Grade Twelve: *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. (On the list)

**Summary**

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is a haunting and dark novel. The central story describes a woman’s escape from slavery, the sacrifice of a child to keep from returning, and the child’s return as a ghost to haunt the family, representing the power of the legacy of slavery. Morrison’s style is fragmentary, closely tied to the consciousness of each character, weaving between past and future. *Beloved* effectively conveys the brutality and dehumanization that occurred under slavery through the struggles of the characters, all former slaves or children of former slaves, as they try to forage relationships for the future and move beyond their past.

**Activity One: Quote Board**

**Learning Outcome:** Students will read and write to Discover, explore, clarify, and extend their understanding of American Slavery through Slave Narratives.

**Rationale:** This activity is designed to introduce students to Slave Narratives and prepare students for reading Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Students are provided time to explore Slave Narratives freely to gain an understanding of Slave experiences and to reflect on their thoughts and feelings from the information they gather.

**Grade:** This activity can be used and adapted for preparing students to read any form of ethnic or cultural text that deals with trials of a culture, such as the Holocaust and Aboriginal writing. For this specific novel I would not do this activity with any grade other than grade 12. With other texts this activity can be a very successful way to activate students’ prior knowledge and hook students into the coming text.
**Timeline:** Ideally this activity would take place the first day of the unit, before students start to read the novel. It should only take one computer lab period, but you may want to expand it to two days and have the students elaborate on a particular story they find engaging.

**Materials:**

A Computer Lab Period

A Bulletin Board

Markers

Coloured paper

A list of Slave Narrative Sites

**Steps:**

1. Introduce *Beloved* to the students and make sure they are aware of the content of the novel.

   Students need to be prepared to handle a very emotional and serious text.

2. Explain to students that Slave Narratives have been recorded from hundreds of ex-slaves in the USA. In order to prepare for the novel ask students to spend the computer lab reading through Slave Narratives they find on the sites provided. Ask students to write down at least one quote or fact from each story they go through on a piece of coloured paper. At the end of class students will return to the class and pin or staple their quotes up to the bulletin board.

3. Once the quotes are all up on the board allow students a couple minutes to look over what their classmates have recorded and placed on the wall.
4. As homework have students write a reflection on what they read during class and the quotes they chose to write down, and the overall effect of having all the quotes pinned up on the board.

5. Students and Teacher can refer to the quotes on the board throughout reading *Beloved*.

**Additional Considerations:** In order to ensure that this activity is successful make sure to provide students with a list of acceptable sites containing narratives you have already scanned, this will eliminate some of the risk of students accessing narratives they should not. Encourage students to share the stories they find with other students. As long as students are on topic encourage sharing and discussion.

**Personal Connections:** This activity is one that came to me on my own. I can remember how overwhelmed and unprepared I was when I first read *Beloved* and thinking about that I wanted to find some sort of pre-reading activity to help students prepare to access Toni Morrison’s work. I feel that this activity will help students orient themselves with the issues the novel deals with, and provide students with some sort of background to make connections with during the reading.

**Activity Two: Story Quilt**

**Learning Outcome:** Students will read, write, listen, speak, view, and represent their thoughts and feelings in order comprehend and respond personally and critically to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.

**Rationale:** This is a culminating activity to help students reflect, analyze, represent, and share their responses to Toni Morrison’s very powerful novel. Rather than give students a traditional test to culminate this novel this activity is designed to help students debrief and share in the collective experiences and perspectives of the class.
**Grade:** I would use this activity when working with very powerful novels dealing with sensitive issues, such as *Beloved*. This would also be a good activity to adapt to literary circles as a type of final presentation for groups. Adapted in the right way this activity could be used in elementary, middle, and high school classes.

**Timeline:** Ideally this activity would start on a Friday, allowing students the weekend to process their ideas, with a work day on the Tuesday or the Wednesday, and finish on a Friday with the quilt being assembled. Depending on the size of the class it could be completed faster, or it could take longer. Because the activity is inviting students to reflect deeply on their experience with the novel, and share those thoughts and experiences with the rest of the class it is important to not rush the activity and allow students enough time to properly debrief from the novel.

**Materials:**

- Scraps of fabric cut into 12X12” Squares
- Paint and brushes
- Markers
- Fabric Writers
- Needles
- Thread
- Paper cut to 12X12”

**Steps:**

1. Explain the project to students. Students are to choose a quote, scene, chapter, character, theme, image, or something else from the novel that struck them as significant while reading to represent on a quilt square.
2. Students will select a 12x 12” piece of fabric to place their ideas on. Students should leave a two inch border around the edge of their squares where they can write a quote and their name. On the inside of the square students can represent their ideas with colours, symbols, lyrics, drawings, and words to communicate their ideas.

3. Provide students with 12X12’ pieces of paper to plan out their ideas first.

4. Allow students on period to begin their square at school, then a work day once students are ready to make their good copies. Students can use paint, markers, fabric writers, and thread to transfer their design.

5. When the squares are complete the class will spend one lesson assembling their quilt and sharing their ideas and feelings about the book, and the process of the quilt.

**Additional Considerations:** For this activity to work well students may need to see various examples of completed quilt squares. The visual and creative aspect will be exciting for some students, but for others it will be challenging. Be sure to provide support and allow students to make use of resources. This is not art class, students should be allowed to access images and symbols to use in their squares, as long as they find a way to represent their ideas. Also, for collecting fabric send home letters with the class, many parents may have scraps of fabric they can donate. Finally if you feel that you do not have the time to stitch the quilt together in class just have students use a sharing circle to show their squares to each other and share about their experiences with the novel. Then check with the teacher in charge of the sewing and foods class and see if students in the class are willing to put the quilt together for your class.
**Personal Connections:** This activity is elaborated from the Story Quilt idea in *Bridges*, Chapter Seven.

Like the first activity for this novel I felt that students needed a way to exit the book as much as they needed an activity to enter it. *Beloved* is very powerful and I do not feel that traditional comprehension will be effective. I like this activity because it touches on some of the larger ideas in the novel of collective experience and the colours of life.