

Example Literary Analysis Passages—Teacher’s Copy

These example passages are from “The Quest for Self-Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*,” a student essay by Melanie L. Hanson that is included in *The Fiction of Toni Morrison: Reading and Writing on Race, Culture, and Identity* (NCTE, 2007).

Macon tells Milkman, “Let me tell you right now the one important thing you’ll ever need to know: Own things. And let the things you own, own other things. Then you’ll own yourself and other people too” (55).¹

When Milkman’s character is first introduced into the novel, we learn that there is some type of hesitant force that restrains this character. At a very young age, Milkman learns that he cannot fly: “When the little boy discovered, at four, the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier, that only birds and airplanes could fly, he lost all interest in himself. To have to live without that single gift saddened him” (9). For Milkman, being able to fly is more than the literal ability of flight; it becomes symbolic of his quest for autonomy.²

While looking at his reflection in the mirror, for example, “[h]e was, as usual, unimpressed with what he saw” (60).³

She lets him know that he has never once lifted a finger to help. He has yet to wash his own clothes, “wipe the ring” from his tub, or “move a fleck of [his] dirt from one place to another,” and he has never noticed that they have been tired; but most of all, he has never thanked them, not even once (215).⁴

Haizlip explains further that “colorism subjectively ranks individuals according to the perceived color tones of their skin. People who ‘look white’ received preferential or prejudicial treatment both within and between races.”⁵

¹ page 219.

² page 217.

³ page 220.

⁴ page 224.

⁵ page 209.