

## Approved for use in AP Literature and Composition/English IV

**Summary of the Work:**

The novel spans the years 1861-1865, during which time the Fugitive Slave Act was in place. Morrison was inspired by the story of Margaret Garner, a slave who killed her child when slave catchers threatened to return her and her children to slavery. Sethe, the protagonist, spends time in jail before being released to her remaining children. They live in a house that is haunted by the spirit of her dead daughter. Then a woman named Beloved who seems to be the child's ghost, appears upon the scene and forces Sethe and her family to truly reckon with the past.

**Rationale:**

Beloved is an ideal title for the AP Literature and Composition course as it diversifies the curriculum with an author who is a woman of color, it regularly appears on the list of possible texts for the Literary Argument essay on the AP Exam, it addresses the enduring American legacy of slavery, and it is a skillfully-written and challenging example of literary fiction.

The novel will introduce students to Toni Morrison, a Nobel prize-winning author, through her renowned novel about the psychological trauma of slavery on its survivors.

Toni Morrison's gripping and intriguing story in *Beloved* appeals to young readers, motivating them to push through a difficult text. The shifts in narration and point of view, the lyrical prose, the elements of magical realism, the historical, biblical and classical allusions, and the ambiguities of the story lend to rigorous discussion and analysis.

**Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:**

"Morrison's truly majestic fifth novel—strong and intricate in craft; devastating in impact." *Kirkus Review*

"Beloved is one of the few American novels that take every natural element of the novel form and exploit it thoroughly, but in balance with all the other elements. The result is that it is dense but not long, dramatic but not melodramatic, particular and universal, shocking but reassuring, new but at the same time closely connected to the tradition of the novel, and likely to mould or change a reader's sense of the world." Jane Smiley in *The Guardian*

"At the heart of Toni Morrison's extraordinary new novel, "Beloved," there stands a horrifying event - an event so brutal and disturbing that it appears to warp time before and after into a single, unwavering line of fate. ... it will reverberate in readers' minds long after they have finished this book.

... This is a dazzling novel." Michiko Kakutani for *the New York Times*

**Noted Distinction:**

- Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 1988
- Anisfield-Wolf Book Award 1988
- Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Book Award
- Lyndhurst Foundation Award
- Elmer Holmes Bobst Award
- Frederick J. Melcher Book Award
- Morrison won Nobel Prize in 1993

**Readability**

- Lexile Score: 870
- Readability Level:

**Learning Resources Guidelines**

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

**Standard Alignment: ([link](#))**

**Notes on the Text:**

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

The novel addresses mature themes which is unavoidable in any attempt to face the brutal history of slavery. The book centers around an unthinkable crime of infanticide. It describes sexual violence, beatings, and other abuse inflicted upon people who are enslaved. These descriptions are necessarily disturbing to portray the extremity of the institution of slavery.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

Students seeking college credit for this course, especially those continuing on to study literature at the college level, will do well to familiarize themselves with Morrison's writing as she has a firm place in the canon of American Literature as a novelist, poet, and editor. *Beloved* is now a classic American novel and serves as an essential model of the "big ideas and enduring understandings" that the AP Literature course focuses on: Character, Setting, Structure, Narration and Figurative Language.

**Additional Connections:**

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*

Oprah Winfrey stars as Sethe in the 1998 Film adaptation of the novel. Margaret Garner, the woman who inspired Morrison's novel, is also the subject of a 2007 opera, and in 2019, *The New York Times* eulogized Margaret Garner in their "Overlooked" series.