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This is Not a Story to Pass On”: Teaching Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*

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Why teach *Beloved* ?

This curriculum unit aims to solve two problems I have encountered in my linked tenth grade Early American Literature and Early United States History classes this year -- finding texts about American history that interest teenagers, and expanding the course's curriculum to include more women.

The unit will introduce students to Toni Morrison, a Nobel prize-winning author, through her historical novel of the psychic trauma of slavery on its survivors. The unit approaches *Beloved* both as historical fiction and as literature. Students will engage with the history woven through the book, as well as looking at the artistic and literary aspects of the text. The unit also devotes a substantial amount of energy to comprehension, as the text is a challenging one for high school students.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is so gripping and phenomenally told that students will be motivated to work through the difficulties of the text. Briefly summarized, it is the story of an escaped slave living on the border between Ohio and Kentucky just at the end of the Civil War. She is haunted by the grown-up ghost of her baby girl, whom she killed in order to save the child from returning to slavery. Activities in the unit will provide support for students so that they will be able to interpret, as well as decode, the novel as it slowly reveals the almost unspeakable suffering of its major characters.

Brief Background: Toni Morrison and *Beloved*

Toni Morrison, born Chloe Anthony Wofford, was raised in Lorain, Ohio. She has been married and divorced and has two children. She has an undergraduate degree from Howard University and a Masters degree from Cornell University in English. She has been an editor at Random House and taught at many colleges and universities. She currently teaches at Princeton University. In addition to *Beloved*, Morrison has written the novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*. She has also written essays and plays.

When Morrison published *Beloved* in 1987, there was outrage in the black community when she did not receive the National Book Award. A group of African-American writers took out an ad in *The New York Times* praising *Beloved*. The book went on to receive a Pulitzer Prize and a Nobel Prize for Literature, but remains Morrison's most controversial work. Supporters find the sophisticated contemporary representation of slavery and its effects compelling, while critics find it melodramatic or take issue with its claims about the horrors of slavery.

Beloved is based on the true story of an ex-slave named Margaret Garner, who attempted to kill her children to prevent them from returning to slavery. Taking this event as the germ for her story, Morrison weaves it into a story about refugees from slavery, caught between remembering and forgetting what they have been through. She also uses the novel to explore the intensity of a mother's relationship with children, particularly under slavery.

Entry Points into the Novel

The unit introduces *Beloved* in the context of nonfiction African American voices right out of slavery -- Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech and Chapter 1 of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. If students are studying American history at the same time that they read *Beloved*, this introduction can be expanded. If not, it might be better condensed or abbreviated.

Sojourner Truth's Ain't I a Woman? speech

"Ain't I a Woman?" works well as an entry point for students to think about the social position of African-American women, "doubly oppressed" and maybe doubly authorized to speak as a result. Sojourner Truth uses her own experience to question nineteenth century definitions of femininity when she says, "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?" She voices her own class and race position positively as well as negatively: "Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me. And ain't I a woman?" (Truth, 595-596). Discuss with students whether they think she is establishing a moral platform from which to speak as she explains what she is and is not in her speech. Compare this with Morrison's use an enslaved mother to express the cruelty of slavery. How is a woman, and a mother, in an especially good position to demonstrate the inhumanity of slavery?

Another connection between "Ain't I a Woman?" and *Beloved* is the use of repetition of phrases for emphasis. I describe the call and response tradition in African-American preaching and song in a discussion of "Ain't I a Woman?" and the first chapter of *Beloved*. We discuss what effects Morrison and Truth achieve through repetition, as well as the transformation of that tradition from an oral to a hyper-literate context. Many students are interested in this "upward mobility" of the vernacular, and feel more closely allied with Morrison. This will ease, for many readers, the adversarial relationship that can develop between a reader and a difficult text.

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Another connection I make while opening this unit is between the opening scenes from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; an American Slave* and *Beloved*. Douglass describes some of the most basic dehumanizing aspects of slavery -- not knowing his birthday, barely knowing his mother, being treated as an animal. Like Morrison, he brings alive for his reader the feeling of a slave, to put the reader in his shoes. He writes of watching his aunt being beaten by his master: "It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. ...I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it" (23).

