

Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards*



Beloved

Toni Morrison

1988 AWBA Fiction Winner

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In *Beloved*, the smell of sap, the sounds of a work song, or the retelling of a family story is enough to blur time and send characters slipping into the past, allowing the novel to convey settings and characters that are not in the present events of the story, such as Sweet Home and the prison camps of Alfred, Georgia; Sethe's mother and husband; schoolteacher; and the Garners in a way that is palpable and enduring. What do these narrative choices illuminate about memory for each character, and how do they work to amplify the lasting wounds of enslavement?
2. During her lifetime, Toni Morrison drew attention to the lack of historical markers to commemorate the lives of enslaved people and dedicated *Beloved* to the over sixty million who died during the Middle Passage. How does *Beloved* act as a memorial to preserve the memory of those who have been enslaved?
3. Stream of consciousness is used to render the thoughts of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved as they appear in their minds. Why do you think Morrison chose to include these first-person perspectives in a novel that is told primarily through third-person narration? As a reader, what effect did this technique have on your experience of the novel and your understanding of these characters' motivations?
4. *Beloved* is set in 1873 and makes references to the rhetoric of the Civil War, including the Fugitive Slave Act, the Dred Scott decision, and the abolitionist movement. How are the lives of the novel's characters directly impacted by this political climate? Can Sethe's crime be seen as an act of resistance against this legislation?