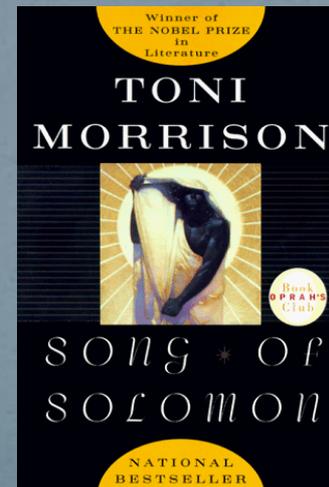


Song of Solomon
by Toni Morrison
Author and Novel
Introduction



The Life of the Author

- A Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, as well as an editor and professor, Chloe Anthony Wofford was born on February 18, 1931.



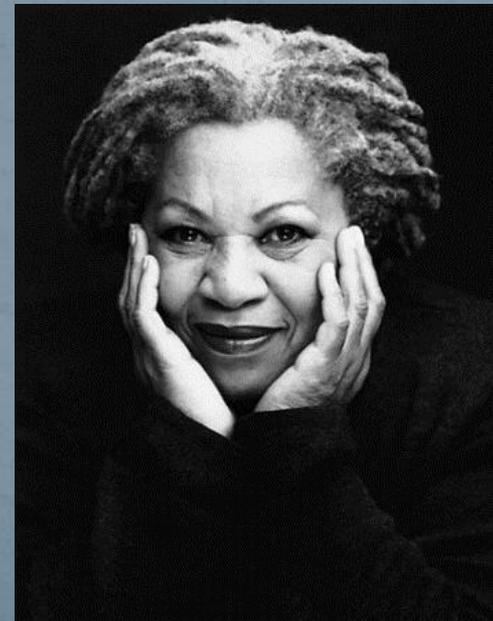
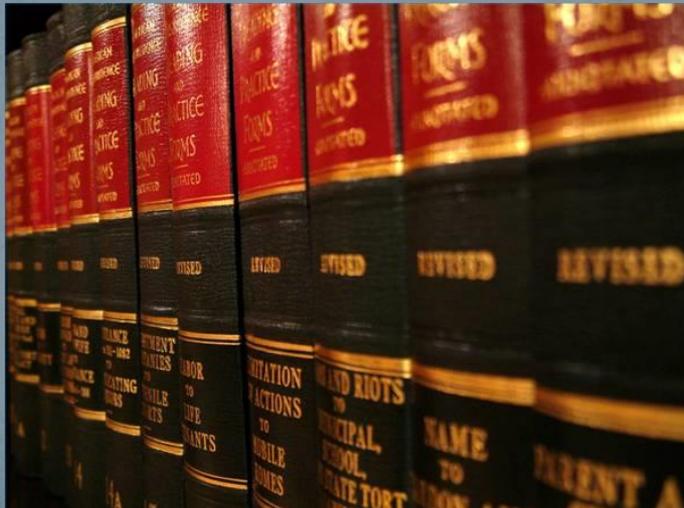
The Life of the Author

- While growing up in a working-class family in Loraine, Ohio, she became an avid reader of such notables as Jane Austen and Leo Tolstoy. Her father contributed to her eventual storytelling style by relating folktales from the black community.



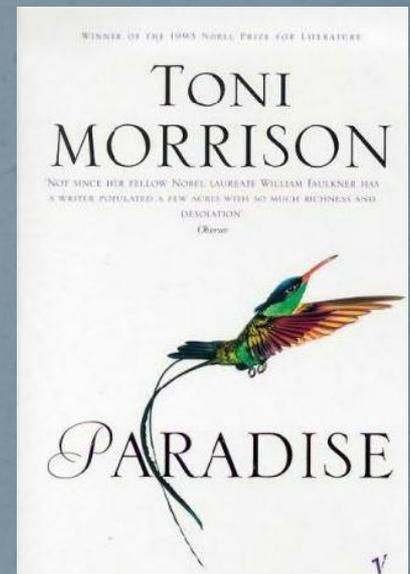
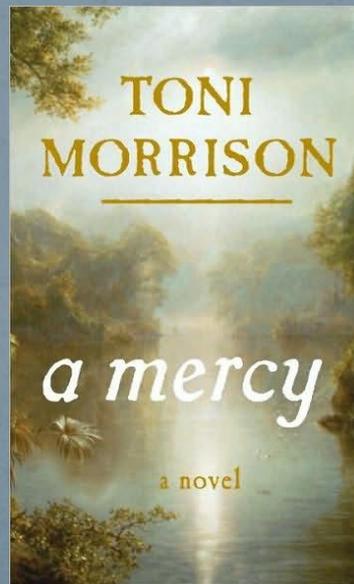
The Life of the Author

- She holds degrees in English from Howard University and Cornell University, has instructed at various colleges, and eventually became an editor, where she utilized her role to bring black literature into the mainstream.



