



Sula

by Toni Morrison

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

PART ONE

A white farmer tricks a slave into doing work for his freedom and a parcel of bottomland. The land the farmer gives him, in the hills over Medallion, Ohio, eventually supports a black community, but is now to be razed for the expansion of the Medallion City Golf Course.

1919

Shadrack spends the year in a hospital after seeing a fellow soldier's face blown off while the soldier's lifeless body continued his charge. He's released from the hospital even though he suffers from post-combat delusions such as his hands and fingers growing to monstrous proportions. Reduced to weeping on a curbside because he can't untie his shoes, Shadrack spends a night in jail before being delivered to his old residence at the Bottom, Ohio. He lives in his grandfather's river shack and sells fish to support himself; he institutes a National Suicide Day on January 3, 1920, with a parade and cowbells, to commemorate his horrors.

1920

Helene Sabat's grandmother Cecile, a Louisiana Creole, rescues Helene from Sundown House and rears her in piety for 16 years. Wiley Wright marries Helene and settles her at Medallion, where she lives sedately. Nine years later, she gives birth to Nel. On November 20, she and ten-year-old Nel take the train to New Orleans to visit Cecile, who is ailing. Nel is outraged that Helene smiles at a racist conductor.

Helene and Nel arrive at Elysian Fields the day after Grandmother Cecile's death. Nel encounters her own grandmother, Rochelle Sabat, an entrancing prostitute who smells like gardenias and asks Nel's name. Henri Martin takes care of funeral arrangements. Three days later, Nel and her mother return home. Nel makes friends with Sula Peace, the child of a frowzy household.

1921

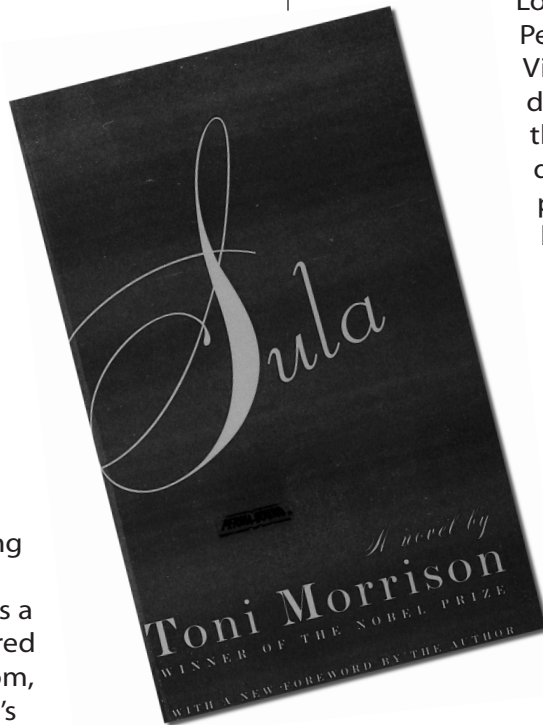
Local legends account for Eva Peace's loss of her left leg. A proud Virginian, she married BoyBoy, a drunken womanizer who built them a one-room cabin. He abandoned her after five years. To support Hannah, Pearl, and Plum, Eva begged, then disappeared for 18 months before returning minus a leg. When BoyBoy visits with his citified woman, Eva determines to hate him.

Eva takes in three foster sons and names each one Dewey King. The trio and Tar Baby, a drunken boarder, join Shadrack on National Suicide Day. Eva welcomes men to her house. After Rekus dies, Hannah cares for her mother and Sula and receives a string of lovers.

When Plum returns from the war with a drug addiction, Eva hugs him, sets him on fire, and leaves him to burn to death.

1922

Ajax watches Nel and Sula walk to Edna Finch's ice cream parlor. One afternoon, Irish boys push Nel around. Sula terrifies them by cutting the tip from her left forefinger and threatening them with a paring knife. Helene beautifies Nel by smoothing her hair with a hot comb and by urging her to pull her nose to make it look less African. In summer, Sula swings Chicken Little into the river, then runs to Shadrack's house for help. A bargeman locates the drowned boy and reports him to the sheriff at Porter's Landing. Sula weeps during Rev. Deal's sermon.



1923

In August, Hannah asks Eva if she loved her children. Eva reminds Hannah of the terror of starvation. To a question about Plum's death, Eva relives the horror of her son's addiction and her decision to murder him. Hannah has a dream about wearing a red wedding dress. While canning, she catches fire and burns to death in the yard. Eva leaps from the upstairs window to smother the flames; Sula watches, but does nothing to help. Hannah dies in the ambulance. Willy Fields saves Eva from bleeding to death by summoning a nurse. Eva lives to age ninety still hating Willy for intervening.

1927

In June, Helene Wright holds a reception for Nel's marriage to Jude Greene, a waiter at the Hotel Medallion. To support a wife, he applies for work building a road. During the reception, Sula leaves town.

Part Two: 1937

After a decade, Sula returns to the Bottom during a plague of robins. She arrives from Nashville, where she attended college on the insurance money left by Plum and Hannah's deaths. Sula chides Eva for losing a leg under a train to earn \$23 a month disability pay. Eva scolds Sula for refusing to marry. In April, Sula becomes Eva's guardian and has her removed to an old folks home named Sunnydale. Nel is delighted with Sula's return. Sula confides that Eva threatened to set fire to her granddaughter. Nel promises to help Sula manage money to keep Eva in comfort. Jude leaves Nel for Sula. In a prayer to Jesus, Nel questions a woman's loneliness.

1939

Sula ditches Jude, who flees to Detroit. She earns a reputation for sexual liaisons with white men. Betty spreads a lie that Sula pushed Teapot down the stairs. After Mr. Finley chokes on a chicken bone, people interpret the rose-shaped birthmark on Sula's eyelid as Hannah's ashes. Dessie claims that Shadrack tipped his invisible hat to Sula. A symbol of evil, Sula lives for herself alone until she meets Ajax, who eludes her attempt to domesticate him.

1940

Nel works as a chambermaid at the Hotel Medallion. She visits Sula, fills her prescription, and accuses her of being too independent to get help. Nel asks why Sula took Jude away. When Nel

leaves Sula's sickroom, Sula looks at Eva's boarded-up window and dies.

1941

Sula's death brings the curious to her gravesite. Eva transfers to a new nursing home. An icy October 1940 precedes a downturn in lives. In January 1941, things improve. Shadrack begins to feel lonely and cherishes the belt that Sula left behind in girlhood. On National Suicide Day, neighbors greet Shadrack with laughter. A parade follows him to the abandoned tunnel under the river, where many drown in the collapsing structure.

1965

Life improves for blacks. Nel visits inmates of old folks' homes. A call on the demented Eva declines with her accusations that Nel drowned Chicken Little. On the walk home, Nel mourns for Sula.

