and won four more terms of office.)*
9. You sound like that red-headed Negro named X. (Part I, Chap. 6, p. 160)  
*(Milkman is aware of the rising reputation for Malcolm Little, who renamed himself X to shed a surname derived from slavery. As leader of the Black Muslims, he thrived as role model, social reformer, and preacher. Rival forces gunned him down on February 21, 1965, as he delivered a speech to 400 supporters at the Audubon Ballroom in Manhattan.)*
10. Go north until you come to a stile. It's falling down, but you'll see it's a stile. (Part II, Chap. 10, p. 245)  
*(Circe directs Milkman across open land, where a stile once pierced a fence. The built-up steps were intended for humans to cross without allowing animals to get out of the enclosure.)*

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

#### Motivation

1. What causes Milkman to seek the cave and details about his grandfather?  
*(After Macon learns about Pilate's inheritance, he fills Milkman's head with dreams of a treasure in gold nuggets. To find the place where Jake killed an old white man and discovered bags of nuggets under some boards, Milkman must return to Danville, Pennsylvania, and search out information about his grandparents. Because Reverend Cooper corroborates much of the family history, particularly the soldering of a gold wire to Pilate's snuffbox earring, Milkman grows more eager to locate the cave.  
After Nephew drives Milkman to the Butler residence,*

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he acquires more details from Circe, the faithful midwife who delivered Pilate from Sing's corpse. Milkman's trudge over the crumbled stile and up the ridge to Hunters Cave thwarts his hope of instant wealth. By driving to Shalimar, he fills in gaps in his understanding of Jake's murder and, farther back, of great grandfather Solomon's flight. Driven to know more, he gleans details from Vernell and Susan Byrd, his cousin. The final piecing together comes from strains of a children's song that retains the myth of the flying African.)

### Setting

2. Describe Milkman's home town.

(In a Michigan town near Lake Superior, Milkman becomes the first black child born at Mercy Hospital. He grows up in the grand home built by Foster, the only black doctor, with whom Milkman's parents live until the old man's death. Apart from Southside, the black community, Milkman and his sisters live privileged lives and gaze at their neighbors through the windows of Macon's Packard during Sunday drives to the countryside. At age twelve, Milkman begins learning about the less affluent black community from friendship with Guitar, the orphaned teenager who saves him from angry bullies.

By skipping school to spend time with his pal, Milkman visits the Blood Bank and attempts to enter Feather's pool room to buy beer. Ousted for their connection with the town's rent collector, Milkman and Guitar receive a warmer welcome at the barber shop from Hospital Tommy and Railroad Tommy, who introduce Milkman to a more realistic view of black existence. His visit to Pilate's house teaches him about the lifestyle of the eccentric bootlegger, who supplies the black community with homemade wine. After his break-in at his aunt's house to steal her inheritance, he also learns about the police and jail, where he spends two hours before Pilate convinces officers that he and Guitar stole the bag of bones as a prank.)

### Character Development

3. How does the friendship between Guitar and Milkman alter?

(Guitar, the tough, street-wise urchin, develops an abiding love for Milkman, who is several years younger and in need of introduction to the working-class black community. Guitar helps Milkman learn about his mysterious wine-selling aunt Pilate, her daughter Reba, and the spoiled granddaughter Hagar who steals his virginity after he falls in love with her behind. Through hard times at home, Milkman retreats to Guitar's room for acceptance and understanding.

The friendship begins to change as Guitar evolves a philosophy of benign murder to equalize the status between blacks and racist whites. Designated as the Sunday hitman of the Seven Days, he explains to Milkman that he can never marry or raise a family and that he must avenge all blacks who were murdered by whites on any Sunday. The friendship strains from veiled conversations during the period that Milkman withdraws to Guitar's room to await Hagar with her butcher knife. After Guitar agrees to help Milkman locate the gold and split it three ways, greed is the tiny thread that holds together their strained relationship. When Guitar loses trust in Milkman, Guitar becomes the second stalker intent on

ending Milkman's life.)