This line echoes, or opposes, the line repeated at the end of *Beloved*: "This is not a story to pass on." After reading Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*, I lead a conversation comparing these two quotes and ask, "What is the point of re-entering the low points of history in such a deep personal way?" We discuss the motto of Holocaust survivors: "Never forget." Why this motto? Where's the value in remembering such horrors? Where are the problems in this kind of remembering?

This discussion of historical memory leads well into a discussion of time in *Beloved*, which can present a significant block to understanding for some readers of the book. The easiest way I can think to describe the plot is that there are two, which happen 18 years apart and are told, in bits and pieces, simultaneously. I tell

students to look for connections between the two stories, or contrasts. I ask students if they've ever had a memory that had a life of its own, something that stops them in their tracks and lets them almost relive it again. This helps clarify the time shifts in the novel. Depending on the reading level of students, this may be too much hand-holding, and I might want them to find their way through it on their own.

As students move far enough through the book to figure out what exactly is the traumatic memory which is obsessively circled around throughout the book, I ask them to focus on the question of "Why Beloved? Why Sethe?" What does this particular extreme relationship capture about the trauma of slavery? Is Sethe a good mother? Can you understand her decision and what do you think of it? The culminating activity of this unit addresses that question in a mock trial.

Teaching the Novel as History

Toni Morrison uses *Beloved* to bring to a new kind of life familiar and unfamiliar elements of slave experience. The town on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio in which the novel takes place is a through station for slaves escaping on the underground railroad and then migrating north after emancipation. The "colored community" is described, as it gathers in or avoids the house which provides the setting for most of the novel -- #124 Bluestone Road. Morrison alludes frequently to other stories of suffering in the lives of this community and the African-American community, and it seems safe to say that at least one goal of the book is to expose the awful magnitude and far reach of slavery's effects through many interwoven stories of suffering. She alludes to sexual cruelties, chain gangs, the break up of families, the shell-shocked quality of post-slavery life, the cohesiveness of a poor "colored community" in ante-bellum Ohio, illiteracy, insanity, the Middle Passage, Fugitive Slave Laws, and Social Darwinism, all swirling around the central tableau of a slave woman killing her infant.

"The Experience of Slavery in the United States" Lecture

To clarify this historical context for students, I present a social history lecture on "The Experience of Slavery in the United States" early in our reading of *Beloved*. The lecture is framed by slides bearing images that encapsulate selected aspects of slave experience. The idea of a slide lecture is borrowed from the book *History Alive!* produced by the Teachers' Curriculum Institute, a teacher-run organization that designs history curricula. Other teachers may find it useful to create a slide show to accompany this lecture. I take images from textbooks and auxiliary materials (see bibliography) and create either slides or overhead transparencies of these images. The more people in the image, and the more emotional and drama-filled, the better job the images do of anchoring students' attention. This historical background could also be effectively communicated in an outline format and discussed with students, or broken into research assignments for individuals or groups to present orally.

The lecture in this format takes two to three days of classroom time, with time factored in for discussion, and probably goes into more depth than necessary for the teaching of this novel. However, Morrison covers a lot of territory in the novel, through the major characters and through many side characters. Students will be better able to appreciate her references if they have a stronger knowledge of the history she is referring to. Teachers should use as much of this as seems appropriate to the context in which they are teaching the book. The common knowledge established in this introductory lecture serves the class well as they read the book and connect characters' experiences with their knowledge of slavery.

1. The Origin of Race-Based Slavery in the United States

The original source of labor in the American colonies was indentured servants. Europeans who wished to come to America for a fresh start, but were unable to afford the cost of the sea journey, signed contracts pledging to work for a “master” once they arrived in America for a certain number of years, until they had repaid their passage. This was not an ideal arrangement. Indentured servants could be mistreated, ill-fed, and often emerged from a four- to seven-year term of indenture with no land, no money, and few skills. But indentured servitude was not a life-long condition.

The first Africans to arrive in the British colonies in North America were on a Dutch ship. Nineteen Africans disembarked in Jamestown, VA in 1619 -- one year before any Europeans arrived at Plymouth, MA. Few records remain of their status, but it is generally believed that they were treated as indentured servants.

Gradually, throughout the seventeenth century, the supply of European immigrants willing to enter into indentured servitude declined. Tales reached Europe of cruelties and abuses of servants, and discontented groups of poor people who had served out indentures were not prospering as they had hoped to in the New World.