Timeline of the Action

- 1870** Eva Peace is born.
- 1890** Plum is born to Eva and BoyBoy.
- 1892** Plum's sister Pearl is born.
- 1895** Hannah is born to Eva and BoyBoy
- November** BoyBoy deserts the family.
- December** Eva fears her children will starve and leaves town.
- 1897** Shadrack is born.
- June** Eva returns home an amputee.
- 1900** Ajax is born to a conjure woman.
- 1901** Helene Sabat and Wiley Wright marry and live in Medallion.
- 1907** Jude Greene is born.
- 1910** Nel Wright is born to Helene and Wiley. Eva retreats to the upstairs. Sula Mae is born to Rekus and Hannah Peace.
- 1913** Rekus dies.
- 1915** Nel meets Sula at Garfield Primary School.
- 1917** Dewey King One is born. Plum goes to war.
- Dec. 1917** Private Shadrack goes to war in France.
- 1918** Shadrack enters a Midwestern military hospital for a year's treatment.
- 1919** Still traumatized by combat, Shadrack returns to Medallion. Dewey King Two is born.
- 1920** Dewey King Three is born.

- January 3** Tar Baby takes a room at Eva's house. Shadrack begins celebrating National Suicide Day.
- Nov. 20** When Cecile Sabat sickens, Helene Wright and Nel take the train to New Orleans.
- Dec. 28** Plum returns from the war with a drug addiction.
- 1921** Eva becomes foster mother to the three Dewey Kings.
- 1922** Ajax calls Nel and Sula "pig meat."
- November** To scare off lurking Irish boys, Sula cuts the tip from her left forefinger.
- summer 1923** Sula watches as Hannah burns to death.
- fall 1924** The three Deweys enter first grade.
- spring 1927** Sula and Nel graduate from high school.
- June** Nel marries Jude Greene. Sula leaves town.
- 1937** Sula returns to the Bottom.
- April** Sula has Eva placed in a seedy nursing home.
- 1940** Sula dies.
- 1941** The abandoned tunnel caves in, killing people from the Bottom.
- 1940s** Nel has a lover in the military.
- 1959** Pearl dies.
- 1965** Nel realizes that she misses Sula.

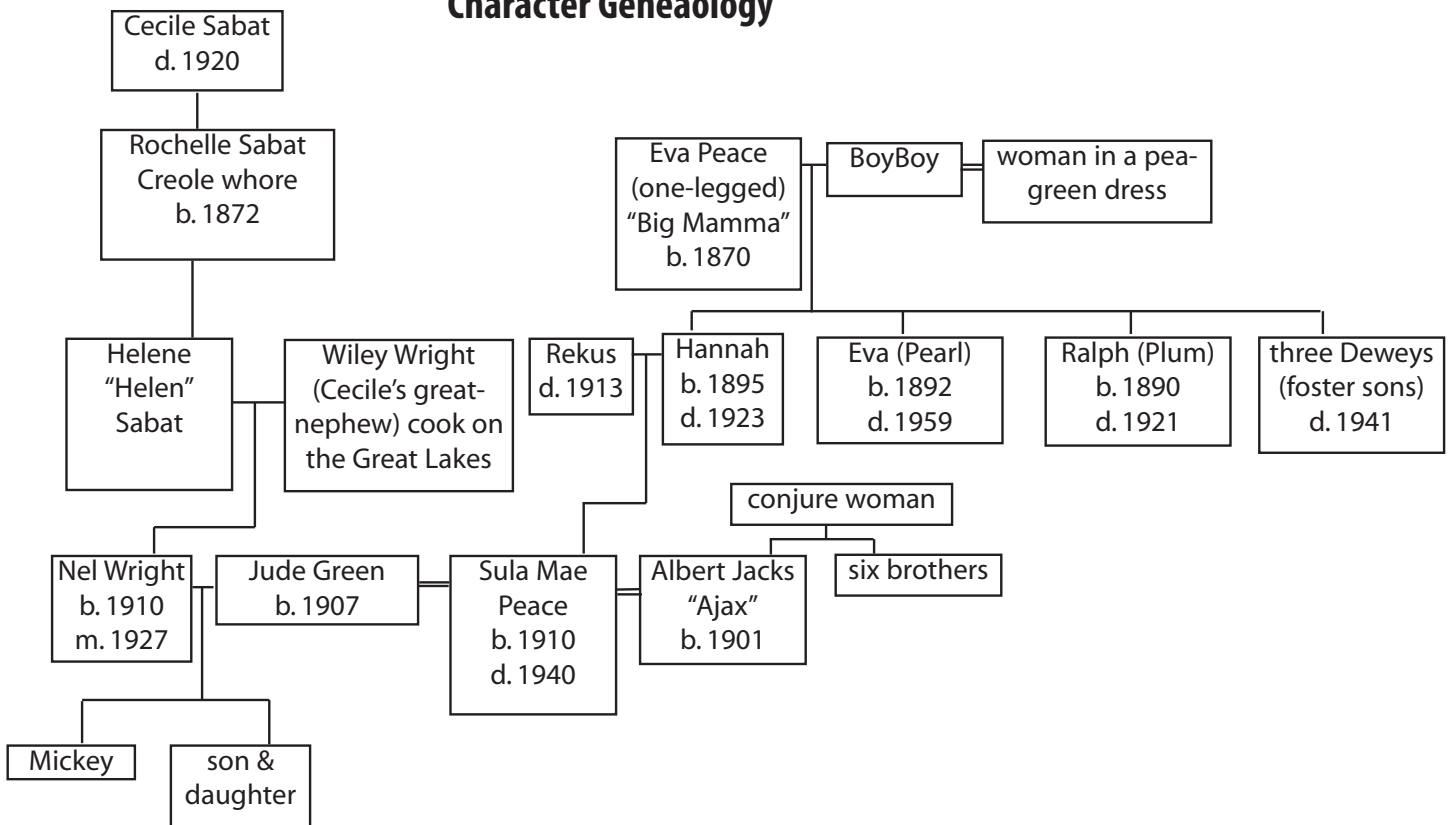
Author Sketch



Possibly the most revered female writer in America, 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 gentle mother, Ramah Willis Wofford, demonstrated more racial tolerance, perhaps because she was better educated than her husband.

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

Character Genealogy



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, for ten years, taught English at Texas Southern and Howard universities.

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 of *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 child-murderer Margaret Garner, who, unlike Sethe, was returned to her owner. Subsequent works—*Jazz*, *Playing in the Dark*, *Paradise*, and *Love*—have settled Toni Morrison more firmly in the canon of feminist, African-American, and world literature.

Critic's Corner

From black female author to world-class Nobelist, 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 flourished 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. In 1996, she was named the Jefferson lecturer, the federal government's highest honor for intellectual achievement.

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 which 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.

Bibliography

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- Closser, Raleen. "Morrison's Sula," *Explicator* 62, no. 2: 111.
- David, Ron. *Toni Morrison Explained: A Reader's Road Map to the Novels*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- King, Nicola. *Memory, Narrative, Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
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- Okonkwo, Christopher N. "A Critical Divination: Reading Sula as Ogbanje-Abiku," *African American Review* 28, no. 4 (winter 2004): 4.
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- Schreiber, Evelyn Jaffe. *Subversive Voices: Eroticizing the Other in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002.
- Wall, Cheryl A. *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage and Literary Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Yardley, Jonathan. "Toni Morrison: An Introduction," *Washington Post* (6 March 2006): C1.

