**Sample of Challenges & Opportunities Shmoop**

Reading Toni Morrison is often a lot like traveling through a thick, tangled maze set within a dream in another time. Her language, rich with imagery and symbols, can twist and turn from one time period to another and from one character to another. Following Morrison's narrative threads without getting lost is a difficult feat, but then, maybe that's the point since it's in the getting-lost, the journeying, that enables characters like Milkman to lead themselves and us readers to a nearly transcendent consciousness.

**Okay, but really, what does she mean?**

Well, sometimes, it's best to hear it from the horse's mouth. For a young Morrison, reading was an art that demanded

*a heavy reliance on my own imagination to provide detail; the specific color of things, the feel of the weather, the space characters occupied, their physical features, their motives, why they behaved as they did, and especially the sound of their speech, where so much meaning lay. Listening required me to surrender to the narrator's world while remaining alert inside it. That Alice-in-Wonderland combination of willing acceptance coupled with intense inquiry is still the way I read literature: slowly, digging for the hidden, questioning or relishing the choices the author made, eager to envision what is there, noticing what is not.* ([Source](http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Toni-Morrison-on-Reading#ixzz1bmVasWKY))  
  
What Morrison describes about her own reading practice—that feeling of staying open to choices—can be applied to *Song of Solomon* as well. In other words, to get meaning out of *Song of Solomon*, one needs to read it slowly, even repeatedly, in order to allow for the full range of meaning in Morrison's words to develop. Reading *Song of Solomon* is a little like Milkman's realization at the end of the book that Solomons are everywhere: that essential thing or significance Milkman is seeking (the truth of his forefather Solomon) gets multiplied because all the other Solomons after the first Solomon have taken the name of Solomon and made it their own. And that first Solomon? He flew off and left all his family behind. He left them the hard freedom of making their own lives and their own meaning without him, and that kind of hard freedom is what Morrison gives us as readers.  
  
But that's not to say that Morrison leaves us completely rudderless when we read her novel; there is, after all, the vision of Pilate and the idea that we can start with at least two known meanings to any word or character. In Pilate's case, she is Pilate, the Christ-killer (even though she doesn't actually kill a Christ-like figure), and pilot, our guide (and Milkman's) through Morrison's novel. In fact, taking Pilate and, for that matter, Solomon as allegories for reading might be one of the keys to understanding Morrison's novel. The goal of reading is the feeling of flight, the use of imagination to deepen and broaden our mundane understanding of life's grand themes—love, death, justice, history, family, the self.