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“Everything for the English Classroom!”

Free Lesson of the Month February, 2011

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Please feel free to share this lesson with all your colleagues. We hope that they find these classroom-proven lessons to be as useful as you do.

This month's free lesson comes from the *Beloved Teaching Unit* and includes a student Study Guide with vocabulary and questions for Book I and a teacher answer key.

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Beloved

Book One (Pages 4 – 49)

Vocabulary

deprivation – prevention from using or enjoying something
devious – underhanded, deceitful; indirect
exorcise – to expel an evil spirit
glittering – sparkling
intolerable – unbearable
luminous – glowing, emitting light
palsied – paralyzed, made helpless
perfunctory – indifferent
pike – a long-snouted fish
pondering – thinking deeply
rebuked – reprimanded, scolded
revulsion – disgust, aversion
spiteful – full of ill will or malice
studded – embedded with
untethered – untied, unrestrained
venom – spite, malice, anger

1. The first line of the book is “124 was spiteful.” Why do you suppose Morrison describes the house and not the ghost residing in it as “spiteful”?

Answers may vary. Example: Because supernatural phenomena, like ghosts, are hard for some readers to understand, Morrison begins her novel by associating the odd occurrences with the house, a more familiar connection for her readers to make.

2. What is the significance of the house number “124”?

Answers may vary. Example: The number “124” is a morbid reminder to Sethe of her lost child, her third. The number “3” is missing from the sequence of the house number, just as Sethe’s third child is missing from her house.

3. Both Sethe and Paul D remember their time at Sweet Home with relative contentment. Why does Sethe not look back on her enslavement with more anger?

Sethe does not directly associate the actual farm with what happened to her there, making it possible to look back fondly on the physical structures of Sweet Home, including the sycamore trees. “It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too.”

4. Why did Mr. Garner draw pleasure from “calling his own niggers men”?

As a slave owner, Mr. Garner was obviously in control of his slaves, but by allowing them the freedom to carry weapons, etc., he was displaying his own prowess as a man. Because he trusted his slaves not to revolt, it was implied that he commanded such respect that the idea of a revolt was ridiculous. Because “men” were his slaves, it made Mr. Garner a bigger man.

5. After Paul D exorcised the ghost from 124, why was Denver sad?

Denver was sad because the ghost was her only companion beyond Sethe in 124. With Baby Suggs dead, Paul D upstairs with Sethe, and the ghost scared away, Denver was left alone.

6. What color is the pool of light in 124? Why is it there and why is it that color?

The light is red, and it represents the ghost living in 124. The color red is normally associated with anger; however Sethe, Paul D and Denver agree that the ghost is sad, not angry.

7. Why do Sethe and Denver continue living in 124 Bluestone Road?

Sethe has decided that after running away from slavery, she is not going to run away anymore. In addition, Baby Suggs claimed that leaving 124 would not mean an escape from haunting, as there is “not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief.”

8. Why does Amy Denver, a white girl, help out the pregnant Sethe, an admittedly escaped slave?

Like Sethe, Amy Denver is running away from a life of forced service (she is an indentured servant), and can, therefore, commiserate with the miserable circumstances from which Sethe is escaping. Also, despite her young age, Amy could probably identify with Sethe and her impending childbirth, a desperate situation for any woman to face alone.

9. When did Sethe become aware of the colors around her? Why?

Sethe became more aware of color (like the orange squares on her quilt) after Paul D came to 124. For the first time since her daughter’s death, Sethe slowed her life down enough to appreciate the little things, including the colors she had been purposely ignoring. Her recognition of the colors can be seen as a step in her healing process, as the last color she remembered prior to Paul D’s re-entry to her life was the pink of her baby’s gravestone.

10. Why does Paul D think Sethe's attachment to Denver is "risky"?

Because Paul D is a survivor of the system of slavery, he is familiar with how easily a mother and child can be separated. Echoing the statements made by Baby Suggs earlier in the novel, Paul D feels that people should love everything a little, instead of loving one thing with all they have. Based in self-preservation, this logic defends the psyche from crumbling when a loved one is taken away (often without warning), or worse, killed. Baby Suggs relied heavily on this belief, as more than one of her children were sold without the chance to say goodbye.

11. What purpose does the circus serve in the story?

The circus serves as a break from reality for Sethe, Denver and Paul D. Surrounded by freaks and oddities, the circus was an alien environment, a place where blacks were entertained by performing whites, and where the residents of 124 were not the main attraction.

12. What do the linked arms of the shadows represent?

Spending the day at the circus soothed some of the tension between Denver and Paul D, as symbolized by the linked arms of the shadows cast ahead of them on their walk home.

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