Morrison's Published Works

- College Reading Skills*, 1965
- The Bluest Eye*, 1969
- Sula*, 1973
- The Black Book*, 1974
- "Behind the Making of *The Black Book*," *Black World*, 1974
- "Rediscovering Black History," *New York Times Magazine*, 1974
- "Reading," *Mademoiselle*, 1975
- "I Will Always Be a Writer," *Essence*, December 1976
- "The Slow Walk of a Tree (as Grandmother Would Say, Hopeless)," *New York Times Magazine*, 1976
- Song of Solomon*, 1977
- Tar Baby*, 1981
- "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," *Black Women Writers, 1950-1980*, 1984
- "A Knowing So Deep," *Essence*, May 1985
- Dreaming Emmett*, 1986
- Beloved*, 1987
- "The Site of Memory," *Inventing the Truth*, 1987

- untitled essay, *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*, 1989
- Racing Justice*, 1992
- Jazz*, 1992
- Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 1992
- The Dancing Mind*, 1997
- Birth of a Nation'Hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case*, 1997
- Paradise*, 1998
- The Big Box*, 1999
- Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, and Conversations*, 1999
- Love*, 2003
- Who's Got Game? The Ant or the Grasshopper*, 2003
- Who's Got Game? The Lion or the Mouse*, 2003
- Who's Got Game? The Poppy or the Snake*, 2004

Media Versions of Morrison's Sula

Audiocassette (unabridged)

Sula, Random House Audio, 1997

Critical Edition

Toni Morrison's Sula, Chelsea House, 1999

General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of parenting on children
2. To account for girlhood friendships
3. To interpret social and community customs
4. To contrast points of view on promiscuity
5. To discuss the themes of evil and retribution
6. To explain main events in terms of American history
7. To analyze sources of regret
8. To identify attitudes toward females, drunks, orphans, and the aged
9. To pinpoint elements of atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze the shift in community aspirations and values
11. To characterize the civil rights movement from the rural perspective

Specific Objectives

1. To explain why Eva thrives after losing a leg
2. To analyze the symbolism of the names Wright, Sabat, and Peace
3. To account for Nel's contentment with Jude
4. To contrast Nel and Sula in terms of logic and self-control
5. To justify Shadrack's reverence for a lost belt
6. To predict how Nel will honor a dead friend
7. To typify the childhoods of Nel and Sula
8. To discuss the implications of Chicken Little's death and the collapsing tunnel
9. To summarize the roles of Jude, BoyBoy, and Ajax
10. To list examples of Sula and Eva's intractability
11. To analyze Eva's accusations of Sula and Nel

Related Reading

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
Toni Cade Bambara, "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird"
George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes*
Kate Chopin, "Desirée's Baby"
Rita Dove, *Thomas and Beulah*
Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*
Kaye Gibbons, *Charles for the Easy Life*
Alex Haley, *Queen*
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*
Ruthann Lumm McCunn, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*
Walter Dean Myers, *Glory Field*
Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*
Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
August Wilson, *Gem of the Ocean* or *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Toni Morrison's narrative style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

literary foil: a character who serves as an opposite or as a standard by which another character is measured, as with the extremes of Sula's slicing off a fingertip to protect Nel from menacing white boys and Helene's conservative household, which contrasts the loose, uninhibited ways of Eva and Hannah at the Peace residence.

novella (or short novel): a shortened form of fictional development lying between novel and short story that covers a single event. In Toni Morrison's *Sula*, the focus on a friendship between Sula and Nel introduces commentary on the development of a black community and its neighborhood, religious, economic, and racial traditions. To stress Sula's status as a pariah, the text describes anomalies of her funeral, which relegates her remains and burial arrangements to whites.

saga: a framework story of noble and unworthy deeds that interlace the history of a family, clan, tribe, or nation, as found in the sedate upbringing of Helene Sabat at the home of Grandmother Cecile in New Orleans and the continuation of social and moral proprieties in Nel's home. Similarly, Sula Mae Peace learns independence from males while living with Grandmother Eva Peace and with Hannah.

The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Toni Morrison's *Sula* is the meticulous racial divide between Medallion, Ohio, and the black community known as the Bottom. Growing up on a hilltop among poor blacks, Nel and Sula observe the inconsistencies between moral and religious mores taught at Greater Saint Matthew's Church and the behaviors of womanizers like Ajax, no-goods like BoyBoy, racist agitators like the Irish boys, and child neglecters like Betty and the mothers of the three Deweys. The waves of prosperity and want in the Bottom derive from icy winters as well as post-war optimism that a road and bridge will connect hill and valley. Into shanties and thin-walled homes come epidemics of scarlet fever and croup as well as the welcome of Eva to newlyweds boarding at her home and the joys of soldiers returning from World War I.

As a jolt to Nel Wright, her mother takes her south on the railroad from Ohio to the Deep South to attend to Cecile Sabat during her final illness. Helene's failure to board the right car introduces Nel to the Jim Crow manners expected of blacks in close association with whites. The faces that register distaste for Helene's exaggerated smile to a rude train conductor belong to returning war veterans, soldiers who have seen parts of the world devoid of Southern racism and black Uncle Toms. Nel's brief experience with Rochelle Sabat suggests that there are places in the South where good-tim-

ing women make their way via boldness and seduction, even if they have to live in Elysian Fields behind the red shutters of Sundown House.

Contributing to the setting are symbolic structures, like the boarded-up window in Eva's bedroom, serving of whites at the Hotel Medallion, and the erection of retirement homes for the aged that indicate a social shift toward devaluation of elderly family members. Another focus, the bridge from the New River Road to Medallion, is never built and, thus, never supplies jobs to the anxious unemployed men of the Bottom. At story's end, on National Suicide Day, Shadrack leads a parade to the abandoned river tunnel, a gesture toward integration that collapses and results in a mass drowning, including the hapless three Deweys. In the years that follow the Civil Rights era, Medallion receives blacks into the job market and generates a reversal of land use. As more blacks move to town, wealthy whites take over the hilltop community of the Bottom and map out a golf course, a symbol of self-indulgence and exclusion.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Toni Morrison, racism, social isolation, feminism, the South, World War I, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

Articles

"Censorship Roundup," *School Library Journal* 51, no. 12 (December 2005): 20.

Audiocassette

Freedom Road, Recorded Books

Disc Recording

A Raisin in the Sun, Columbia Records
Their Eyes Were Watching God, Caedmon

Filmstrips

Self-Fulfillment, Guidance Associates

Flashcards

On Black America, Social Studies School Services



Internet

"Sula,"
www.luminarium.org/contemporary/tonimorrison/sula.htm.
"Toni Morrison,"
www.kirjasto.sci.fi/tmorriss.htm.