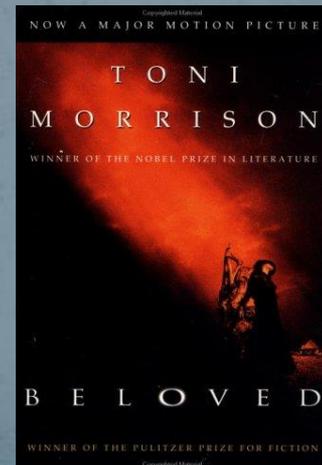
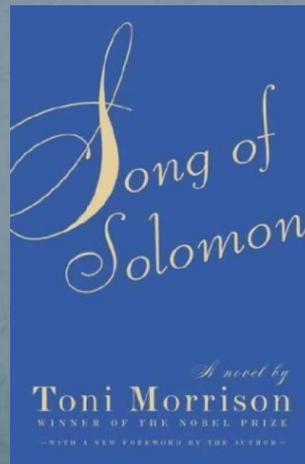
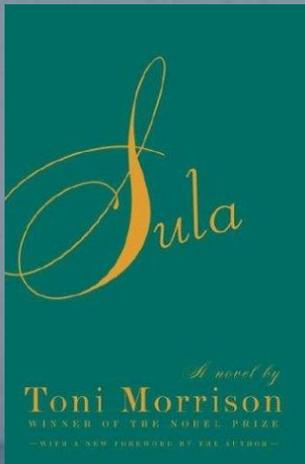
Morrison's Literature

- Her transition to writing began with an informal group of instructors from Howard University who met to share and discuss their poetry.



Morrison's Literature

- Her novels have achieved much critical acclaim.
 - *Sula* (1973) – National Book Award
 - *Song of Solomon* (1977) – National Book Critics Circle Award
 - *Beloved* (1987) – Pulitzer Prize for fiction



Morrison's Literature

Art is the restoration of order... --Morrison

- In 1993, Morrison became the first black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her citation for the award reads: Toni Morrison, “who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of America reality.”

