

You're going to listen to a book club discussion about the novel *Beloved* written by Toni Morrison.

Listening task one: read questions one and two, listen to the discussion, and then choose the correct answer for each question.

- Thanks for letting us have our book club meeting at your house Kim.
- No problem sherry. I'm glad you could all make it. A coffee anyone? Pablo?
- Yes please Kim. great choice of book this month.
- You liked it?
- Absolutely! I've never read anything by Toni Morrison before, actually I've never even heard of her who is she.
- I'm surprised you don't know her, Pablo. She won the Nobel Prize for Literature in, let me see, 1993.
- I also know that she's probably the most famous living African-American novelist. We use a lot of her books at the University where I teach. The students like writing about her. That's how I discovered Morrison. I wrote my senior thesis about her you know, the major essay you sometimes have to write at the end of an undergraduate degree.
- What did you write about Kim?
- Mostly about this book that we read *Beloved*, but I was also really interested in her Nobel Prize. It was an unusual choice for the committee an African-American woman, but they felt Morrison had played an important role in writing the history of black Americans. Not all her books are about slavery like *Beloved*, but they're all about the effects of history on individual people. It's a powerful idea.
- I see what you mean and *Beloved*. the main character Sethe is literally haunted by her history.
- That's a great way to say it Sherry. Do you mean that Sethe thinks she sees ghosts? That's why she's haunted?
- Actually, I was a bit confused by the story. Can we perhaps talk about the plot first? Sethe is an escaped black slave right?!

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- Yes, that's right she was in Kentucky, and then she escaped to the north, to Ohio, with her child. The main plot of the book takes place in 1873 after the end of slavery in the south of the US.

- Ok, but aren't there really two stories in this book?

- Yes, there are. The second story happened 20 years earlier when Sethe was still a slave in Kentucky. That story describes how she escaped from her slave owner.

- Got it! But I was still confused about how many children she has. Can one of you help me out?

- She has four children in total, two sons: Howard, and Bolger. A daughter, Denver, who she's living with in the Ohio part of the story, and another daughter who was older than Denver but died. She didn't just die though, Sethe killed her.

- Killed her own daughter?! Oh, I remember now after she first escaped, her owner tried to bring her and her children back as slaves and to stop him from getting that one child, she actually killed her.

- Exactly, but she hadn't given that daughter a name, and when she buried the baby she just had the word *Beloved* written on the gravestone.

- So, who is the character called *Beloved*?

- Wait that's the mysterious girl who shows up outside Sethe's house in 1873?

- Yeah. Is she the ghost of the dead baby? You're the expert, what do you think?

- Oh, I'm no expert and Morrison doesn't really tell us, but the book suggests that *Beloved* is the spirit of the dead daughter, that's why Sethe tries to explain to her why she had to kill the baby.

- You could say that slavery killed the baby?

- Is that what Morrison said?

- Not exactly. You know that when the Nobel Prize is presented, the winner gives a speech. Well, Morrison's speech is brilliant. She says that language can not fully described something as awful as slavery. Sometimes you need silence as well. She argues that literature should ask questions, but it should not give easy answers. At least that's what I understand from her Nobel acceptance speech.



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- So, that's why we're never really sure if *Beloved* is Sethe's dead daughter or if she's just a lost young woman. Sometimes the book was so realistic. I could see the events, but then there were some episodes that felt like a dream. It was very powerful.

- I agree, but I had a problem with the book. I wanted more description of America after slavery, after the Civil War. I wanted to know more about Sethe's life in Ohio. It sounded too easy to me, I had many questions about the society and discrimination and race at that time.

- I see what you mean Morrison doesn't really say much about ordinary life in the 1870s. I think that's because the author wants to concentrate on the characters, and their lives not the world around them. We can't help feeling Sethe's pain.

- That's how I see it, too. Although Morrison said that language cannot fully express other people's pain, she can hint at it.

- Okay. I can see that. Thanks. So what's next month's book?

Listening task two: read the statements below. Listen to the discussion again and write T for true or F for false for each statement, then compare your answers with a partner. Correct the false statements.

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you know, the major essay you sometimes have to write at the end of an undergraduate degree.

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Listen for the third time to make sure you understood everything.

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Advanced Two - Unit Six - Mini Listening

Listen to Junko and Andy discuss what people learn from reading literature. Make a list of the main points they make.

Junko: Well, you know there are the practical things, you know you learn a better vocabulary, and you learn more... well, actually, I think the best thing you learn from literature is you learn someone else's point of view. For instance, if I read a book that's from a male viewpoint, then I learn more about the male viewpoint, male ideas, male opinions...

Andy: Yeah, yeah, and I think it's more than that. Like when you read, you become another person, and you can see what it would be like to be in that situation. You know it's a way to like try out being different people.

Junko: Right, or if you read a book about someone from a different country, then you learn all about their culture, and how they think about things, and what else, let's see... well, I guess you learn different writing styles. I mean, it's not something that you really look for, but you know you pick it up along the way.

Andy: Yeah, yeah. You know, sometimes I'm reading a certain type of poem, and I think, wow, I like that. You know I want to try that. It really helps you with your own writing.

Junko: Oh, definitely, and you know you can also be influenced or inspired by characters in literature even though they're not real people. Some characters are so well-developed that you know you just want to have them as your friend.

Andy: Okay, What else? Um... What about reading is an escape?

Junko: Oh, definitely, and you know it's healthy every now and then to escape.

Andy: Yeah, you know I also think that reading, to a certain degree, it trains your mind to, you know, imagine, and I think because you have to do that you get more involved in it, in general, I think that reading, in most cases, engages you more than say a movie you learn to imagine from a book, not a movie.

Junko: Well, that's true, and you know I think I've learned most of my facts in history from literature

Now listen again and check your answers.

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