

# Beloved college essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

She who had never had one but this one; she who left a dirt floor to come to this one; she who had to bring a fistful of salsify into Mrs. Garner's kitchen every day just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was hers, because she wanted to love the work she did, to take the ugly out of it, and the only way she could feel at home on Sweet Home was if she picked some pretty growing thing and took it with her.

#### Slavery: Sweet Home and 124 Bluestone Road

Historically, the period in which slavery was prevalent in America signaled a time of social and economic unrest. Before the Civil War, though everyone living in the South was not straight out of *Gone with the Wind*, a certain class system was enforced, and people lived strictly under these unspoken regulations. Slavery was more than an institution that defaced the prideful image of America; it was a living, breathing monster that survived in the hearts and minds of those who suffered through it, "unspeakable thoughts, unspoken." (Morrison 199). In the novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison contrasts the two settings of the scarred but resilient Sethe's life in order to show the continuity of the political culture before and after the emancipation of slaves in America.

In life, people are affected by their surroundings, and the author of this novel plays with that aspect of human nature. Also, this novel deals with the coping of traumatic life experiences. People deal with stressful situations in different ways; but it is painful to witness the downfall of someone's free will because their emotional crutch is the only thing keeping them standing upright.

The protagonist, Sethe, is shackled to emotional and mental slavery even after she escapes from physical slavery on the Sweet Home farm.

The settings add to the intensity of the characters and their interactions with each other as well as their surroundings both in Kentucky and Ohio in order to make the unique turn of events appear normal in the warped reality of a life changed forever by slavery. Throughout the novel, 124 Bluestone Road goes through three evolutions: “ spiteful, loud, [and] quiet. ” (Morrison 1, 170, 239) Plagued by the ghost of an innocent child, the house does more than entrap those who enter.

The perpetrator of the grisly murder, Sethe, is bound by an invisible chain more powerful than any white man or woman, more permanent than any law. The most destructive part is that both Sethe and her lonely daughter Denver become oblivious to the outside world; they lose sight of freedom and subconsciously relinquish their free will to this tiny mistress.

This small house is surrounded by “ the most beautiful sycamores in the world” (Morrison 6); it is naturally isolated from the rest of the suspicious community.

Though it is on the outskirts of a major city, the novel does not introduce many characters in the wake of that house after the death of the baby. They are alone with their demons. Until the arrival of an outsider, no one can tell the extent that the ghost dictates the lives of those who live in the house.

Paul D does not understand the disturbing slavery of motherhood and guilt that Sethe is bound to every moment of her life, and thus, he sheds a light of

clarity and reality into the isolated world of 124, much to the chagrin of the ghost who does not want to lose her power over her family.

Much like the issue of slavery in the United States, the ghost of Crawling Already? Baby began small. This little master did not originally demand much more than attention. Yet, when Sethe began to waver, the domineering spirit came to “ life” to ensure that Sethe does not run away. Her physical presence completely pushes Paul D out of Sethe’s scope of consciousness.

Like many slave owners in that time period, Beloved is possessive and desperate to have complete control over their property.

Unfortunately, Sethe is the last to realize that Beloved has increasingly malevolent intentions, yet freedom seems so far away and she can no longer fight against the control of her past. Though she has freedom, she is not free. Her hands are still bound and the guilt of her murdering her baby, even if it was to keep her infant from slavery, hangs over her head more than any owner could. Morrison effectively utilizes the ghost, a part of 124, as a symbol of the habit of the past to slowly grow in the background until it violently fights to the surface

Sweet Home is a place of ignorance, a place of lush grass and trees. The Garners work on the small farm and still make time to teach their slaves basic skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Though there are boundaries, as far as slavery goes, it is a blissful place to live. Morrison uses this non-stereotypical setting to bring a more realistic

aspect to the novel; this is less like a worst case scenario and more like a real life situation. Also, the Sweet Home Men are not the slaves one expects. Many people were born on the farm, and they simply do not have the taste for freedom.

They cannot fight for something that they have never experienced.

Like the biblical Garden of Eden, it is deceptively pleasing because those who live and work there do not understand the horrors and injustices of slavery because it does not directly affect them until the arrival of the evil Schoolteacher. Morrison's use of setting makes the character of Schoolteacher that much more potent when contrasted with the farm he comes to save from ruin, not to mention the other white characters, the nice and well-intentioned Garners.

Almost like a character foil, Sweet Home contrasts with Schoolteacher so much that it makes both of them more potent and memorable. The author also takes a puzzling take on the subject of freedom with the setting of 124 in Cincinnati. A kind master, Mr.

Garner let Halle work off the cost of his mother, Baby Suggs. So, when she arrives in Ohio, she is technically "free, you know." (Morrison 143.) Yet, after having her body and soul owned by another human being, she eventually collapses into a depression so deep it is fatal.

No one, especially the female characters in the novel, seem to achieve the freedom they so desire. Sethe is in debt for her entire life, she never is completely free to be her own person. She owes Baby Suggs for helping her

recover from her escape and ultimately giving her own life in exchange. Not to mention the fact that it is Baby Suggs she runs to and inherits her house one month after she arrives.

Sethe owes the Bodwin family for shortening her jail sentence as well as getting her a job to get her on her feet after her stint in jail for killing her baby.

Though she is free from slavery in Ohio, Sethe's friendships and relationships with other people make it impossible for her to be free from debt. Morrison ironically utilizes setting as an individual entity to draw a conclusion about not only slavery, but about the human spirit as well. Morrison draws many similar aspects from the two settings that she creates in this novel. Both are surrounded by the common symbol of trees.

The Sweet Home men spend time under the old branches of Brother, and Denver finds solace and beauty in her bower of trees. Yet, though these symbols begin as a positive reinforcement of individuality and solidarity of personality, it turns sour later in the novel. As if the human condition rots with age, the symbolism becomes increasingly more dark and depressing. Paul D is bound to a tree by Schoolteacher as he watches his friend Sixo burn to death.

These once encouraging trees now represent alienation and the horrors of slavery.

Paul D longs for his own tree, a family tree, to bring some closure and meaning to his life in the years after he escapes from slavery. So it is only

fitting that when Sethe and Paul D are alienated from each other emotionally, a forest springs up between them. Historians often refer to slavery as America's one and only giant domestic embarrassment. Yet, Toni Morrison does not write the typical slavery novel.

Instead, she takes a realistic approach and thus is able to relate the experiences of the characters to subjects beyond slavery.

Sethe is not scarred by being a slave until she is actually free from Sweet Home and is instead faced with the binds of her past holding her in place, keeping her from being able to move forward and progress. She must narrowly escape slavery not once, but twice. Explicitly and implicitly, the two main settings in the novel *Beloved* act to further elaborate in two aspects in particular: character development and the meaning of the novel in itself. One cannot move forward with the future and succeed until they have moved through their past.