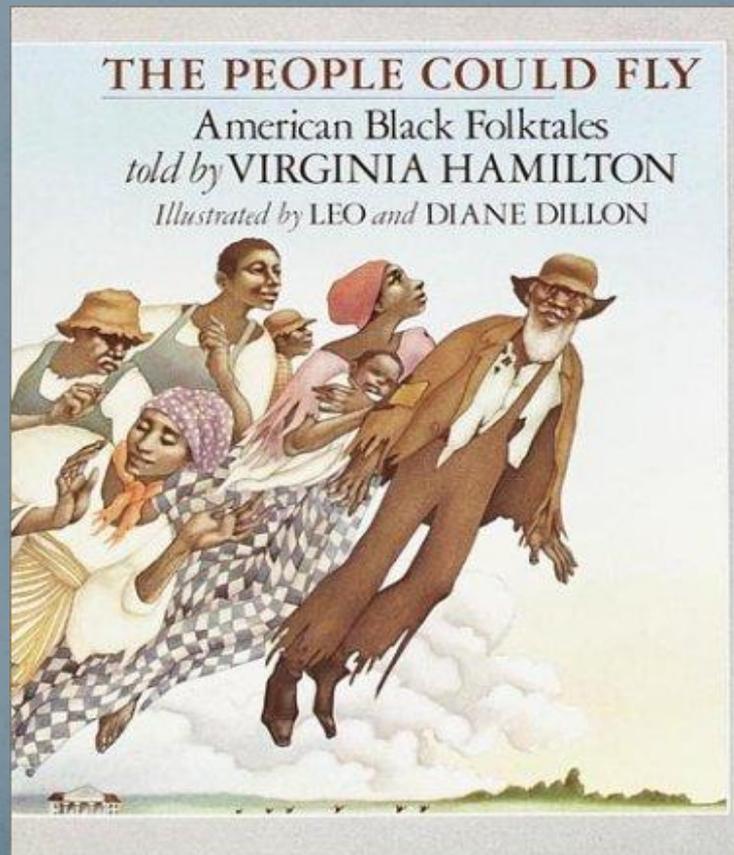


Song of Solomon

- Published in 1977, Morrison presents the life of Macon “Milkman” Dead III as he progresses from birth to adulthood.
- While all novels bring forth difficulties of understanding, those present for *Song of Solomon* stem from the incorporation and conglomeration of true-to-life fiction, African folktales and mythology, actual historical events, and Biblical allusions.

African Folklore

- The following folktale was recorded by Virginia Hamilton in her book *The People Could Fly*.



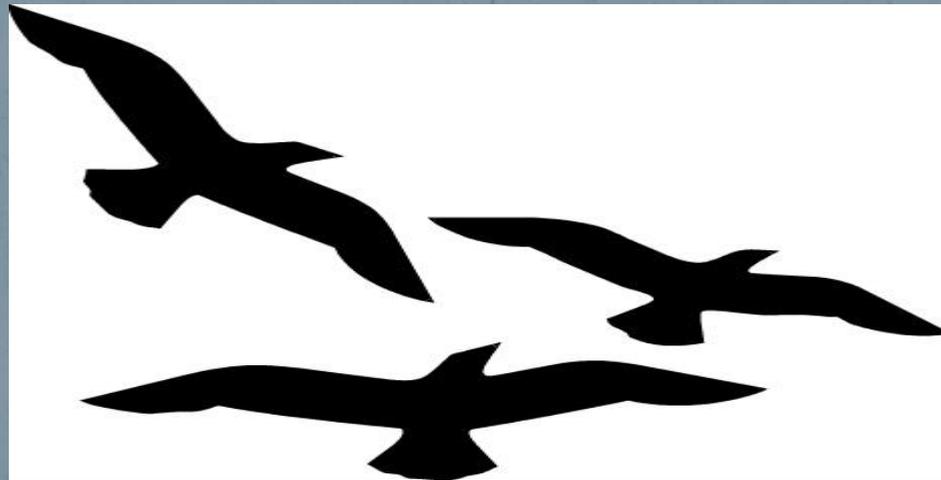
African Folklore

Once all Africans could fly like birds; but owing to their many transgressions, their wings were taken away. There remained, here and there, in the sea islands and out-of-the-way places in the low country, some who had been overlooked, and had retained the power of flight, though they looked like other men.

A particularly cruel master bought a group of these magical people, and worked them mercilessly. One woman had recently given birth to her first child, and was beaten by the overseer when she fainted from overwork and heat. She began working again, but soon faltered. This time when the slave driver approached to whip her she leaped into the air at a signal from the oldest man in the group, and flew away. The overseer was furious, and worked the other slaves harder. Soon a man fell, was beaten, and also rose into the air and flew away with the help of the old man, but he laughed at them and raised his hands. Suddenly, all of the slaves “leaped into the air with a great shout; and in a moment were gone, flying, like a flock of crows” over the fields and back to Africa.

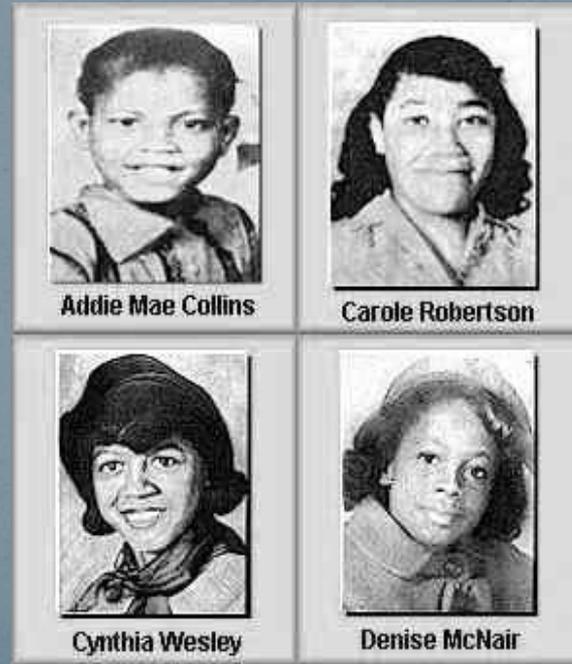
African Folklore

- Morrison incorporates this motif of flight into *Song of Solomon*.
- Consider the symbolic nature of flight and why it would yield a complex insight into black culture.