It became more economical for employers to purchase slaves who served for life than to employ a series of indentured servants. A new set of characteristics grew up to define slavery. For the first time, slavery became a racially determined institution, in which Africans were captured, brought to America on the Middle Passage, and sold into lifelong slavery. The children of slaves were seen for the first time as slaves. Tracing slavery from the maternal side made it possible for white masters to have slave children. This leads to some interesting conflicts with the Enlightenment ideals of the European immigrants who were settling the colonies, enthusiastically asserting the rights of man.

2. The Middle Passage

During the eighteenth century, the big seventeenth century business which had grown up around kidnapping West Africans and bringing them across the Atlantic to work in the Caribbean and Central America extended into North America. European traders traded guns and other manufactured goods for human laborers. Slave traders encouraged rivalries between ethnic groups, and took the prisoners of war from local conflicts as slaves.

The journey by slave ship from Africa to the Americas was intensely frightening and dangerous for Africans. Africans were rarely allowed on deck, and they were often jammed into the hull of the ship, without enough room to stand or lie down comfortably. Some people died of suffocation, or became very ill. They were fed very little, and the food was often rotten or not nourishing.

Some Africans, in despair over conditions on the ship, unable to communicate with other prisoners because of language barriers, and unsure of what would happen to them, killed themselves by jumping off the ship. There are also many stories of mothers throwing their infants overboard to save them from the horrifying conditions on board and bleak prospects ahead. Ship crews were very watchful for suicide and infanticide attempts, and Africans caught attempting to kill themselves or others would be severely punished to discourage others from trying it.

3. Slave Trade

Once in the British colonies, slaves were sold at auctions to the highest bidder. Potential buyers would examine Africans, who were frequently required to stand naked and show their teeth or be subjected to other evaluations of their worth. At auctions, members of families would often be sold to different buyers, and would be taken to live all over the colonies, usually without hope of ever being reunited with parents, children, or siblings.

The fear of the auction block stayed with slaves throughout their lives, for at any time, if a master needed money, or died, or was displeased with a slave, he or she could sell that slave and remove him or her from family and friends forever.

4. Treatment of Slaves

The life of the majority of African slaves was that of agricultural workers. Slavery evolved to meet the demands for inexpensive labor in the agricultural southern colonies, so many Africans ended up living and working on farms with ten or more other workers. The “field slaves” on plantations found themselves performing hard physical labor for long hours, sometimes with enough food, but more often without enough food or rest. Despite the long hours and difficult work, the advantage of being a field slave could be the relative independence of life mainly with other slaves.

Slaves who worked in and around the plantation owner’s house, such as cooks, maids, butlers, and gardeners, were known as “house slaves.” These jobs were often less physically straining than those in the fields, and sometimes were accompanied with better living conditions. However, they involved negotiating a complicated series of interactions with the white family who owned the farm.

Urban slaves fared somewhat better. They were able to learn a trade, although their wages were handed over to their masters. Slaves in cities generally experienced more independence than rural slaves, and better treatment, as abuse of one’s slaves was more difficult to conceal from one’s neighbors in the close quarters of a city.

5. Nat Turner’s Rebellion and Increased Restrictions

In 1831, Nat Turner, a black preacher, led a slave revolt in Virginia. Turner’s people killed 55 whites before they were stopped. Turner and 20 others were hanged, and in retaliation, around 200 slaves who had nothing to do with the rebellion were also killed. Slave laws became harsher in many states from this time until the end of slavery, in an attempt to prevent future rebellions from succeeding. Laws were passed throughout the South, preventing slaves from reading and writing, having prayer services without a white person present, gathering in large numbers, or voting.

6. Conflict over Slavery

At the same time that slavery was becoming harsher, efforts to end slavery became stronger. In 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society was founded. Throughout the North, and to some extent in the South as well, abolitionism, or the movement to outlaw slavery, was spread through abolitionist lectures and newspapers. Two prominent leaders of the movement were William Lloyd Garrison, a white abolitionist and the publisher of the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, and Frederick Douglass, the publisher of the paper *The North Star*, and the author of several books on his experience as a slave and a free black in Massachusetts. Sojourner Truth was another famous lecturer for the abolitionist and women’s rights causes.

