

Beloved Prompts

An Illuminating Moment

In *The Writing of Fiction* (1925), novelist Edith Wharton wrote: “At every stage in the progress of his tale the novelist must rely on what may be called the illuminating incident to reveal and emphasize the inner meaning of each situation. Illuminating incidents are the magic casements of fiction, its vistas on infinity.” Write a well-organized essay in which you describe **an “illuminating” episode or moment** from Beloved and explain how it functions as a “casement,” a window that opens onto the meaning of the novel as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

Irrational Behavior

One definition of madness is “mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it.” But Emily Dickinson wrote: “Much madness is divinest Sense— / To a discerning Eye—”. Novelist and playwrights have often seen madness with a “discerning Eye.” In Beloved, identify **a character whose apparent madness or irrational behavior plays an important role**. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the “madness” to the meaning of the novel as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Necessary Secrecy

Often in literature a character’s success in achieving goals depends on keeping a secret and divulging it only at the right moment, if at all. In Beloved, identify **a character who is required to keep a secret**. Then, in a well-organized essay, briefly explain the necessity for secrecy and how the character’s choice to reveal or keep the secret affects the plot and contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Importance of Home

According to Sonsyrea Tate, “You can leave home all you want, but home will never leave you.” Her statement suggests that “home” may be conceived of as a dwelling, a place, or a state of mind. It may have positive or negative associations, but in either case, it may have a considerable influence on an individual. From Beloved, identify **a central character who leaves home yet finds that home remains significant**. Write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the importance of “home” to this character and the reasons for its continuing influence. Explain how the character’s idea of home illuminates the larger meaning of the novel as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

Parent/Child Conflict

Many works of literature depict **a conflict between a parent (or a parental figure) and a son or daughter**. Write a well-organized essay on Beloved in which you analyze the sources of this conflict and explain how the conflict contributes to the meaning of the novel as a whole. Avoid plot summary.

A Tragic Figure

According to critic Northrop Frye, “Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.” In Beloved, identify **a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the suffering of others**. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by that figure contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

Desire for Power

One of the strongest human drives seems to be a desire for power. From Beloved, identify **a character who struggles to free himself or herself from the power of others or seeks to gain power over others**. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss this struggle and demonstrate how Toni Morrison uses this power struggle to enhance the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

Past Affects Present

In many works of literature, past events can positively or negatively affect the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. In Beloved, select **a character who must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal or societal**. Then write an essay in which you show how the character’s relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the novel as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

Search for Justice

In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.” From Beloved, choose **a character who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice**. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the meaning of the novel as a whole. Do not simply summarize the plot.

Conflicting Directions

The eighteenth-century British novelist Laurence Sterne wrote: “Nobody, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man’s mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time.” From Beloved, choose **a character (not necessarily the protagonist) whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences**. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict within one character illuminates the meaning of the novel as a whole. Avoid plot summary.