Historical Events

- To demonstrate the oppression and tragedy black culture has been forced to endure, Morrison includes actual historical atrocities from the Civil Rights Era.



Historical Events

- “A young negro boy had been stomped to death in Sunflower County, Mississippi. There were no questions about who had stomped him – his murderers had boasted freely – and there were no questions about the motive. The boy had whistled at some white woman, refused to deny he had slept with others, and was a Northerner visiting the South. His name was Till” (Morrison 80).

Historical Events

- In the summer of 1955, Emmett Louis Till visited relatives in Mississippi. Till was young and brash, and did not know how he was supposed to act toward Southern white women. Not long after reportedly whistling at a white woman in a store, Till was kidnapped, beaten, shot, and mangled. A few days later, his remains were found in a river.

Historical Events

- When his remains were returned to Chicago, his mother insisted upon an open-casket burial, so that the world could see “what they did to my boy.”



Historical Events

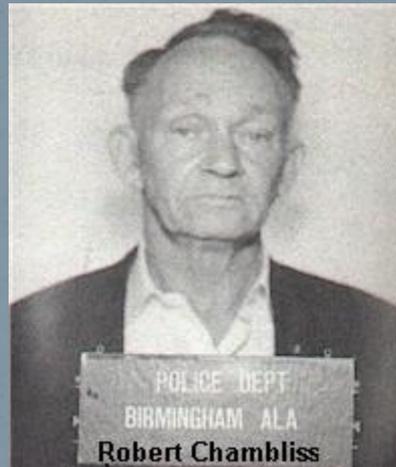
- “The men began to trade tales of atrocities, first stories they had heard, and then those they’d witnessed, and finally the things that had happened to themselves” (Morrison 82).



Historical Events

- On Sunday, September 15, 1963, a white man was seen getting out of a white and turquoise Chevrolet and placing a box under the steps of the 16th Street Baptist Church. At 10:22 am, the bomb exploded killing Denise McNair (11), Addie Mae Collins (14), Carole Robertson (14), and Cynthia Wesley (14). Also hurt in the blast were 23 other people. Not until 1977 was Robert Chambliss retried and convicted of this atrocity.

Historical Events

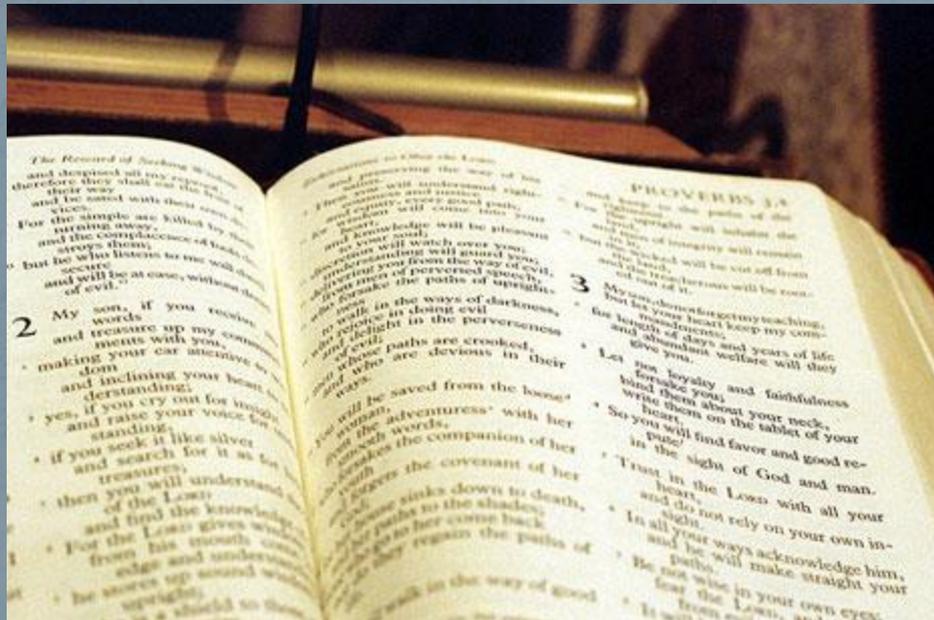


Historical Events

- Reflect upon how these events impacted the Civil Rights Era and American history.
- Consider why Morrison weaves this historical information into her novel and what is gained from it.