### Historical Milieu

4. How does Morrison incorporate historical detail? (It is important to the story to recognize mounting agitation among blacks over injustices committed by whites, particularly members of the Ku Klux Klan, which began operations after the Civil War. When Emmett Till is shot and beaten in Mississippi, his name becomes a rallying cry to blacks all over the United States after courts refuse to prosecute his white murderers. On the opposite side of the race question, the overt racism of Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus rallies whites, despite the fact that Faubus breaks national laws against public school segregation and faces federal marshals dispatched by President Dwight Eisenhower to enforce integration.

On meeting Reverend Cooper, Milkman observes a knot behind the old man's ear and learns about crimes against black veterans returning home to racism and violence. Cooper says, "Some of us went to Philly to try and march in an Armistice Day parade . . . We were invited and had a permit, but the people, the white people, didn't like us being there. They started a fracas. You know, throwing rocks and calling us names." He emphasizes that the police "ran us down." The post-World War II era adds to the welter of emotions as blacks shuck off centuries of oppression. The social activism of Father Divine and the religious rabble-rousing of Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad in the name of the Black Muslims filter down to the blacks in Michigan, giving them hope of vengeance and justice.)

### Theme

5. What does the author reveal about names? (Morrison uses naming as a significant act of love and family solidarity. To the people of Shalimar, Solomon's name carries the glory of his flight and the power of his memory, which survives in a predominant local surname and in Solomon's Leap. After the drunken Union soldier changes Jake's name to Macon Dead, the honor to Solomon is eclipsed as the shameful surname passes to son and grandson. Adding to Milkman's third generation woes is the undignified nickname that reminds people of Ruth's unnatural attachment to breastfeeding a four-year-old as a substitute for her husband's withheld love.

The superstition that fuels the selection of names underscores the ignorance of people who believe that they honor their children by turning to a page in the Bible to select names for infants. Thus, Pilate, "Magdalena called Lena," and Corinthians go through life with inexplicable first names that confuse and amuse people. In contrast to people who seem stuck with birth names, Morrison interposes acquired names like Hospital Tommy, Railroad Tommy, Empire State, and Guitar, the boy who wants to play the guitar. More benign is Sweet, the name that characterizes the demeanor of the only woman who charms Milkman with uncompromising acceptance and tenderness.)

### Interpretation

6. What does myth add to the novel? (The introduction of myth to Milkman's understanding of family history connects him with a pervasive motif—the flying African. The story permeates folklore and legends from early times, suggesting a wish fulfillment of slaves



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who have no way of escaping their masters except by physically rising above the Southern plantation system. Milkman learns the story while collecting the particulars of his grandfather's childhood.

By thinking of his great grandfather Solomon as one of the elite flying blacks, Milkman looks beyond his greedy, coercive father to a past rich in power and majesty. The fact that children of Shalimar preserve black lore in their games and songs convinces Milkman that the myth was strong enough and believable enough to survive from the slave era. The added evidence of place names—Solomon's Leap and Ryna's Gulch—contributes to his pride in belonging to a worthy family that rejected dependence and oppression to reach for liberation in the skies.)

### Conflict

7. How do Macon's class-consciousness and hate for his wife influence his children?

(A greedy, land-grabbing man before marriage, Macon Dead thinks of Ruth Foster, the only child of the town's only black doctor, as a trophy wife, a suitable mate for a social climber and status seeker. When he comes to live at the doctor's house as a member of the family, he discovers the unnatural link between Ruth and her father, who disgusts Macon by delivering Ruth's first two children. Rather than accept her need for the strong male who protected her from isolation and rejection among lower-class blacks, Macon considers her behavior aberrant and shameful. Their two conflicting stories of the day the physician died suggest exaggeration of the two points of view to establish wrong in the other party.)

The older children and young Milkman cringe and cower from their hostile, status-conscious father, who gives them money for Christmas rather than buy them suitable presents. The girls regret that he mauls their mother and creates daily uproar and discontent in their lives. After Milkman demonstrates that he will tolerate no more of his father's bullying, Macon takes him aside and poisons his mind against Ruth. To his credit, Milkman gathers information from both parties by following his mother to Fairfield Cemetery and confronting her with the regular secret pilgrimages she makes to her father's grave. The redemption of Milkman's character derives from his willingness to lose all in exchange for the whole story of his family, all the way back to Shalimar and Solomon, the flying African.)

