**Beloved, A Novel by Toni Morrison**

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Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* is included in our historical tour to illustrate how fiction can uncover stories from the past that allow us reflect on the present.

The novel is based on a true story that was well known in the nineteenth century but largely forgotten when Morrison wrote her book in the mid-1980s.

Morrison's fictitious novel is based on Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman in 1850s Kentucky, whose child was about to be sold away. Garner escaped to Ohio with her daughter and her other children, via the Underground Railroad. Later, when she and her daughter are discovered by her former enslaver, Garner decides to kill her own child, rather than allowing her to be re-enslaved.

Toni Morrison turns this tragedy from history into the story of a mother's haunting. The novel imagines that Garner (called “Sethe” in the novel) has escaped slavery, but that Beloved, the daughter she killed years before, reappears from the grave. Sethe and Beloved (now a young woman) form an intense bond, as the mother tries desperately to make her daughter understand why she felt she had to kill her. However, Beloved's presence wreaks havoc. She becomes increasingly demanding and manipulative. She seduces her stepfather, the man Sethe has come to love. In response, members of the community organize a type of exorcism. Just before the situation sparks another violent tragedy, Beloved disappears for good, and Sethe tries to come to terms with what has happened in her life.

In *Beloved*, slavery is trauma from the past that revisits the characters in difficult and frightening ways. Maybe the novel is suggesting to us that, even today, slavery is a ghost to be reckoned with.