Multimedia

Race and Prejudice in America Today, Knowledge Unlimited

Novels

Beloved
The Color Purple
The Glory Field
Jubilee
Like Water for Chocolate
Their Eyes Were Watching God

Poetry

"A Double Standard," Frances Ellen Harper
"Griots," Nikki Giovanni
"I Am a Black Woman," Mari Evans
Thomas and Beulah, Rita Dove

Reference Books

Black History Month Resource Book, Gale
Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature, Facts on File
The Great Migration: An American Story, HarperCollins
Now Is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom, HarperCollins

Scripts

The Color Purple, Script City

Short Stories

"Blues Ain't No Mockin' Bird," Toni Cade Bambara
"Desirée's Baby," Kate Chopin
"Homeland," Barbara Kingsolver
"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?," Joyce Carol Oates

Videos/DVDs

Band of Angels
Chocolat
Daughters of the Dust
The House of the Spirits
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Queen
Ragtime

Workbook

Prejudice, Social Studies School Services

Themes and Motifs

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

Themes

- feminism
- injustice
- poverty
- friendship
- isolation
- family
- racism
- tradition
- self-esteem
- desertion

Motifs

- coping with social and economic change
- evaluating male-female relationships
- justifying independence and selfhood

Meaning Study

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

1. A young man hardly twenty, his head full of nothing and his mouth recalling the taste of lipstick, Shadrack had found himself in December, 1917, running with his comrades across a field in France. (I, 1919, p. 7)
(The war on the Western Front heated up in 1917 along the Somme River and in Champagne on the Aisne River toward Rheims, France. Either setting might account for Shadrack's nearness to a river when he views the explosion of a comrade's skull and suffers combat trauma that sends him to a Midwestern military hospital.)
2. The red shutters had haunted both Helene Sabat and her grandmother for sixteen years. (I, 1920, p.17)
(The direction of Helene's life begins before birth with the work of her mother, Rochelle Sabat, at Sundown House, a brothel identified by red shutters. Cecile retrieves her granddaughter, rears her conservatively, and stresses piety and duty. These values influence the upbringing and behavior of Nel and set her apart from Sula.)

3. The lift in spirit that such an accomplishment produced in her quickly disappeared when the train finally pulled into New Orleans. (I, 1920, p. 24)
(In Alabama and Mississippi, Helene Sabat Wright saves herself the humiliation of entering a shabby outhouse marked "colored women" by going into the field on the opposite side of the tracks. Her refusal to be debased remains firm until she returns to her hometown and the family degradation of a having whore for a mother.)
4. Don't just sit there, honey. You could be pulling your nose. (I, 1920, p. 28)
(Helene considers it time well spent in attempts to reshape a broad African nose into a thinner, less noticeable form. Her commands to Nel suggest that having black features is shameful.)
5. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead; Nel's because he wasn't), they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for. (I, 1922, p. 52)
(Morrison sums up in a sentence the draw that creates a life-long bond between Sula and Nel. Both have little contact with parents and yearn for affection, respect, and the closeness of female bonding.)
6. "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference." (I, 1922, p. 57)
(Reinforcing Sula's self-evaluation as a neglected child is her mother's admission that she loves her daughter in maternal fashion, but does not like her as a person. At the same moment, the friendly call of Nel restores Sula's self-esteem.)
7. "I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more. I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again." (I, 1923, p. 71)
(To explain why she murdered Plum, Eva tells Hannah that Plum had returned to infancy through post-World War I drug addiction. Rather than take the responsibility for his care, Eva chose to kill him.)
8. Eva was wide awake. The blood from her face cuts filled her eyes so she could not see, could only smell the familiar odor of cooked flesh. (I, 1923, p. 77)
(The text contrasts the deaths of two of Eva's children from fire—Plum in a kerosene-fueled blaze set by his mother and Hannah by accident while lighting a fire to heat water to sterilize canning jars. In self-punishment, Eva curses Willy Fields, the hospital orderly who saves Eva from bleeding to death following her leap out of an upstairs window.)

9. Just 'cause you was bad enough to cut off your own leg you think you got a right to kick everybody with the stump. (II, 1937, pp. 92-93)
(Because Eva insults Sula's independence in an unmarried, unmatronly state, Sula rains retribution on Eva for deliberately crippling herself to gain a disability check. The fight worsens with blame for Plum's murder. The spiteful grandmother evens the ground between them by reminding Sula that she made no effort to save Hannah from burning to death.)
10. She was pariah, then, and knew it. (II, 1939, p. 122)
(Sula embraces the freedom of promiscuity until local men's wives aim murderous glares in her direction. She becomes an outcast. It is this low point in her 29 years when Ajax enters her life and further demoralizes her.)

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 Sula to leave and return to the Bottom?
(Sula learns early that her mother doesn't love her. To compensate, Sula develops esteem with self-love through hasty, destructive actions. She eagerly aids Helene in planning Jude and Nel's wedding reception, but departs during the party because her best friend has moved on to another level of love and commitment. Using money from the death benefits of Plum and Hannah, Sula leaves home to educate herself in Nashville, Tennessee. She travels to Detroit, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Macon, and San Diego in search of satisfying relationships. When her search produces no contentment and no friend like Nel, Sula returns to the Bottom. Out of pride, she sashays into town in a stunning outfit. Out of need, she reinitiates her girlhood oneness with Nel.)

Setting

2. Describe where Chicken Little dies.
(Chicken Little's death occurs in a bucolic summery setting where Nel and Sula are enjoying play in the grass under the shade of four trees. When Chicken Little arrives from the river bank, Sula helps him climb a beech tree. When she pretends to leave him in the branches, he begs to be rescued. She swings him around, startling birds and grasshoppers, then releases his limbs, sending into the river. As Chicken Little drowns, the water

returns to a peaceful surface in the sun. The only source of rescue is Shadrack's house across the plank bridge and up a pathless hill.)

Character Development

3. Describe Sula's relationship with Ajax.
(As an assertion of female independence and sexual equality, Sula toys with men. At Eva's house, Sula takes her pleasure without regard to the hurt and anger of betrayed wives. When Ajax arrives with a bottle of milk, he introduces Sula to a more conversational relationship than she has ever known. The couple balances sex with friendship. Because she begins to rely on his nearness, Ajax retreats from too domestic a scenario. After he departs for the airport at Dayton, Sula yearns for his return. He leaves so little of himself for her to treasure that she delights in a driver's license, the only personal token that attests to their fervid love. Symbolically, the scrap attests to the consequences of sexual "license" for males and females.)

Historical Milieu

4. How do times change race relations?
(The 1960s end the Jim Crow racism of the past and bring a more balanced relationship between blacks and whites. Young black workers from the Bottom gravitate toward Medallion to work in stores. Whites trust black employees with monetary transactions and keys to cash registers. As blacks feel more at home in the valley, they desert the hilltop community, leaving behind the elderly. Gradually, whites retreat once more from residence near blacks in town by moving to the hilltop. They build houses that overlook the river and the town of Medallion, a symbol of earthly reward. When few blacks remain in the Bottom, whites develop the land as a golf course.)

Theme

5. What does the author reveal about independence?
(The double standard in the Bottom accepts as unavoidable the male prerogative to flirt with young girls, chase women, and abandon families. After BoyBoy deserts Eva, she goes to extremes to feed Plum, Pearl, and Hannah. Returning from a deliberate encounter with a train, she arrives in town displaying the amputation of her leg. Because she receives a monthly disability check of \$23, she earns local regard for providing for her family. She develops her reputation for kindness by taking in the three Deweys, Tar Baby, and newlyweds needing a rented room.