Despite the growing unpopularity of slavery in the northern states and in Europe, slavery continued to be legal in the South and in some of the expanding territories of the United States. Many federal battles were fought in Congress over the laws governing slavery. As part of the Compromise of 1850, a harsh Fugitive Slave Act made it easier for slave owners to recover slaves who had run away to free states. In 1857, the Supreme Court heard the Dred Scott Case, in which a slave whose owner traveled with him in a free state argued that he should no longer be enslaved. The Court's decision was that African-Americans were not citizens of the United States, and did not have "any rights which the white man is bound to respect."

7. Emancipation

After the official abolition of slavery at the end of the Civil War, African-Americans faced a new series of challenges. The new governments of the South tried to rebuild or "reconstruct" Southern society. There were many opportunities for positions of power to be held by African Americans during this time, and for large-scale reforms of slavery-based society.

8. Northern Migration

However, many of these reforms were short-lived, and a lack of land, unresponsive government, and white hate groups began to restrict the possibilities available to free blacks in the South. Many blacks chose to move from rural southern communities to urban northern communities, searching for jobs and increased freedom.

Teaching the Novel as Literature

Journal

Students will keep a journal as they read, answering questions of varied difficulty to track comprehension and interpretation. Journal questions will be assigned with each night's reading, and judged based on the following criteria.

Does the journal entry:

- * answer the question asked?
- * stick to the text, using at least one quote?
- * elaborate to explain and strengthen its argument?
- * provide the journal writer's opinion?
- * sound like the journal writer means it?

At the beginning of each class, I hold a brief discussion of the previous night's journal questions, and

check to see that each student has completed their questions. At the end of the unit, students self-evaluate their journal entries, based on the five questions above, and write me a letter in their journal about the quality of their entries. I then read the journal entries in their entirety and respond to their self-evaluations. The final journal grade is the test grade for the unit. The sum of daily journal checks become their homework average.

Other teachers may find this volume of journal questions cumbersome; it is the backbone of my teaching of the book. Journal writing allows students a meaningful, intellectually varied, independent approach to their own reading. The sharing of journal entries often seems less threatening to shy students than jumping into open-ended discussion of the book. If it does not seem a useful tool in its complete form, some of these questions can be used to stimulate discussion, as writing assignments, or selections can be made from among them in a less extensive journal. I include them all to give teachers greater choice in how to use this resource.

The “chapters” of *Beloved* (frustratingly untitled and unnumbered) are of varying lengths. Many are very short. I recommend breaking the novel up into nightly or weekly reading assignments which last no longer than three weeks. Students will burn out on a novel read any more slowly.

These questions are designed to tap into the learning styles of diverse students. The questions should range from comprehension to interpretation. My main strategies for moving students into reflective writing on what they’ve read are to ask them: to interpret a specific quote; to find a quote to back up an opinion they have about the text; to retell passages from a new point of view; to explain the motivation or emotion behind a character’s actions or words; or to appreciate the author’s use of language.

Book One

pages 3-19

1. Write a journal entry as Sethe or Denver, describing how you feel about Paul D’s arrival. How do you think it will change life in 124?
2. What do you think Baby Suggs means when she says, “What’d be the point [of moving?].… Not a house in this country ain’t packed to the rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby.” (5)

20-27 What are Paul D and Sethe remembering about Sweet Home? Why do you think Morrison gives us the information little bit by little bit?

28-42

What new information do we learn about Sweet Home in this chapter, specifically about Denver’s birth?

Retell the night of Denver’s birth, from Amy’s point of view.

43-50

For each of the following quotes, explain:

- a. What does it tell us literally about the characters and what they are experiencing?
- b. What is significant about the quote? Does it have a deeper meaning than the one it holds in this context? Does it contain any literary devices that make it beautiful or interesting?

1. "Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have enough love left over for the next one." (45)

2. "They were not holding hands, but their shadows were." (4)

50-56

Describe the woman who walks out of the water. Who do you think she is? Explain.

Explain who is being discussed in the following quote, and why you think it is significant:

"If there had been an open latch between them it would have closed." (56)

57-63

What does Sethe remember about her mother? Why does it upset her to remember? Why do you think Beloved keeps asking her questions?

64-73

Explain what information the following quote provides about both characters:

"Beloved was shining and Paul D didn't like it." (62). Make a prediction about what will happen in the future based on the events between them in this chapter.

What new information do we learn about Sweet Home in this chapter? What information can you guess at which is not clearly revealed?

74-85

Who does Denver think Beloved is? How does she feel about it?

