***Song of Solomon* Reading Questions**

**Note:  There are two primary purposes of these questions:**

* To help you keep track of the plot of the novel
* To help you focus on important moments in the plot.  You will have to do some thinking and pay careful attention in class to understand the significance of these moments.

**Foreword**

1.  Explain Morrison’s thoughts on father-son/daughter relationships.

2.  Morrison gives a thorough analysis of the first sentence of the novel.  What can we expect from this writer based on that analysis?

**Chapter 1**

1.  How does **Robert Smith** finish his short note announcing his flight from the top of Mercy Hospital?

2.  What is the unofficial name of Mercy Hospital?  Why does it have this name?

3. Watching Robert Smith prepare to fly, and beside the “well dressed” pregnant doctor’s daughter (**Ruth Foster Dead),** is a poor woman (**Pilate)** singing.  Write down the words of the song.

4.  What does the little “Cat-eyed boy,” (**Guitar)**, notice in the nurse’s words that reveals his intelligence?

5.  How did **Milkman** get his nickname?

6.  How did **Pilate** get her name? (18-19).

7.  Based on his behavior in this chapter, give three adjectives that describe **Macon Dead’s** character.

8.  Why does Macon go to Pilate’s house?

**Chapter 2**

1.  Why is the green Packard known as “the hearse”? (32)

2.  After reading the description of Pilate on pages 36-38, give three adjectives that might describe her.

3.  How did Pilate and Macon Jr’s father die?  Pick two details from the account (40,50-51,53) that are significant in some way.  Be ready to explain why.

4.  How did the Dead family get their name?

5.  Why doesn’t Macon want Milkman to visit Pilate?

**Chapter 3**

1.  Explain why Guitar “can’t eat sweets”(61).

2.  Why does Macon hit Ruth?  Is he justified?

3.  Why does Milkman hit Macon?  Is he justified?

4.  What does Macon tell Milkman he saw when he opened the door on Ruth and her dead father?

5.  What does Macon’s story compel Milkman to remember?

6. How did **Lena** and **Corinthians** get their names?

7.  What news is being broadcast over the radio when Milman arrives at Tommy’s Barber Shop?

**Chapter 4**

1.  How did the relationship between Milkman and Hagar begin?

2.  How does Milkman feel about Hagar now that they have been together for almost twelve years?

3.  What is the effect of Milkman’s letter on Hagar?

4.  Why does Milkman like Honore and why does Guitar not like it?

5.  Describe Milkman’s vision of his mother in the tulip garden. (104-105)

6.  Who does Freddie say killed his mother?

7.  Why do you think Freddie tells Milkman to ask Corinthians about the strange goings on around town?

**Chapter 5**

1.  What is Milkman waiting for at Guitar’s place?

2.  When Milkman follows Ruth on her night-time journey, where does she go, and why?

3.  What is Ruth’s version of what happened to her father?

4.  How did Pilate save Milkman’s life before he was born?

5.  What are the differences between Ruth and Pilate (139)?

6.  Briefly summarize Pilate’s life after her father died and before she came to the wine house.  What made most people afraid of her?  Why does she eventually move to her brother’s (Macon’s) town?

**Chapter 6**

1.  Explain the reasoning and the method of the Seven Days Society.

2.  What new information do we learn about Robert Smith’s beginning-of-the-novel flight?

3.  What new information do we learn about Henry Porter’s drunken episode in the upstairs window?

4.  Explain Guitar’s statement: “Slave names don’t bother me, but slave status does.”

**Chapter 7**

1.  Explain “For Milkman it was the door click”(163).  What is Milkman yearning for and what is the plan that he tries to express to his father?

2.  Who is **Circe** and how does she help Macon and Pilate after their father is killed?

3.  Who buries Macon and Pilate’s father, and where?

4.  What two possessions of her mother’s does Pilate have?  What two possessions of her father’s?

5.  What is the dispute Macon and Pilate have about the contents underneath the tarpaulin, and what does Macon find when he returns to the cave “three days and two nights later” (171)?

**Chapter 8**

1.  Whom has Guitar been assigned to kill and why?

2.  Why does Milkman ask Guitar to help steal the sack from Pilate’s house?

3.  How does Guitar’s comment, “You got a life?  Live it!” (183) help Milkman?

4.  How do Pilate and her father (Macon Dead I) have significant roles in the very final scene of the chapter?

**Chapter 9**

Definition:  *amanuensis:*a literary or artistic assistant, in particular one who takes dictation or copies manuscripts).

1.  Why does Corinthians’ mother approve of the title “amanuensis” and what is the actual work that Corinthians does?

2.  How does Corinthians start dating Henry Porter?

3.  What was in the sack that Guitar and Pilate stole from Pilate’s house?

4.  Describe the change that takes place in Pilate when she gets Milkman and Guitar released from jail.

5.  List the men that Milkman sees in the Oldsmobile as he walks towards Guitar’s place.

6.  What is the effect of Milkman’s telling Macon about Corinthians and Porter, and what does Lena misunderstand about his reasoning?