Unlike Eva, Sula also leaves town to free herself of the stereotypical role of wife and mother. On the proceeds of two insurance policies from the deaths of her brother and mother, Sula educates herself in Nashville, Tennessee, and travels to large cities around the country. When a yearning for affection and welcome

draws her back to the Bottom, she lives in the casual, self-pleasuring style that she adopts in college and on her travels. Like Hannah, she enjoys promiscuous relationships with local men, but earns the spite of their wives for using and discarding lovers. The implications that Sula is too good for local men causes women to circulate gossip that Sula sleeps around with white men. She pays for her violation of local mores by suffering and dying alone and neglected in her grandmother's old room, a symbol of the dominance of conservative standards over upstarts like Sula.)

Interpretation

6. Compare characterizations of Cecile, Rochelle, Helene, and Nel.
(The brief scene that brings together four generations of the Sabat family prefigures the price that women pay for violating sexual codes. The French surname "Sabat" suggests the turmoil of a witches' sabbath, the symbolic extreme of female violation of social and religious standards. For Cecile Sabat, living near the red shutters of Sundown House, the milieu of Rochelle's promiscuity, degrades the family and compromises Helene's reputation. By rearing her granddaughter in strict conservative mores, Cecile widens the breach between a tender daughter and a neglectful mother.

When Helene returns to New Orleans in 1922, she finds Cecile dead and Rochelle as casual as ever about her responsibilities as daughter and mother. Helene spurns Rochelle's overtures to Nel, which Rochelle conducts in Creole patois, a foreign language to her granddaughter. Although Helene perpetuates her grandmother's pury home training, Nel clings to a fantasy of the enticing, insouciant Rochelle. Like the gardenia fragrance that envelops their meeting, female independence occupies Nel's memories and prefaces her joy in friendship with Sula.)

Conflict

7. Why does Sula betray Nel?
(Nel's love for Sula revives upon their reunion after a decade of separation. Sula's casual interest in males violates the Greenes' loving relationship that was beginning to form the day that Sula departed Jude and Nel's wedding reception. Lacking regard for matrimony and wifely subservience, Sula refuses to play the fawning female to Jude's needy ego. Her rough regard tantalizes him to abandon Nel and their three children and initiate a sexual liaison. The rickety relationship concludes with Jude's retreat to Detroit and his inability to face his wife and children. Significantly, he ponders sending birthday cards only to his sons.

The severance of a childhood friendship gnaws at Nel. Drawn to her old friend, Nel refuses to leave the status quo with questions unanswered. By reviving their girlhood camaraderie and extending kindness to Sula on her deathbed, Nel learns some-

thing about herself and about female bonding. She realizes that she grieves less for Jude than for the dissolution of a woman-to-woman bond with Sula. Nel's tender heart allows her to visit Sula and to report her old friend's death to authorities.)

Style

8. Summarize Morrison's method of storytelling. (Morrison narrates the story of Nel and Sula in the form of a fairy tale tinged with the exaggerations of folklore and with brutal realism. The charming community of Medallion exists in tandem with the Bottom, which blacks inhabit after a white man tricks a black man into believing that hilltop soil is preferable to the valley. The trickster element resurges at significant moments in the text, particularly the debacle that accompanies Chicken Little's death and burial and Sula's theft of Nel's loving husband.)

With dramatic irony, Morrison emphasizes feminist themes by picturing Sula as the victim of Ajax's trickery in pretending to love her, then pursuing his fantasy of airplanes in Dayton. The storytelling mode winds down to the conclusion of a cautionary tale as blacks migrate to Medallion to find work and whites once more assume the elevated position of owners of a golf course that overlooks the valley. The futility of racial unity reaches its height in the drowning of a parade following Shadrack, the pied piper of the Bottom, into an abandoned tunnel originally intended to link the two communities. Like false anticipations of jobs and prosperity, the structure collapses, drowning the optimists in a river that flows on, oblivious to the social divide.)

Diction

9. How does the author maintain her distance from the people of the Bottom? (Toni Morrison is adept at irony and lyric language. She speaks with the authority of an educated observer who can view and interpret human frailties. She pictures rural black women as the natural receivers of bruises and missing teeth, the reward due all wives who remain loyal to brutal husbands. To increase the social gap, Morrison inserts the dialect of poorly educated blacks, e. g., Chicken Little's declaration "I'm a tell my brovver" and Eva's sexist assertion to Sula, "Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around without no man." To indicate compassion for the denigrated female, the author concludes with a lyric salute to female bonding by quoting Nel's lonely cry and by characterizing its endless circle of sorrow.)

Feminism

10. How does Toni Morrison honor the battered egos of decent women? (By focusing on Nel, the author captures the naivete of a wife who bases her existence on marriage vows and motherhood. At the end of "1937," lyricism reaches a height of shock and hurt as

Nel prays to Jesus the prayer of the abandoned woman. Nel anticipates a sentence of loneliness until the grave when she envisions "O my god, to that box with four handles," her summation of burial. The text summarizes the domestic chores of repairing pillow cases, washing the porch, feeding children, beating rugs, and hauling coal. In a declaration of strength, Nel declares that she could plow with her bare hands and support the walls of her home on her back if she could assure herself the reward of a loving mate. In a stunning accusation of the almighty for the loss of Jude, she demands, "O my sweet Jesus what kind of cross is that?")

How Language Works

Writers tend to fall into two classes—masters of prose and poets who speak through prose. Morrison possesses a poet's eye for verse and an ear for melody, whether joyful or plaintive:

1. In a fairy tale preface to Hannah's fiery death, Morrison describes in sexist imagery the dry wind that sweeps the Bottom: "The men who worked in the valley got up at four thirty in the morning and looked at the sky where the sun was already rising like a hot white bitch."
2. To gentle with folk humor the demonization of Sula, the author notes the self-importance of Sula's accuser: "The most damning evidence, however, came from Dessie, who was a big Daughter Elk and knew things."
3. A subtle, but bitter irony pervades Morrison's description of Ajax's mother, the conjure woman: "Had she any teeth or ever straightened her back, she would have been the most gorgeous thing alive, worthy of her sons' worship for her beauty alone, if not for the absolute freedom she allowed them (known in some quarters as neglect).
4. The text sums up relationships with an incisive view of the bleak status quo: "Eva out at the old folks' home, the deweys living anywhere, Tar Baby steeped in wine, and Sula upstairs in Eva's bed with a boarded-up window and an empty pocketbook on the dresser."

Across the Curriculum

Composition

1. Write a poem, one-act play, or song picturing female courage and maternal love. Consider scenes in which Eva leaps from the window to rescue Hannah, Sula goes to college in Nashville, Betty mothers Teapot after his fall down the steps, Helene teaches Nel good manners, Eva loses a leg to gain a disability check of \$23, Helene hosts an extravagant wedding reception for Nel and Jude, and Cecile brings up her granddaughter in a pious home far from the house with the red shutters.
2. Outline historical events that influence the novel. Include World War I, a government project launching a tunnel under the river, the Civil Rights movement, black migration to Northern industrial centers, the women's movement, and integration.
3. Write notes for an oral report on Sula's feminism. Discuss her longing for independence and self-expression. Include the cost of courage, particularly the loss of Nel's friendship, dying alone penniless in Eva's old bedroom, accusations of sexual liaisons with white man, lies about causing Mr. Finley to choke on a chicken bone, and the low opinion of Sula's mourners at her funeral.
4. Compose a paragraph on Sula's relationship with men. Stress her ability to lure Jude and Ajax without any overt effort. Explain why both men flee from her grasp.
5. Make an annotated genealogical chart of the Peace and Sabat-Wright families. Underneath each entry, summarize the conflict that hampers that person's happiness and contentment, e. g., wanderlust, promiscuity, loneliness, poverty.