Why do you think both girls are so interested in the story of Denver's birth?

86-105

Why does Sethe go to the Clearing?

Describe the gatherings which used to take place in the Clearing.

Find a quote which reveals how Beloved feels about Sethe.

Find a quote which reveals how Denver feels about Beloved.

106-113

"Eighty-six days and done. Life was dead. Paul D beat her butt all day every day until there was not a whimper in her." (109)

How does this quote explain Paul D's emotions while on the chain gang?

Why does Morrison compare Paul D's heart to a "tobacco tin lodged in his chest"? What does this metaphor tell us about his emotions?

114-117

Explain the significance of the quote: "She moved him." (114)

118-124

Write a journal entry as Denver, explaining how you feel about Beloved. What are you afraid she will do? How does she make you happy?

125-132

How is Paul D's problem sleeping in the house solved? What predictions can you make about the future of the conflict between Paul D and Beloved?

133-134

What is starting to happen to Beloved? Why do you think she cries?

135-147

Explain what the following quote refers to, and what its significance is:

"Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess." (138)

"And when she stepped foot on free ground she could not believe that Halle knew what she didn't; that Halle, who had never drawn one free breath, knew that there was nothing like it in this world. It scared her." (141)

147-153

Who thinks this to himself? "But now she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her run." (149)

What is he talking about? Do you agree with him?

154-158

Imagine you are Paul D walking home from talking to Stamp Paid. What have you just found out? What are your feelings towards Sethe? Will you talk to her? If so, what will you say?

159-165

For each of the following quotes, explain:

a. What does it tell us literally about the characters and what they are experiencing?

b. What is significant about the quote? Does it have a deeper meaning than the one it holds in this context? Does it contain any literary devices that make it beautiful or interesting?

“So you protected yourself and loved small. ...A woman, a child, a brother -- a big love like that would split you wide open in Alfred, Georgia.” (162)

““You got two feet, Sethe, not four,” he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet.” (165)

Book Two

169-199

Was Stamp Paid right to tell Paul D about Sethe’s past? He argues with himself about it. Give one reason it was a good idea, and one that is was a bad idea. What do you think?

“Now, too late, he understood her. The heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the Word, didn’t count. They came in her yard anyway and she could not approve or condemn Sethe’s rough choice. One of the other might have saved her, but beaten up by the claims of both, she went to bed. The whitefolks had tired her out at last.” (180)

Who is this quote about? How was she “beaten up”? Did she react the way you think she should have to Sethe’s action? How would you have reacted?

Why did Sethe decide she had to run away from Sweet Home? Use a quote from the book to in your explanation.

200-204

Who is the narrator in this chapter? Who is she talking to? How does this narrator feel about Beloved’s return?

205-209

Who is the narrator in this chapter? Who is she talking about? How does this narrator feel about Beloved’s return?

210-213

Who is the narrator in this chapter? Who is she talking about?

Can you describe the style of this chapter? Why do you think Morrison made it so difficult to understand?

What images does the narrator describe? What do you think she is referring to?

214-217

Who are the narrators in this chapter? What do they keep repeating?

What is the mood in this chapter? Based on the last three chapters, how would you predict life is changing at 124?

218-229

What new information do we learn about the attempted escape from Sweet Home in this chapter?

“Paul D hears the men talking and for the first time learns his worth. He has always known, or believed he did, his value -- as a hand, a laborer who could make a profit on a farm -- but now he discovers his worth, which is to say he learns his price.” (226)

Why is this such an important moment for Paul D? How do you think it affects him to hear “his worth”?

230-235

How does Stamp Paid try to explain Sethe’s actions to Paul D? Do you agree or disagree with him? Explain.

Book Three

239-262

Describe life inside 124 from Denver’s perspective after Sethe figures out who Beloved is.

Write a journal entry as Mrs. Lady Jones on the first day Denver comes to see you. How do you feel about her visit? How will you help her?

Write a conversation between Janey Wagon and Ella about Denver’s situation in 124, and what the townspeople should do about it.

Compare the climactic scene in this chapter to the first climax in the story. How is it similar? How is it different?

263-273

Explain what you think Denver means when Paul D asks Denver, “You think she sure ‘nough your sister?” and she replies, “At times. At times I think she was -- more.”

