***Beloved* Reading Guide**

**Reading Calendar 2017**

**Part one:**

**RR #1** 3-27 for 2/21 and 2/22

**RR#1** 28-42 for 2/23 and 2/24

**RR #1** 43-73 for 2/27 and 2/28

**RR #2** 74-105 for 3/1 and 3/2

**RR #2** 106-134 for 3/3 and 3/6

**RR #3** 135-165 for 3/7 and 3/8

**Part two:**

**RR#3** 169-199 for 3/9 and 3/10

**RR#4** 200-235 for 3/13 and 3/14

**Part three:**

**RR #4** 239-275 for 3/15 and 3/16

*Beloved* Themes Debate

1. “Home” is a space for women.  
2. A “real” man or woman resists authority and does his own thing.  
3. Love can make good people go insane.  
4. Love is possession.  
5. It’s impossible to consider a slave holder “humane.”  
6. To understand the present, we must examine the past.  
7. Communities need an outcast to band together against.  
8. There’s evil in all of us.  
9. True character is only revealed in desperate situations.  
10. Females respond better than males to powerlessness.  
11. Parents must protect their children—at any cost.  
12. Sometimes, murder is excusable.  
13. Good parenting is passed down through generations.  

**Literary elements to trace:**

**Characterization:** direct/indirect

**POV:** Switches between third person omniscient, limited, and first person—pay attention.

**Setting:** importance of place/time/atmosphere

**Style elements:** use of metaphor, simile, personification, and other figurative language

**Use of flashback to create structure:** what is the effect of such frequent flashbacks? Is there a pattern to their occurrence?

**Irony:** house number, “Sweet Home”, living ghosts, living dead

**Major symbols:**   
\*124 (E.G. The opening sentence: "124 was spiteful" (3).—how does this opening line repeat and create structure? Any other significant numbers? Remember the connection between owners and their houses in Gothic literature?

\*Tobacco tin box/red heart

\*Water  
\*Trees/nature

\*Colors (E.G. Baby Suggs, "between the nastiness of life and the meanness of death . . . used the little energy left her for pondering color" [3-4].)  
\*Quilts  
\*Masks

\*Behavior of animals—“Here Boy

\*Breast/milk

**Major motifs:**

\*The Supernatural/Gothicism

\*Rememory/Disremember

\*Money and wealth

\*Family

\*Aftermath of slavery

\*The role of community

\*The relationship between the past, present, and future

\*The nature of home

\*Love: both platonic and romantic

\*Identity and oppression

\*Power

\*Evil

\*Bondage vs. freedom

**General Questions:**

* What does the novel tell us about history and memory? Consider, for example, Sethe's relationship with her past, Paul D's relationship with his (their inability to join at the beginning of the novel and then their co-joining at the conclusion of the novel). How do these characters' eventual acknowledgment their respective pasts model a way of coping with the history of American slavery?
* Who is Beloved? Consider the possibility that she is something different to each character. What is significant about the timing of her appearance and her disappearance? How does Beloved fit into Morrison's idea of "rememory"?
* Consider storytelling in the novel. Consider the relationship between storytelling and teaching, including evil storytelling represented by schoolteacher and redemptive storytelling represented by Baby Suggs and, at the novel's conclusion, by Denver.
* *Beloved* is a composite of slave narratives and related materials. Sethe's story is based on the true account of Margaret Garner, a young slave who ran away, was caught, and returned to her plantation. Her owner was shipping her to Mississippi when she jumped ship with her child in her arms, killing them both. Consider the relationship between *Beloved* and the slave narratives by Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs. Who are the "Sixty Million and more" to whom the novel is dedicated?
* Morrison once said that all of her novels pose questions. What is the question(s) posed in *Beloved*?

**Look for details that will help you discuss the following questions:**

**Pages 1-19**  
1. Discuss Sethe's attitude toward memory and the past. For example, how and why does she remember Sweet Home, the farm where she was a slave?  
2. Describe what you know about the ghost that haunts 124. What is Denver's and Sethe's attitude toward the ghost? How do they live with it?  
3. What is the significance of the phrase "Sweet Home men"? What does this passage tell you about the institution of slavery?  
4. Comment on the names of the slave men. Why are three of them called Paul Garner?  
5. Describe each of the three main characters we meet in this first chapter: Sethe, Paul D, and Denver. What important information do we learn about each?  
6. Morrison continually makes reference to events that she hasn't yet described. Why do you think she does this? What effect does this technique have on the reader?  
7. Why does Sethe focus on the schoolteacher's boys taking her milk, rather than on them beating her? What does her milk represent?

**Pages 20-42**  
1. How does Mrs. Garner react when Sethe asks her for a wedding, and why? What does this say about Mrs. Garner's perception of and attitude toward her slaves?  
2. When Amy says that "anything dead coming back to life hurts," why does Denver think this is a "truth for all times" (35)? What relevance does this bit of wisdom have for Sethe's (or Paul D's) situation more generally?  
3. Why is it hard for Sethe to believe in time? How is this lack of belief in time reflected in the narrative?  
4. Discuss Sethe's notion of "rememory." How is it different from our normal conception of memory?  
5. Why does Sethe's story always reach "the point beyond which she would not go" (37)? What do you think this point represents? What does this silence say about her memory (or rememory) of the traumatic past?