Religion

1. Compose a graveside service for Rekus, Cecile, Hannah, Chicken Little, Plum, the three Deweys, or Sula. Indicate how significant black people remain alive in black history, for example, through anecdote, fool or trickster tale, legend, and song.

2. Account for the singing of "Shall We Gather at the River" over Sula's grave. What multiple meanings does the river have for the people of the Bottom.

Business and Economics

1. Describe the local products and job opportunities for skilled and unskilled blacks of the Bottom. Explain how the economic situation alters for blacks from the 1890s to the Civil Rights era. Why do local people cling to the promise of work on the bridge, tunnel, and road?
2. Contrast the work of blacks as rivermen, babysitters, domestics, beauticians, cooks, conjurors, prostitutes, owners of ice cream parlors and pool halls, fishmongers, and caregivers to the elderly at Sunnydale. How does Sula's college education break the pattern for black females?

Geography

1. Use topographical maps to describe the terrain the story covers, particularly the route of the train from Medallion, Ohio, to New Orleans and Sula's wanderings after her education in Nashville, Tennessee, and Plum's route before he returns home from the war.
2. Research the major battles of World War I. Account for Shadrack's placement along a river in France.

Social Studies

1. Compose an extended definition of social isolation. Explain why the term describes Sula, Eva, Shadrack, Tar Baby, Cecile, Jude, Wiley Wright, and Nel. Why does Ajax deliberately distance himself from women seeking husbands? In what respect are the three Deweys isolated?
2. Contrast female characters and their attitudes toward family, racism, responsibility, domestic chores, joy, community, sex, God, tradition, endurance, and freedom. Consider the refusal of neighbors to attend to Sula's corpse or to perform standard funeral amenities.
3. Explain in an oral report why the community takes an interest in Chicken Little's drowning, in Eva's amputation, and in Eva's attempt to

smother the flames that kill Hannah. How do these incidents pass from local history into legend?

Psychology and Health

1. Explain with diagrams the pressures that impinge on Nel and Sula. What does each character learn from parents and grandparents? Why does Sula leave town during the wedding reception?
2. Lead a debate concerning the best methods of including the elderly at Sunnydale in community activities. Consider visitation, religious services, music, shared activities, field trips, greeting cards and photographs, holiday observances, hair and skin care, and food.
3. Compose a lecture on emotional trauma as found in desertions, hermetism, and sudden or violent death. List causes, symptoms, and treatment for suffering like that of Tar Baby, the three Deweys, Eva, Sula, Nel, Plum, and Shadrack.

Language and Literature

1. List phrases that underscore the emotional atmosphere of the story. Include these: promise licked at her feet, that painted canary who never said a word of greeting or affection, a fake prosperity, run the ice pick through the cat's-head pin, and the cold vise of that lean and bitter year's end.
2. Compose an extended definition of dialect. Analyze unusual terms, e. g., settin' up (a wake for the dead), 'voir (goodbye), heifer (shameless female), Devil's Shoe String (herb), manlove (sexual attraction), the Lamb (Christ), gal (a pejorative for a black woman), and Ham's sons (the black race).
3. Outline Creole history and customs in New Orleans. Account for red shutters and for the remains of French in Creole patois, particularly *vrai*, *chere*, *'voir*, *comment t'appelle*, and *oui*.
4. Pantomime symbolic or significant names, for instance, "Wright" and "Peace" as the surnames of the main characters, "Dewey King" as the name of three stunted boys, and "the Bottom" as the name of a hilltop community. Include in the activity literary or ironic mean-

ings of Ajax, Helene, Eva, Jude, Chicken Little, Tar Baby, Teapot, BoyBoy, Sabat, and Shadrack.

5. List sense impressions from the novel that give immediacy and force to characterization. Name graphic details such as the smell of tainted fish and of Eva's outhouse, the sound of Hannah's screams and of Shadrack's National Suicide Day parade, the sight of glowering black soldiers on the train and of the black wreath at Elysian Fields, the gardenia fragrance that clings to Rochelle and the reek of Hannah's bubbling flesh, the taste of ice cream sundaes and of cane liquor in the punch, the sight of a soldier shot in the head and of his brains sliding down his body, and the feel of Eva's hug and of flames as Plum is burned to death.

Literature

1. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe treachery, racism, neighborliness, injustice, sexism, and poverty. Include Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Rita Dove's *Thomas and Beulah*, Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, Kaye Gibbons's *Charms for the Easy Life*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Garden in the Dunes*, Ruth Praver-Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* or *Gem of the Ocean*, Kate Chopin's "Desirée's Baby," George Washington Cable's *The Granddissimes*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, Walter Dean Myers' *Glory Field*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Toni Cade Bambara's "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird," Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Alex Haley's *Queen*, Ruthann Lumm McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*, Isabelle Allende's *Daughter of Fortune*, and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.
2. Propose a reading list for a feminist literature course that would appeal to Sula. Include the poems of Sappho and Adrienne Rich, the novels of Amy Tan and Isabelle Allende, the speeches of Barbara Jordan and Eleanor Roosevelt, the short stories of Carson McCullers and Joyce Carol Oates, the epic of Velma Wallis, the historical fiction of Ann Petry and Margaret Walker, the biography of Fawn Brodie and Margaret Mead, and the plays of Caryl Churchill and Eve Ensler.

Law

1. Post on a bulletin board examples of violations of civil rights, for example, the beating of Tar Baby, the murder of Plum, the forced removal of Eva from her house, the ejection of Helene from a whites-only railroad car, the release of Shadrack from a military hospital, the hiring of whites for government projects, the arrest of Ajax and Tar Baby, and the sheriff's failure to investigate Chicken Little's drowning.
2. Make a chart of advice concerning the civil rights that citizens of the Bottom should demand, particularly health care for the elderly and addicted, treatment of war trauma in returning soldiers, police protection of black girls from Irish troublemakers, equal employment opportunities and hiring practices, and free access to public transportation, housing, schools, stores, restaurants, and hospitals.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of Sula's discovery of the driver's license, BoyBoy's return visit, Nel's visit to Sula's sick-room, Jude's sudden departure to Detroit, Helene's entry in a white railroad car, Shadrack's fear of his fingers, Jude and Nel's wedding reception, and Ajax's romance with airports. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as Helene's brown dress, luggage, Jude's tie, a prescription on a slip of paper, hospital sheets, punch cups, and Sula's bathtub.
2. Create a storyboard account of Nel and Sula's friendship. Dramatize their walk to Edna Finch's ice cream parlor, Sula's retreat over the plank bridge to Shadrack's residence, the lovers' laughter at Nel's residence, Sula's dramatic return to the Bottom, a visit to Sula's gravesite, the slicing off of Sula's fingertip, Shadrack's recovery of Sula's belt, weeping at Chicken Little's funeral, and the purchase of Sula's prescription.

