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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Note to the Teacher: This book contains references to prostitution, scenes of graphic sex and violence (including a scene in which the main character murders a child), prodigious use of offensive language, including repeated use of the word *nigger*, as well as depictions of the racism of society in the 1800s.

Pre-Reading

- 1. The title of this book is *Beloved*, meaning something or someone that is dearly loved. What is something that is beloved to you? What personal possession do you have that you love above all others? Write a journal entry in which you describe something that is beloved by you, and explain why it is special.
- 2. Some of the language in this book is quite complex. As you study *Beloved*, keep a list of words you don't understand. When you write the word, look it up in a dictionary, and write a short definition of it to help you better understand the novel.
- 3. Toni Morrison dedicates *Beloved* to "Sixty Million and more." Imagine that you have written a novel. Write a dedication for it. List to whom or what the novel is dedicated, and explain why.

23. Although Beloved seemingly arrives out of thin air, Paul D recognizes her kind. After the Civil War, he saw dozens of women just like her in Rochester. They were freed during the war, and now they were roaming the country, looking for family members they lost track of when they were sold. When slaves' family members were sold, the family members could be sent to the plantation down the road, or they could be sent to another state hundreds of miles away. After the Civil War, former slaves would search, sometimes for years, for the family they lost in slavery.

On paper, draw a webpage designed to help former slaves find their relatives. Add text to give people practical advice on how to begin their search for missing family members.

24. When Beloved asks Sethe if she ever owned any diamonds, Sethe replies that she hasn't, but once she owned a pair of crystal earrings, which her owner's wife gave her as a wedding gift.

Although Sethe and Halle were married, they never had a wedding ceremony of any kind. Marriage for slaves at Sweet Home required only the Garners' permission to live as husband and wife. If the owners said that two slaves were married, then they were.

In hearing Mrs. Garner talk of her wedding to Mr. Garner, Sethe longs for a wedding ceremony of her own, or at least for some formal way to mark her union with Halle. Write the vows that Sethe and Halle could say to each other if they were to have a ceremony.

25. Though Sethe and Denver seem enamored with Beloved, Paul D finds her unsettling. There's something about Beloved that makes Paul D uneasy. Maybe it's because no one knows where Beloved came from or how she knew to come to 124. There are just too many unanswered questions about her.

Paul D's and Sethe's differences of opinion about Beloved put the two of them on edge and cause them to argue continually. Write a transcript of a family counseling session with Paul D and Sethe, in which the counselor tries to get them to reach a compromise about their thoughts on Beloved.

Is there such a thing as being too generous? Do Baby Suggs' neighbors have a right to be offended by the lavish party she throws? Write the text for a presentation at a charity telethon, telling viewers your opinions about whether it is possible to be too generous.

46. Baby Suggs' son Halle made an agreement with their owner, Mr. Garner, to purchase Baby Suggs' freedom. Halle would take on extra work for money, and, if Mr. Garner agreed, would use the money to buy Baby Suggs from him and set her free. Because Baby Suggs was considered a possession belonging to Mr. Garner, the only way to make her free was to purchase her.

Write a contract between Halle and Mr. Garner, spelling out the details of the agreement they make for Halle to purchase his mother.

47. When Baby Suggs recalls her life on Sweet Home, her experiences there, though not exactly pleasant, were not as violent as those on other plantations where she had lived. For one thing, she was able to stay with Halle on Sweet Home, where other masters sold away her children. She was also allowed to be a house slave, meaning that her labor was not as physically taxing as it had been working in the fields at other places.

Baby Suggs' experiences at Sweet Home were not just different from those she had at other plantations; they were also vastly different from Sethe's experiences at the same place. Write a Twitter summary of one of Baby Suggs' experiences at Sweet Home and another of Sethe's. Each summary must be no more than 140 characters.

48. When Baby Suggs is finally freed, she is so excited that she hardly knows what to do. She looks at her hands, for example, and realizes that, for the first time, they belong to her, not to a white man. Everything that Baby Suggs has is her own. She no longer belongs to anyone except herself.

Write the text for a telegram to be sent to Baby Suggs, congratulating her on her freedom.

Wrap-Up

64. Toni Morrison begins her novel with a quote from the Bible, specifically from the book of Romans:

I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved which was not beloved.

Why do you think Morrison chose this quote to begin her book? Write a paragraph or two in which you explain why you think Morrison chose to start *Beloved* with this quote.

65. *Beloved* contains some very dark concepts, including slavery, violence, and insanity. This is a novel that makes people think deeply about its subject matter, which may actually be Morrison's reason for writing it.

If you had a chance to interview Toni Morrison, what kinds of questions would you ask her about *Beloved*? Write a dialogue in which you interview Toni Morrison and discuss some of the questions you have about her novel.

66. One of the most controversial ideas today that relates to American slavery is the political push to offer reparations to the descendants of slaves. Some people think that the U.S. government should pay slaves' descendants for the physical and emotional damage that was inflicted on their ancestors. Others disagree, saying that, although there is no doubt that slaves in the United States were beaten, tortured, and treated inhumanely, the people who perpetrated these atrocities are long dead. "Why," they ask, "should today's taxpayers pay for the damage that people who lived long ago created?"

Should the government pay the descendants of slaves for what happened to their ancestors? Write a letter to the governor of your state, telling him or her whether you support paying reparations for slavery and providing ample of reasons to support your opinions.