### Atmosphere

8. How does Morrison express macabre, unsettling details? (Touches of eerie detail and sidenotes, such as the burial of the two halves of Guitar's father, create a spooky atmosphere to the novel. The extended breastfeeding of Milkman and Ruth's alleged naked caressing of her father's corpse imply perversion in the town's most prominent black family. Adding to Macon's twisted personal history is his ongoing disaffection for Pilate, the navel-deprived sister who experiences frequent visitations from their murdered father's spirit. She searches through the Red Cross, Quakers, and Salvation Army to end strife with her only sibling. Milkman's refusal to avoid his kin leads him to the bootlegger's lair, an odd-smelling, strangely furnished house from which Pilate sells illegal wine. From his first visit, he is intrigued by

the brass box that dangles from his aunt's ear.

The Gothic influence gathers speed in Part II, when Morrison fills in the perversities and crimes that haunt the family's history. Circe, the old midwife occupying a crumbling mansion, lives in the reek of Weimaraners and hopes that someone will locate her corpse when she dies before the dogs eat her. Milkman moves on to the empty cave and Shalimar, the community occupied by people with multiple connections to Solomon, his great grandfather. To exaggerate the parallel stalking during the night hunt, Morrison depicts the skinning of a bobcat and Milkman's sore neck after he escapes garroting by his estranged friend Guitar.

The final scene rounds out the macabre with closure. After escaping incarceration in Pilate's stone cellar, Milkman convinces her to lay to rest the "inheritance" in the green sack. The two seek out Solomon's Leap and bury Jake's remains. Pilate restores her appearance to normalcy by removing the brass box and burying the scroll with her name on it along with her father's bones. The death of Pilate in Milkman's arms completes a long saga of flight from Jake's murder and estrangement of brother and sister. In an upbeat image, Morrison depicts Milkman, free at last of his father's domination, reaching into the air for the same liberation that loosened Solomon from earth and carried him to glory.)

### Author Purpose

9. Why does Morrison depict a strong woman-to-woman bond in Pilate's household?

(The motif of strong nurturing women dominates Morrison's fiction, particularly in *Song of Solomon*, and in her masterwork, *Beloved*. In Milkman's story, loving women rear and fondle Hagar, the fatherless child of a fatherless mother and orphaned grandmother. Morrison stresses that broken and dysfunctional parenthood need not destroy children. Hagar grows up in a non-traditional background, yet knows the constant and unwavering love of her double mothers. The arrangement of beds illustrates the importance of Hagar to the family, which settles in the Michigan town to give her a home near her kin.)

Chapter 13 halts Milkman's story to emphasize the poignant passing of Hagar, deranged by his rejection and intent on decorating her womanhood with makeup, fashions, and hairdo to lure him back again. As Guitar carries Hagar home, he ponders, "Why did they think their brand of love was better than, or even as good as, anybody else's?" He concludes that the power of the family's love was "so much they would kill anybody who got in its way."

A flaw in the family structure conceals from Pilate and Reba that "Hagar was not like them." Hagar had grown into a demanding psyche that required "a chorus of mamas, grandmamas, aunts, cousins, sisters, neighbors, Sunday school teachers, best girl friends, and what all to give her the strength life demanded." To Hagar, Guitar confides that he, too, had love from his aunt Florence and grandmother, yet feared that, if he loved anything, "it would die."

The beauty of Hagar's funeral service comes from the duet of call-and-response that pours from Pilate and Reba. As though rocking a cradle, Pilate touches the

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coffin with three fingers and sings the "sweet sugar lumpkin" song, "the very same reassurance she had promised her when she was a little girl." Pilate challenges the small congregation to accept her claim that her baby girl "was loved!")