Who is Paul D talking about and what do you think he means when he says, “There are too many things to feel about this woman” (272)? Do you agree with his assessment of her, or do you think she is “simpler”?

274-275

What is the tone of this final chapter?

What is the significance of the line: “This is not a story to pass on.”? Has Beloved left any trace? Why write a story that should not be passed on?

Word Log

Students will be responsible for tracking a particular word -- hands, faces, fluid, animals, food -- through the book, looking for how Morrison uses the same image repeatedly for different effects, and how their understanding of her message was reinforced by the development of these images. Students can periodically “web” their word, looking for ways it is used throughout the text.

The introduction and initial web should take one class period towards the beginning of the book. Updates and discussion of the webs can occur more quickly once or twice during further reading.

Plot Chart

Make a large “plot chart” diagram on a bulletin board, and fill in information as it is revealed. It works best as a double plot chart, with two climaxes, two conflicts, etc. -- one for the events at Sweet Home, climaxing with the death of Beloved, and one beginning with Paul D’s arrival at 124 eighteen years later, climaxing with Beloved’s disappearance. This division of the plot helps students identify more clearly with the time-telling. Discussion of this plot chart as it develops should move towards why Morrison tells two stories at once, in the mixed-up order she does. I lead students towards comparing the many flashbacks to how they feel about an important memory that keeps cropping up in their minds, long after the events have passed.

As with the word log, setting up the plot chart takes one class period, and briefer updates should occur several times during the reading of the novel.

Culminating Activity: Putting Sethe on Trial

High school students who have completed this difficult novel deserve a reward. A mock trial will generate enthusiasm and help them collaborate to make sure they understand the events in the novel and can form and defend their opinions of those events. The mock trial takes at least a week to prepare and perform.

An unresolved question at the novel’s end is whether Sethe did the right thing in trying to kill her children, rather than permitting them to return to slavery. Although she is tired and acquitted after the murder, this trial would not satisfy today’s standards of justice. African-Americans, during this period of history, were not allowed to serve as witnesses or jurors. So the question of her guilt or innocence remains very much alive. The idea of this activity is to give her a present-day trial. Was she “making them safe,” as she claimed, or committing murder, as many would accuse her of doing?

Introducing the Trial

1. I explain the purpose of the trial. It is a criminal trial to determine whether Sethe is guilty or innocent of the murder of her daughter Beloved. In a criminal trial, the burden of proof is on the prosecution. They need to convince the jury beyond a reasonable doubt that Sethe is guilty. The defense simply needs to cast reasonable doubt on the idea of her guilt by offering another explanation of her actions.

2. I explain the format of the trial. Both sides make an opening and closing statement of their opinions of her guilt or innocence. The meat of the trial, though, is the examination of witnesses. Each side must choose (I suggest between three and five) witnesses (characters from the book) to help build their case of guilt or innocence. Those witnesses must prepare a written affidavit of their knowledge of the events and characters in question. Each witness who is brought to the stand by one side for direct examination can then be cross-examined by the opposing side. At the end of the trial, the jury goes to another room (If there’s time -- if not, take a vote.) to discuss the verdict, and returns once a verdict has been decided.

3. I then assign roles in the trial. Sometimes I write all the roles on the board, and allow them to raise hands and choose roles; other times, I assign roles. The groups then need at least three days to prepare. I give them

a list of their tasks with deadlines, then allow them most of the next three days to work independently. I begin each class, though, with a brief lesson on aspects of preparation for the trial. Suggested topics for these mini-lessons are:

- * different styles of questions for direct and cross examination
- * how to object
- * how to prepare and submit evidence

Trial Roles

The class is basically divided into two groups: a defense team and a prosecution team. Each team has its own witnesses. The class will also need one judge, a bailiff, and a jury. I strongly recommend that finding an outside jury, composed of students and adults if possible, and one the class will accept as “neutral,” meaning they haven’t read the book and aren’t being graded for their participation. It’s also fun to have outside observers for a class performance.

Each legal team needs to assign members to prepare and perform the following tasks (double-up if there are not enough roles):

Opening Statement

Introduces one side’s case, explaining what your side believes and how you will prove it in a speech no longer than 2 minutes.

Direct-Examination (one per witness from your side)

Works with witnesses whose testimony will support your side. Asks open-ended questions to help witnesses tell the story in their own words. Minimum of five questions must be prepared. (Not all questions need to be asked.)