Speech

1. Express in a short speech Sula's yearning for freedom. Account for her development of independence in a house managed by Eva and Hannah after BoyBoy's desertion and Rekus' death. Explain why local women hate Sula but not Hannah.

2. Give a chalk talk explaining how Toni Morrison incorporates elements of legend, saga, trickster and fool tale, anecdote, fairy tale, and fable into the novella.

Cinema

1. View films about female independence, jealousy, treachery, sexism, and poverty, such as *Queen*, *Beloved*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *Charms for the Easy Life*, *The House of the Spirits*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *The Color Purple*, *Crimes of the Heart*, *Zora Is My Name*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Chocolat*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *Band of Angels*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *Sula*. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, economic, and religious backgrounds, especially Irish Catholic immigrants in Medallion, immigrant road workers, veterans, college graduates, church singers, black prostitutes and white male clients, and people of mixed racial heritage like the Creoles of New Orleans.

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: epithet, jaundice, Elysian Fields, accost, nightshade, catarrh, cakewalk, bier, Dorics, sickle pear, aberration, the Lamb, trinity, vitriol, marcelling iron, shotgun house, ecstasy, sovereign, memorandum, mulatto, priority, black bottom, arraignment, consolation, fastidious, deterrent, pariah, postcoital, predilection, counter-conjure, idiosyncrasy, euphoria, insouciant, buckeye, retribution, intractable, reprobate, undemonstrative, sovereign, Ham's sons, tetter, roustabout, Black Draught, keloid scar, pervasive, and alabaster.
2. Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of abandonment, poverty, racism, addiction, mental and physical illness, public disgrace, hunger, and hopelessness on Teapot, Eva, the three Deweys, Jude, Tar Baby, Hannah, Sula, Plum, Nel, Cecile, Pearl, Chicken Little, and Shadrack. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and health surveys.

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of cruelty, injustice, racism, sexism, and selfishness in various characters, for example, BoyBoy's desertion of his family, charges that Sula is a devil, Hannah's inability to like her daughter, mistreatment of Chicken Little's corpse, the dangling of the Dewey over the stair rail, the burning of Plum, refusal to feed a traumatized patient at a military hospital, Rochelle's cool greeting to Helene, the train conductor's rudeness to Helene, the concealment of black patients behind a curtain, Sula's seduction of Jude, an outhouse reserved for colored women, birthday cards for sons but not a daughter, and the laughter of the woman in the pea-green dress.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate community spirit, particularly the grief over Hannah's death, dancing and drinking at the wedding reception, singing at the Greater Saint Matthew's Church, anticipation of jobs building the new bridge and road to Medallion, respect for Eva, and the rejection of Sula.
3. Compose a scene in which Nel reunites with Jude. Explain the feelings each character had for Sula and their regret over her death alone in Eva's old room.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including: Helene's snobbery, the train conductor's rudeness, Ajax's womanizing, Eva's lawlessness, Tar Baby's alcoholism, Rochelle's lack of love for her daughter, Sula's anger at Eva, Hannah's promiscuity, Betty's character assassination, BoyBoy's desertion of his family, the doctor's rejection of a traumatized black patient, the bargeman's disdain for a black corpse, Shadrack's misguidance of followers, and Plum's drug addiction.
5. Account for the departures and returns of Shadrack, Plum, Eva, Nel, Helene, Wiley, BoyBoy, and Sula.

Teacher's Notes

Vocabulary

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate pair of words from the list below. Place your response in the blank at left.

accost/catarrh
bier/aberration
combat/amiable
conjure/parings
consistency/vulnerabilities
consolation/fastidious
deterrent/pariah
dovetail/excrete

epithet/jaundice
exertion/jaunt
inadequacy/idiosyncrasy
insouciant/retribution
intractable/reprobate
pervasive/alabaster
predilection/euphoria
priority/arraignment

saffron/bunion
solitary/profound
sovereign/mulatto
trinity/vitriol
tuck/shore
undemonstrative/roustabout

_____ 1. Her feet would raise the _____ dust that floated down on the coveralls and _____-split shoes of the man breathing music in and out of his harmonica.

_____ 2. Was there anyone else before whom she could ever be foolish? In whose view _____ was a mere _____, a character trait rather than a deficiency.

_____ 3. She was an evil _____ woman, blessed with seven adoring children whose joy it was to bring her the plants, hair, underclothing, fingernail _____, white hens, blood, camphor, pictures, kerosene and foostep dust th she needed.

_____ 4. She had heard only that one word; it dangled above her wide-brimmed hat, which had slipped, in her _____, from its carefully leveled placement and was now tilted in a bit of a _____ over her eye.

_____ 5. Hating BoyBoy, she could get on with it, and have the safety, the thrill, the _____ of that hatred as long as she wanted or needed it to define and strengthen her or protect her from routine _____.

_____ 6. Whatever his fortune, whatever the cut of his garment, there would always be the hem—the _____ and fold that hid his raveling edges; a someone sweet, industrious and loyal to _____ him up.

_____ 7. He expected history to _____ into milkwarm commiseration, but before Nel could _____ it, Sulla said she didn't know about that—it looked like a pretty good life to her.

_____ 8. They were _____ little girls whose loneliness was so _____ it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into Technicolored visions that aways included a presence—someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream.

_____ 9. While Eva tested and argued with her men, leaving them feeling as though they had been in _____ with a worthy, if _____, foe, Hannah rubbed no edges, made no demands, made the man feel as though he were complete and wonderful just as he was—he didn't need _____ fixing—and so he relaxed and swooned in the Hannah-light that shone on him simply because he was.

_____ 10. They swayed, for the _____ of grief or of _____ must be rocked.

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. is a conjuror's son | A. Sula |
| _____ 2. wonders why Eva doesn't love her children | B. Nel's son |
| _____ 3. dies when his daughter is three years old | C. Rochelle's daughter |
| _____ 4. travels major cities before returning home | D. Pearl's brother |
| _____ 5. has a slip of paper in her purse | E. Hannah's sister |
| _____ 6. smells like gardenias | F. Sula's father |
| _____ 7. regrets her daughter's degradation behind red shutters | G. Sula's last lover |
| _____ 8. moves to Flint, Michigan | H. foster sons |
| _____ 9. clings to the cool rim of the bathtub | I. Sula's grandmother |
| _____ 10. laughs with a woman in a pea-green dress | J. Plum's father |
| _____ 11. irons at Sunnydale | K. Wiley's daughter |
| _____ 12. claims not to speak Creole | L. Mickey's father |
| _____ 13. drinks cold milk from the bottle | M. Eva's younger daughter |
| _____ 14. sends no cards from Detroit | N. Nel's great grandmother |
| _____ 15. loses a belt | O. Cecile's daughter |

Part II: True/False (30 points)