Biblical Allusions

- Many names chosen by Morrison are direct reflections of a Biblical influence.



Biblical Allusions

- “Song of Solomon” – Poetry that takes the form of a dialogue between a kingly husband and his wife. Following the couple through their courtship, the wedding, and the maturation of their union, they experience both tragedy and triumph, eventually singing of the lasting nature of their love.



Biblical Allusions

- “Ruth” – The story told in the book of Ruth focuses on the lives of two women, Naomi and Ruth, and shows how God can turn sufferings into joy.



Biblical Allusions

- “First Corinthians” – The Corinthian church was plagued by divisions. St. Paul gave this church instructions on marriage, celibacy, improper conduct, and immoral relationships.



Biblical Allusions

- Magdalena Called Lena – Mary Magdalene was a woman possessed by demonic spirits until she was healed by Jesus. She and others discovered Jesus' empty tomb and were told by an angel of his resurrection.



Biblical Allusions

- Pilate – Pontius Pilate, often credited with condemning Jesus to be crucified, washed his hands in the sight of a crowd of people who called for his death. He said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person.”



Biblical Allusions

- The characters of Reba (Rebekah) and Hagar also hold Biblical connections to the novel.
- Consider researching further the aforementioned Biblical allusions to fully grasp the purpose of Morrison's inclusion of them.

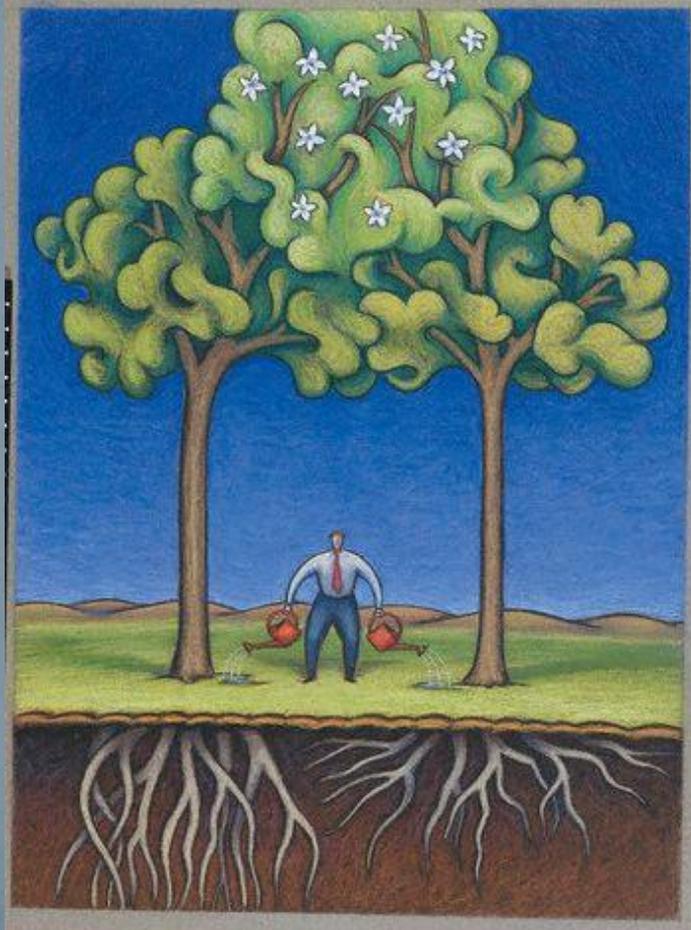


Thematic Focus

- Coming of age (bildungsroman)
- Atonement and forgiveness
- Class conflict / racial conflict / interracial conflict
- Spiritualism vs. materialism
- Written vs. spoken traditions
- The individual vs. society

Think for a moment...

- What do you believe to be the artist's intention?



Author's Intent!

- How might this picture connect to Morrison's intent?

