

About the Author

The volume of critical and popular acclaim that has arisen around the work of Toni Morrison is virtually unparalleled in modern letters. Her six major novels--*The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz*--have collected nearly every major literary prize. Ms. Morrison received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 for *Song of Solomon*. In 1987, *Beloved* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Her body of work was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993. Other major awards include: the 1996 National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, the Pearl Buck Award (1994), the title of Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters (Paris, 1994), and 1978 Distinguished Writer Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Ms. Morrison was appointed Robert F. Goheen Professor of the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University in the spring of 1989. Before coming to Princeton, she held teaching posts at Yale University, Bard College, and Rutgers University. In 1990 she delivered the Clark lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Massey Lectures at Harvard University. Ms. Morrison was also a senior editor at Random House for twenty years. She has degrees from Howard and Cornell Universities. A host of colleges and universities have given honorary degrees to Ms. Morrison. Among them are Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, Sarah Lawrence College, Dartmouth, Yale, Georgetown, Columbia University and Brown University. Ms. Morrison was commissioned by Carnegie Hall in 1992 to write lyrics "Honey and Me", an original piece of music by Andre Previn. The lyrics were sung in performance by Kathleen Battle. In 1997, she wrote the lyrics for "Sweet Talk", which was written by Richard Danielpour and performed in concert by Jessye Norman. Ms. Morrison lives in Princeton, New Jersey and upstate New York. Toni Morrison has earned a reputation as a gifted storyteller whose troubled characters seek to find themselves and their cultural riches in a society that warps or impedes such essential growth. According to Charles Larson in the *Chicago Tribune Book World*, each of Morrison's novels "is as original as anything that has appeared in our literature in the last 20 years. The contemporaneity that unites them --the troubling persistence of racism in America--is infused with an urgency that only a black writer can have about our society."

(penguin.com)

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Reviews

A work that brings to the darkest corners of American experience the wisdom, and the courage, to know them as they are. -*New York Review of Books*

Mixed with the lyric beauty of the writing, the fury in Morrison's . . . book is almost palpable...a haunting chronicle of slavery and its aftermath set in rural Ohio in the wake of the Civil War. The brilliantly conceived story . . . should not be missed. -*Publishers Weekly*

A brutally powerful, mesmerizing story . . . read it and tremble. - *People Magazine*

(*litlovers.com and barnesandnoble.com*)

Movie Adaptation

With the startling, engrossing world of *Beloved*, director Jonathan Demme returns to the big screen following his Academy Award-winning work on *The Silence of the Lambs* and the emotional power of *Philadelphia* to craft a story of singular emotional impact. Academy Award nominee Oprah Winfrey stars with Danny Glover, Thandie Newton, Kimberly Elise and Beah Richards in this compelling story adapted from the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison. *Beloved* translates to the screen with its visceral daring intact, thoroughly immersing viewers in the haunting, haunted landscape of this story.

Oprah Winfrey, for whom *Beloved* is the ultimate labor of love, appears in her first starring feature film role since earning an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress in *The Color Purple*, with a performance of undeniable fearlessness. Winfrey optioned the rights to *Beloved* upon its publication and nurtured the project for nearly a decade, personally shepherding it to its current incarnation as one of the most anticipated motion picture events of the year.

Winfrey stars as Sethe, a woman of elemental grace and unspoken mystery. A figure of fierce determination, Sethe is a runaway slave struggling to carve out her own simple existence with her children in rural Ohio, 1873. Preventing her from achieving that, however, is the painful legacy of her former life, and the desperate measures to which she is driven to keep herself and her family from returning to it.

Danny Glover stars as Paul D, an old friend who comes to visit Sethe and whose understanding is tested by her household's shattering secrets. Kimberly Elise portrays Sethe's daughter, Denver, an embattled young woman who must free herself from the crippling grasp that her mother's choices have on her. And Thandie Newton is Beloved. As Beloved grows to become part of Sethe's family, her devastating presence threatens to destroy the delicate balance of Sethe and Denver's existence.

(rottentomatoes.com)

Movie Reviews

Something rare: a brave film about the emotional toll of slavery, the anguish of memory and the cruel divisions that still sear African American lives. –Edward Guthmann- *San Francisco Chronicle*

Once this film gets its bearings, the unsentimental fierceness of its vision brushes obstacles and quibbles from its path. –Kenneth Turan -*Los Angeles Times*

The elaborate, soaring *Beloved* may alight on the ground with a tap rather than a thud, but land it does, after a harrowing, breathtaking flight. –Michael O'Sullivan_-*Washington Post*

(*rottentomatoes.com*)

Further Reading

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

Go Down, Moses by William Faulkner

Bailey's Cafe by Gloria Naylor

Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich

The Cattle Killing by John Edgar Wideman

Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands by Jorge Amado

BOOK CLUB To Go!

Beloved

By Toni Morrison

Possible Discussion Questions

1. I have a strong reaction to this book. How have others reacted?
2. Why would Sethe have murdered her children after escaping to Ohio; weren't they free?
3. Is Beloved the murdered daughter brought back to life?
4. What about Beloved's claims of a different history, that she and her mother were transported aboard a slave ship?
5. Are there any other possibilities for Beloved?
6. How does the novel represent the relationship between Sethe and her children?
7. Does the novel accurately represent the relationship between women and their children under slavery?
8. Consider the extent to which slavery dehumanizes individuals by stripping them of their identity, destroying their ability to conceive of the self. Consider, especially, Paul and how he can't determine whether screams he hears are his or someone else's. How do the other characters reflect self- alienation?
9. Discuss the different roles of the community in betraying and protecting the house at 124. What larger issue might Morrison be suggesting here about community?
10. What does Beloved's appearance represent? What about her behavior? Why does she finally disappear—what drives her departure? And why is the book's title named for her?
11. Talk about the choice Sethe made regarding her children when schoolteacher arrives to take them all back to Sweet Home (don't you love that name?). Can her actions be justified—are her actions rational or irrational?

12. What does the narrator mean by the warning at the end: "this is not a story to pass on." Is he right...or not[?]

(NoveList.com and litlovers.com)