**Pages 43-73**  
1. What is Denver's attitude toward Paul D? How do her feelings change after the carnival, and why?  
2. Why does Sethe's water break when she first sees Beloved? What does this moment represent?  
3. Who do you think Beloved is, and where does she come from? How does she know things about Sethe, like the earrings?  
4. Why does the narrator compare the hurt in Sethe's past to "a tender place in the corner of her mouth that the bit left" (58)? What image does this simile conjure in the reader's mind?  
5. Why does Sethe's mother show her the brand under her breast? What does it represent? Why does young Sethe want a mark too?  
6. Describe the relationship between Denver and Beloved.

**Pages 74-85**  
1. Why is Beloved so eager to hear Sethe's stories?  
2. Reread Beloved's description of "the dark" (75). Where do you think she was before she ended up on the porch of 124?  
3. What do we learn about the white girl Amy who saves Sethe? What is her social position, for example? Why do you think Morrison included this character in the novel?

**Pages 86-124**  
1. Why do you think Sethe feels the need for "some fixing ceremony" to commemorate Halle (86)?  
2. When Baby Suggs was a lay preacher, what was her message to the people? Why was that message so powerful for the former slaves?  
3. Comment on Ella's advice: "Don't love nothing" (92). What does this comment reveal about the condition of slavery?  
4. Who or what do you think it is that strangles Sethe in the clearing?  
5. Why do you think Denver lost her hearing for two years when she was a child? What prompts this hearing loss?  
6. What does the "tobacco tin" in Paul D's chest (referred to on page 113, for example) represent?  
7. How do you explain why Paul D finds himself compelled to sleep downstairs, then in Baby Suggs's room, then in the shed?

**Pages 125-153**  
1. At the beginning of this section, why is Paul D concerned about his manhood? Why is his masculinity threatened?  
2. Explain this quotation, using at least one other example from the novel: "Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (132).  
3. Why do the neighbors grow angry and resentful at the party thrown by the residents of 124?  
4. Why does Baby Suggs think the Garners ran "a special kind of slavery" (140)? Are Garner's slaves truly better off than those of other slave masters? Why is Baby Suggs still wary of this kind of slavery? Why is she scared that her son understands what freedom means?  
5. Why does the slavecatcher think that Stamp Paid is crazy? What other explanations can you think of for Stamp's "low, cat noises" (149)?  
6. What does Sethe do when she sees the slavecatchers coming? How does the schoolteacher interpret those actions? How do you explain her actions?  
7. How does Sethe's action explain much that has already happened or been mentioned in the novel? Do you read the early parts of the book differently, knowing what you know now?

**Pages 154-165**  
1. Why do you think Stamp Paid shows Paul D the newspaper clipping about Sethe?  
2. How does Paul D react to the news clipping, and why?  
3. Why does Sethe circle round and round both Paul D (literally) and the subject of his question (figuratively)?  
4. Explain this quotation: "more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed" (164).  
5. Why does Paul D leave 124? Does he do the right thing?

**Pages 169-199**  
1. Why do you think the ghost returns to 124 after Paul D leaves?  
2. What do we learn about Stamp Paid in this section? How would you describe his character?  
3. What happens to Baby Suggs after Sethe's arrest and the death of the baby? How does Stamp Paid explain her behavior? Do you agree with his interpretation?  
4. Explain the red ribbon Stamp Paid finds on the Ohio River. How does it affect him, and why? Why does he carry it around like a talisman?  
5. When Sethe finally realizes that Beloved is her baby girl "come back home from the timeless place" (182), how does she react, and why? Did her reaction surprise you?  
6. Why did Stamp Paid give himself that name? Is there a deeper meaning to it?  
7. Why is Stamp Paid so dismayed to learn that Paul D has been sleeping in the church cellar? What does his reaction tell you about the black community in southern Ohio?  
8. What kind of lessons does the schoolteacher give to his pupils? What does this section reveal about how some white people justified slavery to themselves?

**Pages 200-235**  
1. The first three chapters in this section all use "stream-of-consciousness" narration,meaning that the reader hears the thoughts of the characters just as they think them. Why does Morrison use this technique? What effect does it have on the reader?  
2. What is it like inside of Beloved's head (210-213)? What memories does she have?  
3. On pages 215-217, there are bits of a dialogue. Who is speaking, and to whom? How do you know?  
4. Why does Sixo sing when he is captured by the white men? Why does the singing convince the schoolteacher that "this one will never be suitable" (226)? Why does Sixo laugh as he's being burned alive?

**Pages 239-275**  
1. Why does Sethe stop going to work, and why does she "cut Denver out completely" (240)?  
2. What goes wrong between Sethe and Beloved, and why?  
3. For eighteen years the black people in town have shunned 124 and its residents. Why are they now so quick to help Denver when she asks for it?  
4. What is the significance of the statue of the black servant, described on page 255?  
5. What do we learn about the Bodwins? Are they good people?  
6. Why does the narrator repeat, "This is not a story to pass on" (274-75)?