### Structure

10. Why does Morrison break the novel into Part I and Part II?

*(The story of Milkman begins with his birth following the symbolic failed flight of the insurance man, Robert Smith. The first child born in the whites-only hospital, Milkman unintentionally leads the elitist life that sets him apart from the rest of the black community. As he approaches manhood, instead of continued nurturance, he finds himself enslaved to his father, the rent hound who goads poor blacks for money. At age 31, Milkman can tolerate no more of his loveless, confining family.)*

*Part II develops the novel far beyond the Michigan city in the Southern beginnings of Milkman's grandparents. Determined to unravel strands that make no sense, he pulls at the threads of truth until he sees them stretched out, fine and untangled at last. The rise of Milkman from belabored rental agent to family historian gives hope to the novel.*

*Like the others who reside in the stifling black ghetto of the Michigan town, Milkman lives a life of spiritual poverty until he enriches himself with family lore. His gift to Pilate is significant. Rather than introduce his stony-hearted father to Jake and Solomon, Milkman chooses the loving aunt, bringing her search to an end at the burial of Jake's bones, which she had kept tied to the ceiling of her house in a green sack. At his grave, she offers the gift of self in the form of her name, scribbled on a strip of paper in his unsteady, illiterate script on the day of her naming.)*

### HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Morrison is one of a magical coterie of writers who begin their plotting and character delineation with poetry. Her words, compacted with layers of meaning, function like verse by teasing the reader to look deep for multiple resonances.

1. Of father Macon Dead's childhood memories, Morrison notes, "His father may have called their plow horse President Lincoln as a joke, but Macon always thought of Lincoln with fondness since he had loved him first as a strong, steady, gentle, and obedient horse. He even liked General Lee, for one spring they slaughtered him and ate the best pork outside Virginia." The witty imagery replicates the stereotype of Abraham Lincoln as the good, kind-hearted president. Morrison twists the image of Robert E. Lee, the Confederate commander who surrendered to Union forces in April 1865, leaving the rest of the nation to strip him of prestige as surely as a hungry family slaughtering a hog for meat.
2. Hagar's jealousy mounts to murderous passion at Mary's, the local watering hole where Milkman sports a new girl. When "Hagar saw her gray eyes, the fist that had been just sitting in her chest since Christmas released its forefinger like the blade of a skinning knife." Morrison turns the passion from a rock-hard fist into the keen blade of a stalker. The hard-edge yearning grips as "her heart beat like a gloved fist against her ribs. And in

the morning, long before she was fully awake, she felt a longing so bitter and tight it yanked her out of a sleep swept clean of dreams."

3. In a tragicomic thrust against the police, Pilate plays the part of the wheddling, coaxing darky by inventing a husband lynched in Mississippi and a desire to carry out the sentimental white image of heavenly bliss for husband and wife: "We was bony fide and legal wed, suh . . . So I thought I just as well keep him near me and when I die they can put him in the same hole as me. We'll raise up to Judgment Day together. Hand in hand."
4. In introducing Milkman's deliverance in Part II, Morrison compares him to the children in "Hansel and Gretel." With rapid deflation of the fairy tale, she explains, "A grown man can also be energized by hunger, and any weakness in his knees or irregularity in his heartbeat will disappear if he thinks his hunger is about to be assuaged. Especially if the object of his craving is not gingerbread or chewy gumdrops, but gold."
5. At Hagar's funeral, Pilate grows from the wrinkled old grandmother to the "elephant who has just found his anger and lifts his trunk over the heads of the little men who want his teeth or his hide or his flesh or his amazing strength. Pilate trumpeted for the sky itself to hear, 'And she was loved!'" The image of the grandmother reflects not only a dray animal that refuses to be abused or exterminated for its parts but also the whole black race, held in servitude by "little men," those who stop at nothing to make the most of their investment in human flesh.

### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

#### Business and Economics

Summarize Macon's method of enriching himself and the effects of evictions on the blacks renting his houses in Southside.

#### Cinema

View films with troubled or outcast characters. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *Song of Solomon*. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, and economic backgrounds.