Cross-Examination (one per witness from the opposing side)

Works with witnesses whose testimony has just been given by the opposing side. Looks for reasons to discredit the witness or throw doubt upon their testimony. Asks yes or no questions to prevent the witness from having a chance to tell their story in their own words. Minimum of five questions must be prepared. (Not all questions need to be asked.)

Closing Statement --

Concludes one side’s case, reminding the jury of what your side believes and why you think they should believe you.

Witnesses

Each side should select three to five characters from *Beloved* whom you would like to call to the stand to tell

the facts of the case as the character understands them. If both sides choose to call the same witness, only one person should play that witness, in order to avoid contradictions.

Student Preparation

1. Each witness needs to prepare a written affidavit of as much as they know about the case as possible, trying to duplicate the character's attitude, way of speaking, and knowledge of the case. The affidavit should be made available to both legal teams.
2. Each lawyer needs to prepare their part in writing. (Direct and cross examiners need to read their witnesses' affidavits and write down their questions.)
3. Each lawyer and witness needs to rehearse their part. (Speech makers need to rehearse for each other; direct examiners rehearse with their witnesses; and cross-examiners rehearse with volunteers posing as the character they will examine.)
4. Judge and Bailiff need to figure out how to set up the room, to write a list of rules for objections (which ones will be accepted), and recruit jury members.

Trial Procedure

The judge needs to have a firm grip of the order of events (opening statements, direct and cross-examination of witnesses, beginning with the prosecution, closing statements) and how to handle objections and evidence.

The bailiff escorts witnesses to and from their seats, brings evidence to the bench, and evicts rowdy audience members.

When the jury has announced its verdict, there should be time for discussion of the process. Discussion can be open-ended, or focus on the following questions:

- * What went particularly well in the trial?
- * What could have been improved?
- * What did we learn about Sethe's actions that we didn't know before?
- * How did we feel about the verdict? Was there other information that could have come out in the trial that might have influenced the verdict? How would Toni Morrison feel about the verdict?
- * What did we learn from preparing and participating in this trial?

Bibliography

Student Reading List

Sojourner Truth. "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, *The Language of Literature*, McDougal Littell, pages 595-596. Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. New York: First Signet Classic Printing 1845, this edition 1997. Friedheim, William, with the American Social History Project. *Freedom's Unfinished Revolution: An Inquiry into the Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: The New Press, 1996.

An alternative text and set of primary sources and images teaching about the Civil War and Reconstruction. Appropriate for students and/or for teachers' background knowledge.

From Revolution to Reconstruction: a Hypertext on American History, <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/> (6 July 99)

Encyclopedic resource on American history for use by students or teacher for further research into background of novel.

Haley, Alex. *Roots*. New York: Dell Books, 1980.

Another sweeping study of African-American history from a personal perspective. The author's research into his family history motivates the saga.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987. Myers, Walter Dean. *Glory Field*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.

A young adult historical novel which takes a fictional African-American family tree and tells the stories of individuals in the family from the Middle Passage to Northern migration, and Harlem in the 1990s. Didactic, but really ties historical periods together and brings them to life.

Materials for Classroom Use

Africans in America, PBS mini-series, 1998.

Good social history of slavery, from its development in the North America to the Civil War. Very extensive; best to show in clips with discussion.

Teacher Reading List

Meltzer, Milton, ed. *The Black Americans: A History in Their Own Words, 1619-1983*. First HarperTrophy edition. New York: HarperTrophy Publishers, 1987.

Good resource for primary sources in African-American history. Also strong on themes and issues in African-American history.

Teachers' Curriculum Institute. *History Alive!: Engaging All Learners in the Diverse Classroom*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994.

Excellent handbook for teaching history in heterogeneous classes with hands-on approach -- writing-intensive activities. Interesting theory and practical applications.

Lakhia, Ali, and Katie Gillette, Scott Lloyd, Glenn Schuetz. *The Web Page of Toni Morrison's Beloved*. The University of Texas at Austin, <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~nmaynard/Morrison/home>. (6 July, 1999).

Comprehensive site of basic biographical information about Morrison, summary of *Beloved*, and critical excerpts.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States, 1492-Present*. Revised and updated. New York: HarperTrophy, 1995.

Very useful background information on United States history, focusing on "recovering" histories of marginalized groups, such as African-Americans.

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