**Chapter 10**

1. When Guitar speaks to Milkman about “Everybody want[ing] the life of a black man,”  what question does he ask him friend (on page 223) at the very end of his speech?

2.  What are some of the things that indicate Milman is wealthy when he goes to Danville?

3.  When Milkman meets Reverend Cooper, why does the Reverend become extremely friendly and helpful towards Milkman?

4.  What new understanding of his father does Milkman gain (page 234)?

5.  Who made Pilate’s earring for her?

6.  What information does Circe give about Milkman’s grandmother, Sing?

7.  What information about Macon Dead’s bones does Milkman’s father **not** know about?

8.  What is Circe’s reasoning for staying in the old Butler mansion with the pack of Weimaraner dogs? (page 247)

9.  At the freightyard, after just missing Reverend Cooper, Milkman does a small act of kindness for an old man.  What is that act?

10.  What new understanding does Milkman arrive at of his reasons for wanting the gold? (257)

**Chapter 11**

1.  What do the Shalimar women carry in their hands?  What does Milman expect to see them carrying?

2.  Why does Milkman end up buying a car to travel to Shalimar?

3.  What does Milkman say about “southern hospitality”?

4.  How does Mr. Solomon pronounce Shalimar?

5.  What message does Guitar leave with Mr. Solomon for Milkman?  What does it mean?

6.  Why didn’t Milkman play as a child the way the children of Shalimar do?

7.  How did Milkman and Guitar originally meet?

8.  What are the two major things Milkman does wrong to arouse the anger of the men of Shalimar?

9.  What is the name of the place where the wind sounds like a sobbing woman?

10.  What does the earth tell Milkman when he listens to it?

11.  What “cut like a razor into his fingers” (279)?  Briefly explain the scene and its resolution.

12.  Who is Susan Byrd?

13.  How is Milkman’s experience with the prostitute Sweet different from his other experiences with women?

**Chapter 12**

1.  What significant information does Milkman learn from his  meeting with Susan Byrd?

2.  What is Sing’s relationship to Susan Byrd and her father?

3.  What is Susan’ Byrd’s grandmother’s name?

4.  What does Milkman realize the ghost is telling Pilate when it says, “Sing”?

5.  Since Pilate doesn’t have a navel, what else does Milkman figure can also be true?

6.  What does Milkman realize he’s left behind at Susan Byrd’s house?

7.  Why does Guitar try to kill Milkman?  Why doesn’t Guitar believe Milkman’s explanation?

8.  Why wasn’t Milkman really afraid of being killed by Hagar?

9.  What does the reference to the “red man’s house” in the children’s song mean?

**Chapter 13**

1.  What metaphor does Guitar use to Hagar to symbolize what love should be like?

2.  Pilate and Reba are credited with being able to “make up (their lives)”, because each has a quality that Hagar lacks.  What are those qualities?

3. What happens now where Reba tries to win things?

4.  How does Reba get the money for Hagar’s shopping trip, and how much is it?

5.  Why does Marcelline of Lilly’s Beauty Parlor agree to take Hagar as a customer in spite of the late hour?

6.  What happens to Hagar’s shopping bags on the way home?

7.  When Hagar finally sees herself in the mirror, she says “No wonder” (307), and then repeats the phrase.  What does she mean?

8.  Who pays for Hagar’s funeral and why?  What lone member of the Macon Dead family attends?

9.  What three words does Pilate repeat to refer to Hagar at the funeral mass?

**Chapter 14**

1.  Why didn’t Susan Byrd tell Milkman the truth about his family in front of Grace Long?

2.  According to Susan Byrd, what is Jake’s last name?

3.  Who did Solomon leave behind when he flew back to Africa?

4.  Approximately how many families consider themselves the kin of Solomon in the town of Shalimar?

5.  What place other than the town is named after Solomon?  What is the significance of this other naming?

6.  What reason, other than lost love, does Susan Byrd give to explain why Ryna lost her mind?

7.  How does Susan Byrd explain to Milkman why the children’s song says, “Jake the only son of Solomon” (323)?

8.  Who took care of Jake after he slipped out of Solomon’s arms as Solomon flew back to Africa?

9.  Why did Jake have to register at the Freedmen’s Bureau?

10.  What does Milkman say when Susan Byrd offers to get Milkman’s watch back?

**Chapter 15**

1.  Where does Milkman want to swim?  Where does he end up swimming?

2.  Once Sweet learns that Solomon flew back to Africa, what is her next question?  Why?

3.  Why does Milkman read the road signs “with interest” on his ride back to Michigan?

4.  What is the official name of “Not Doctor” street?  Why isn’t it used?

5.  What does Milkman conclude that all human relationships “boil down to”?

6.  What does Pilate do when, upon Milkman’s return, he tries to embrace her?

7.  What is the “something of Hagar’s” that Pilate has put near Milkman in the cellar?

8.  What is the news of Corinthians, and why will the Seven Days “be looking for a new recruit”(334)?

9.  Why don’t Milkman and Pilate fly to Virginia when they travel there to bury Jake’s bones?

10.  What does Pilate put on the grave instead of a rock or a cross?