#### Geography

Use topographical maps to describe the terrain the story covers, particularly Honor, Michigan, on Lake Superior and the areas of Virginia and Pennsylvania that impact the lives of Pilate and Macon after their father's murder.

#### History and Social Studies

1. Compose an extended definition of social isolation. Explain why the term describes Pilate, Macon, Reba, Hagar, Ruth, Freddie, Porter, and Robert Smith.
2. Contrast female characters and their attitudes toward self, family, and compassion. Consider Ruth, Corinthians, Lena, Pilate, Reba, Hagar, Vernell, Susan Byrd, Grace Long, Aunt Florence, Guitar's grandmother, and Sweet.
3. Explain why the community of Shalimar is important to Milkman and Pilate. Discuss the uniqueness of an area where many people claim kinship with a flying African named Solomon.

#### Language Arts

1. List phrases that underscore the significance of names.

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2. Compose an extended definition of blended narrative. In what ways do all people collect information about the past in a ragged, out-of-time-order fashion? Why do people make mistakes in drawing conclusions, especially Pilate's attempt to interpret the ghost's instructions and Guitar's murderous attempts on Milkman's life? How do Susan's lies temporarily mislead Milkman? How does the peripheral chant of children return him to the truth about his ancestry?
3. Record aloud descriptive passages from *Song of Solomon*.
4. Pantomime symbolic or significant episodes.
5. List sense impressions from the novel that give immediacy and force to characterization.
6. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe racism, child abuse, neglect, and poverty.

### Law

1. Read aloud state laws governing crimes committed in the novel, especially bombing, child abuse, neglect, prostitution, shooting, stalking, holding at knife point, conspiracy to commit murder, theft, and battery. Determine if Macon Dead breaks laws in his dealings with tenants.
2. Make a chart of advice to Ruth about demanding a stable home for herself and her three children. Suggest how she can avoid Macon's cruelties and keep her son from becoming as greedy and hardened as his father.

### Mathematics and Computers

1. Make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: Lindbergh, Lake Superior, cupola, peck basket, Father Divine, the reaper, Hoover, Pittsburgh, caul, Rumpelstiltskin, tetter, caught the eagle, Packard, Four Roses, buckra, hip-roofed, Susquehanna, President Lincoln, General Lee, Mary Todd, Ulysses S. Grant, cracklin, head cheese, academe, sabbatical, highballing, galle, Rothschild '29, Beaujolais, baked Alaska, sugar diabetes, divinity, Corpus Domini Nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam, sacrament, anecdote, 1-A, Waterford, Erie Lackawanna, cop a plea, high-yellow, Till, cracker, jailbait, chubby, snood, case quarter, dragnet, Orval Faubus, Belleau Wood, Kennedy, Elijah, Earl Grey, miscegenation, Riviera, wolverine state, Mafia, Klan, red-headed Negro named X, asceticism, amanuensis, Contes de Daudet, Aunt Jemima, garnisheed, whore of Babylon, stile, passing, Freedman's Bureau, Algonquins, and Shalimar.
2. Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of abuse, bootlegging, poverty, seduction, and violence on family life. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and health surveys.

### Psychology and Health

1. Compose an extended definition of psychological compensation. Use as an example the myth about flying blacks, who escape slavery and racism and spontaneously fly home to Africa.
2. Discuss the strong tie that develops between midwives, the women they treat, and the babies they deliver.
3. Discuss with a group why Guitar's early childhood expe-

riences lead him to join the Seven Days to balance the number of blacks killed by whites.

4. Lead a debate concerning the best methods of treating Hagar's longing for Milkman or Ruth's grief for her father and the emotional trauma of living with an overbearing husband. Consider the use of group therapy, journals, shared activities, and support groups for abused women.

### Religion

Compose a graveside service for Hagar or Pilate. Indicate how clergy, friends, and relatives can assist Reba in coping with loss.