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

- _____ 1. Tar Baby is no trouble because he doesn't eat.
- _____ 2. Reverend Deal's sermon makes Sula confess.
- _____ 3. Meridian is more racist than Cincinnati.
- _____ 4. Jude looks forward to the Dayton airport.
- _____ 5. Nel pretends to visit Eva at the nursing home.
- _____ 6. The three Deweys buy medicine to drink for pleasure.
- _____ 7. Shadrack drowns in the collapsing tunnel.
- _____ 8. Chicken Little's body is missing for three days.
- _____ 9. Henri Martin takes charge of Sula's funeral.
- _____ 10. Mr. Finley's death is Sula's fault.
- _____ 11. Wiley is cooking on the Great Lakes when Cecile dies.
- _____ 12. BoyBoy devises a wagon-wheelchair for his wife.
- _____ 13. Albert Jacks is too independent to marry.
- _____ 14. Sula returns to Medallion out of boredom with big cities.
- _____ 15. Teapot terrifies Sula into mutilating her finger.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (10 points)

Explain the significance of the following details:

1. National Suicide Day
2. Plum and Hannah's insurance
3. chambermaid
4. monstrous fingers
5. Teapot's fall

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Contrast homelife for Nel and Sula.
2. Discuss the consequences of Eva's leap from the window.
3. Describe episodes illustrating Albert's attitude toward females.
4. Account for the move of rich whites to the Bottom.
5. Explain how Eva keeps her children from starving.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select an answer to complete each statement below:

- _____ 1. Shadrack treasures a
 A. helmet.
 B. belt.
 C. job on the tunnel.
 D. friendship with Tar Baby.
- _____ 2. The loss of a leg
 A. guarantees a home for Plum, Pearl, and Hannah.
 B. keeps Eva from rescuing Plum.
 C. sends the black soldier to a military hospital.
 D. causes BoyBoy to desert his family.
- _____ 3. White people
 A. gradually take over the Bottom.
 B. ban Shadrack from the hospital.
 C. force Hannah from the train.
 D. hold the airport jobs in Dayton.
- _____ 4. Jude sends
 A. money for Sula to come to Detroit.
 B. Nel to Eva's boardinghouse rather than to Helene's home.
 C. gifts of blue bottles to Sula in Nashville.
 D. no birthday cards to his boys.
- _____ 5. Nel and Sula
 A. fantasize over Jude.
 B. leave ham in the refrigerator for Wiley.
 C. flee from Irish boys.
 D. dangle a Dewey over the stair rail.
- _____ 6. Plum leaves
 A. France and hurries back to Eva.
 B. Carpenter's Road to live beside Tar Baby.
 C. some army insurance.
 D. a bent spoon and a bottle of bloody kerosene.
- _____ 7. Helene explains that
 A. Rochelle is her grandmother.
 B. Nel knows no Creole.
 C. Rekus died when Nel was three years old.
 D. the three Deweys are brothers.

- _____ 8. Nel finds
 A. the lost driver's license.
 B. Eva ironing clothes for inmates of Sunnydale.
 C. Jude's tie in Sula's room.
 D. Sula's body.
- _____ 9. At the time of Sula's return,
 A. robins plague the neighborhood.
 B. an ice storm begins a miserable winter.
 C. scarlet fever kills adults and children.
 D. a bargeman transfers her to the ferry.
- _____ 10. At the cemetery,
 A. neighbors describe the bubbles on Hannah's burned body.
 B. Betty does not recognize Chicken Little's body.
 C. Nel realizes how much she misses her friend.
 D. mourners claim that Sula caused Mr. Finley to choke.

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

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

1. In what city is Elysian Fields? _____

2. How much is Eva's monthly check?

3. Who sends the three Deweys to the first grade? _____
4. Who puts Eva in Sunnydale?

5. Whom does Eva choose to hate?

6. Who leaves during the wedding reception?

7. Who establishes National Suicide Day?

8. Where do white people build a golf course?

9. Whom does Eva hug before she commits murder?

10. What does Ajax dream about?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

Fill in the blanks with short answers from the list below:

Ajax, Betty, Cecile, Chicken Little, Dessie, Dewey, Edna Finch, Eva, Hannah, Helene, Irish boys, Jude, Mickey, Mr. Finley, nurse, Pearl, Plum, Rekus, Rochelle, Shadrack, Sula, Tar Baby, Teapot, train conductor, Willy Fields, woman in a pea-green dress

- _____ 1. Hannah knows that _____ killed her own son.
- _____ 2. Helene marries _____, a cook on the Great Lakes lines.
- _____ 3. _____ becomes a better mother after Teapot's injury.
- _____ 4. _____ builds a fire for canning beans.
- _____ 5. Nel admires _____ for her fragrance of gardenias.
- _____ 6. _____ saves her granddaughter from the embarrassment of the red shutters.
- _____ 7. _____'s mother is a conjure woman.
- _____ 8. _____ marries at 14 and moves to Flint, Michigan.
- _____ 9. _____ watches the brains slide out of a damaged head.
- _____ 10. Doctors release _____ from the military hospital.
- _____ 11. The girls admire _____'s lemon-colored gabardines.
- _____ 12. Nel finds no money in _____'s purse.
- _____ 13. _____ thinks that Sula should marry and have children.
- _____ 14. _____ prefers alcohol to food.
- _____ 15. _____ weeps after drowning Chicken Little.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Discuss the significance of the following citations:

1. O Lord, Sula, girl, girl, girlgirlgirl.
2. She had lied only once in her life.
3. He said "Always. Always."
4. It had to be as far away from the Sundown House as possible.
5. Don't you say hello to nobody when you ain't seen them for ten years?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. saffron/bunion | 6. tuck/shore |
| 2. inadequacy/idiosyncrasy | 7. dovetail/excrete |
| 3. conjure/parings | 8. solitary/profound |
| 4. exertion/jaunt | 9. combat/amiable |
| 5. consistency/vulnerabilities | 10. rivulets/ecstasy |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

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

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T | 11. T |
| 2. F | 7. F | 12. F |
| 3. T | 8. T | 13. T |
| 4. F | 9. F | 14. T |
| 5. F | 10. F | 15. F |

Part III: Identification (10 points)

- a holiday that Shadrack makes up to relieve himself of war trauma
- pays Sula's college tuition
- Nel's job at the Hotel Medallion
- Shadrack's delusion at the military hospital
- proof to the community that Sula is evil

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

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

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

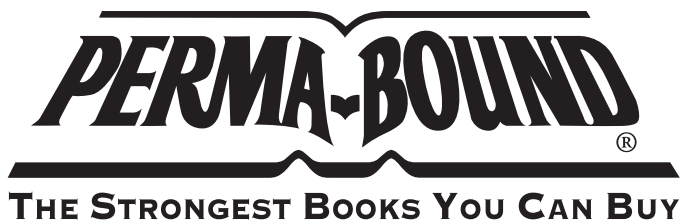
- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. New Orleans | 6. Sula |
| 2. \$23 | 7. Shadrack |
| 3. Eva | 8. the Bottom |
| 4. Sula | 9. Plum |
| 5. BoyBoy | 10. airplanes |

Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Eva | 6. Cecile | 11. Ajax |
| 2. Wiley Wright | 7. Ajax | 12. Sula |
| 3. Betty | 8. Pearl | 13. Eva |
| 4. Hannah | 9. Shadrack | 14. Tar Baby |
| 5. Rochelle | 10. Shadrack | 15. Sula |

Part IV: Citation Analysis (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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