### Speech and Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of Ruth's entry to Mercy Hospital, Corinthians's work for the poet laureate of Michigan, the burial of the two halves of Guitar's father, Circe's residence among Weimaraners in the Butlers' house, the Seven Days shaking hands, Milkman shopping for Christmas gifts at Rexall, Hagar buying makeup and clothes, a blacksmith soldering a gold wire to a brass box, and Sing taking the wagon heading north. Supply sketches of costumes and props.
2. Create a storyboard account of Solomon's departure from Jay and Ryna and the loss of the boy over the porch to the big house. Stress the wonder of flying to the people on the ground below.
3. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle identifiable groups, especially children, women, deformed people, and members of a minority group? How does marital abuse cause tense home situations and hostile children? How do speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, and other forms of creativity help quell ridicule, hatred, segregation, and prejudice?
5. Compose a presentation to potential foster parents. Prepare them for parenting orphaned and unloved children like Freddie, Guitar, Pilate, and Macon by listing positive steps toward adjustment, for example, setting an example of emotional and physical stability.

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of hatred and cruelty in various characters.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate Milkman's curiosity.
3. Compose a scene in which Milkman convinces Guitar that there was no gold to steal from Hunters Cave.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each.
5. Account for the recurrence of the motif of tender mothering in Sweet, Ruth, Circe, Pilate, Reba, Guitar's grandmother, Aunt Florence, and Heddy Byrd.

## SONG OF SOLOMON

### VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each of the following sentences with appropriate words from the list below. Write your responses in the blanks provided.

amanuensis	consistency	discretion	infanticide	sabbatical
analytically	courtesan	exhilarated	invulnerability	sacrament
anecdote	crochetwork	fracas	irregularity	slaughtered
calculated	cruising	garnisheed	miscegenation	stile
committed	cupola	horizontal	profundity	strife
confidential	deference	impugning	revelations	virility

1. At some point Corinthians began to suspect that Porter's \_\_\_\_\_ was not only in \_\_\_\_\_ to who she was (her position and all), but also because he too didn't want to be discovered.
2. Nose, chin, cheekbones, forehead, neck all had surrendered their identity to the pleats and \_\_\_\_\_ of skin \_\_\_\_\_ to constant change.
3. But not with arms stretched out like airplane wings, nor shot forward like Superman in a \_\_\_\_\_ dive, but floating, \_\_\_\_\_, in the relaxed position of a man lying on a couch reading a newspaper.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ violence of a shark grew in her, and like every witch that ever rode a broom straight through the night to a ceremonial \_\_\_\_\_ as thrilled by the black wind as by the rod between her legs.
5. Like every fed-up-to-the-teeth bride who worried about the \_\_\_\_\_ of the grits she threw at her husband as well as the potency of the lye she had stirred into them; and like every queen and every \_\_\_\_\_ who was struck by the beauty of her emerald ring as she tipped its poison into the old red wine.
6. Corinthians listened \_\_\_\_\_, expectantly—wondering how her mother would develop this \_\_\_\_\_ into a situation in which Macon would either lash out at her verbally or hit her.
7. They believed firmly that members of their own race killed one another for good reasons: violation of another's turf; or verbal insults \_\_\_\_\_ their \_\_\_\_\_, honesty, humanity, and mental health.
8. Her mind traveled crooked streets and aimless goat paths, arriving sometimes at \_\_\_\_\_, other times at the \_\_\_\_\_ of a three-year-old.
9. Now he had had a \_\_\_\_\_ talk with his mother, only to discover that before he was born, before the first nerve end had formed in his mother's womb, he was the subject of great controversy and \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The airplane ride \_\_\_\_\_ him, encouraged illusion and a feeling of \_\_\_\_\_.

## SONG OF SOLOMON

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions from the novel with a character name. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- |       |   |                    |
|-------|---|--------------------|
| _____ | 1. keeps Weimaraners.   | A. Sweet           |
| _____ | 2. wants to sell lots at Honor.                                       | B. Robert Smith    |
| _____ | 3. is the Sunday man.   | C. Freddie         |
| _____ | 4. is ashamed of the yardman.   | D. Macon           |
| _____ | 5. owns the Shalimar gas station.                                     | E. Reverend Cooper |
| _____ | 6. rips an ear lobe.  | F. Pilate          |
| _____ | 7. lies to keep Grace from hearing family history.                    | G. Hagar           |
| _____ | 8. fears water moccasins.   | H. Corinthians     |
| _____ | 9. admits to a priest that she is Methodist.                          | I. Solomon         |
| _____ | 10. collects insurance in black neighborhoods.                        | J. Circe           |
| _____ | 11. warns Milkman that Guitar and Empire State are involved in crime. | K. Guitar          |
| _____ | 12. recalls how the blacksmith attached a gold wire to the snuffbox.  | L. Ruth            |
| _____ | 13. is dismayed at her reflection in the mirror.                      | M. Milkman         |
| _____ | 14. dropped his baby boy at the porch of the big house.               | N. Susan           |
| _____ | 15. waits for a stalker.  | O. King Walker     |

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Milkman learns from Circe the names Singing Bird and Crow Bird.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Heddy took the two children and hid them on the third floor of the Butler home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Corinthians moves into Henry Porter's house, even though she knows that he is a killer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Guitar mistakes the movement of a box to the depot as theft of the gold.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Milkman would like to find a woman like Pilate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. At the Fairfield Cemetery, Milkman surprises his mother in her slip.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Hagar's funeral draws many mourners, including the members of Macon's family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Milkman realizes the sacrifice Pilate makes to convince police that the theft was a prank.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Macon early establishes his greed by arguing with Pilate over stealing bags of gold nuggets.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Lena threatens her brother for intervening in Corinthians' love life.



## SONG OF SOLOMON

### Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase which completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is certain that \_\_\_\_\_ will never return Milkman's watch.
2. While walking around \_\_\_\_\_, Milkman begins to put together the song of Solomon with his only son Jake and \_\_\_\_\_, the wailing echo in the gulch.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ pawns a diamond she won for \$200 to bankroll Hagar's new \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Jake gains the name \_\_\_\_\_ when he registers with the \_\_\_\_\_ Bureau.
5. Milkman and \_\_\_\_\_ return to \_\_\_\_\_'s Leap to bury Jake's bones.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe how the town residents view Macon Dead, the rent collector.
2. Explain what Milkman's rejection does to Hagar.
3. Discuss Pilate's influence on Milkman.
4. Account for the value of revenge to the Seven Days.
5. Summarize events and coincidences that acquaint Milkman with his history.

## SONG OF SOLOMON

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. While Christmas shopping,  
A. Hagar drops wet bags.  
B. Milkman realizes that he no longer loves Hagar.  
C. Ruth goes to Catholic mass and receives communion.  
D. Pilate buys extravagant presents for her "sugar lumpkin."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Guitar is responsible for  
A. strangling a boy on the playground.  
B. avenging four girls killed in a bombing.  
C. Till's death.  
D. collecting rent money from Henry Porter.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The song of Solomon reveals  
A. how Jake's father left Shalimar.  
B. Heddy's connection with Susan Byrd.  
C. why the men hunt the bobcat in Ryna's Gulch.  
D. the manner in which Macon was murdered.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Nephew takes  
A. Guitar's message to Vernell's house.  
B. the white hunters to the cave.  
C. the bobcat skin and leaves the meat.  
D. Milkman to the Butler house.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Pilate emphasizes to all  
A. that she breaks no laws by bootlegging.  
B. her father's original name.  
C. how much Hagar was loved.  
D. the amount of gold she carried from the cave.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Milkman longs to  
A. marry Sweet and stay in Shalimar.  
B. be friends again with Guitar.  
C. live independently.  
D. invest in the Erie and Lackawanna.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Knocked into the radiator,  
A. Porter argues with Freddie over the back rent.  
B. Milkman grabs a broken bottle to ward off the knife.  
C. Ruth refuses to fight back.  
D. Macon decides to explain his wife's wrongs to Milkman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The myth of flying  
A. permeates Shalimar's history.  
B. never reaches Susan.  
C. involves Solomon and his 21 children.  
D. causes black neighbors to be suspicious of Algonquins.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Guitar protects  
A. Milkman from Feather's prejudice.  
B. Hagar from the rain.  
C. Corinthians's secret love.  
D. Empire State when he gets into trouble.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The birth of Milkman  
A. is a proud moment for Circe.  
B. precedes that of Lena and Corinthians.  
C. takes place at Mercy Hospital.  
D. requires magic from Pilate.

## SONG OF SOLOMON

### Part II: Matching (30 points)

Match the following actions with places from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- |       |  |                       |
|-------|--|-----------------------|
| _____ | 1. Freddie peers through the window at Milkman.      | A. quarry             |
| _____ | 2. Sweet joins Milkman for a swim.                   | B. Fairfield          |
| _____ | 3. A woman grieves for her departed husband.         | C. Sweet's house      |
| _____ | 4. Grace steals a watch.                             | D. Guitar's room      |
| _____ | 5. Robert climbs to the cupola.                      | E. Honor              |
| _____ | 6. Milkman trails Ruth.                              | F. Sonny's Shop       |
| _____ | 7. Milkman explains his discovery to his aunt.       | G. Danville           |
| _____ | 8. Pilate refuses to marry Reba's father.            | H. Pilate's cellar    |
| _____ | 9. Hunters invite Milkman to join them.              | I. Susan's house      |
| _____ | 10. Cooper leaves work before Milkman can find him.  | J. Mercy Hospital     |
| _____ | 11. Milkman gets a bath, rubdown, and dinner.        | K. Foster's house     |
| _____ | 12. Corinthians asks directions to the bathroom.     | L. King's gas station |
| _____ | 13. Milkman survives a stab wound to the collarbone. | M. Porter's room      |
| _____ | 14. Macon hopes to profit from a vacation community. | N. Ryna's Gulch       |
| _____ | 15. Macon deprives a dying man of medicine.          | O. black colony       |

### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What does Milkman feel at his throat?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What does Jake write on the strip?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What spills on the snow the day Robert dies?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What does Pilate cook for her nephew the day he meets Hagar?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. On which days does Guitar avenge wrongs against blacks?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. After three days of illness, what does Hagar look at?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Who determines that the fancy bed belongs to Hagar?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. How long does Milkman stay in jail?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Who sniffs ether?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Who accuses Milkman of urinating on the family?

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Pilate stays in town near her brother.
2. Contrast Milkman's relationships with Ruth, Pilate, Hagar, Lena, and Sweet.
3. Account for enmity between Foster and his son-in-law.
4. Summarize the verses to the children's song.
5. Describe the causes of marital strife between Ruth and Macon.

## SONG OF SOLOMON

### ANSWER KEY

#### VOCABULARY TEST

1. deference, discretion
2. crochetwork, committed
3. horizontal, cruising
4. calculated, infanticide
5. consistency, courtesan
6. analytically, anecdote
7. impugning, virility
8. profundity, revelations
9. confidential, strife
10. invulnerability, exhilarated

#### COMPREHENSION TEST A

##### Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. J | 6. F  | 11. C |
| 2. D | 7. N  | 12. E |
| 3. K | 8. A  | 13. G |
| 4. H | 9. L  | 14. I |
| 5. O | 10. B | 15. M |

##### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F  |
| 2. F | 7. F  |
| 3. F | 8. T  |
| 4. T | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. T |

##### Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. Susan, Grace
2. Shalimar, Ryna
3. Reba, clothes
4. Macon Dead, Freedman's
5. Pilate, Solomon

##### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

#### COMPREHENSION TEST B

##### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. C  |
| 2. B | 7. D  |
| 3. A | 8. A  |
| 4. D | 9. D  |
| 5. C | 10. C |

##### Part II: Matching (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. B  | 11. C |
| 2. A | 7. H  | 12. M |
| 3. N | 8. O  | 13. D |
| 4. I | 9. L  | 14. E |
| 5. J | 10. G | 15. K |

##### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

1. wire
2. Pilate's name
3. velvet rose petals
4. boiled egg
5. Sundays
6. mirror
7. Ruth
8. two hours
9. the doctor
10. Lena

##### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

**SONG OF SOLOMON**

**TEACHER'S NOTES**





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