

An Alien in the Cotton Fields: 47 by Walter Mosley

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Problem Statement

My adolescent students are both fascinated with and frustrated by stories of slaves. When we read Ann Petry's biographical treatment of Harriet Tubman or Laurie Halse Anderson's fictional account of Isabel in *Chains*, my students respond with a mixture of passion and disdain. They question why, especially in cases where slaves were numerically superior to their white owners, those in bondage were unable to liberate themselves. (This is the same question that is raised about Jews when we read *The Diary of Anne Frank*.)

Further, many of my students have read little science fiction aside from the stories by Bradbury and Asimov that are included in their literature anthologies. (They do, however, have considerable experience watching science fiction.) Reading *47* will, for many, constitute the first sustained science fiction novel they have read. My hope is that this exposure may lead some of my students to further pursuit of works in this genre.

Rationale

In *47*, a science fiction novel for adolescents, Walter Mosley elucidates (almost incidentally) how close to impossible it was for slaves to overthrow their bondage because of the machinery of the law, and their inability to match their white masters' firepower, as well as the personal and familial bonds that made the price of rebellion one that affected family and community members. Mosley mixes social realism and science fiction in *47*, the story of a young slave in 1832. Unbeknownst to himself, Forty-seven has been sought for millennia by a superior life form who knows that this young slave is

the key to saving civilization. In choosing *47* as the focus of my curriculum unit, I am planning to introduce my students to a subgenre of African American literature to which they have little to no exposure while at the same time providing them with the opportunity to develop a more nuanced understanding of the machinery of slavery.

Objectives

1. Students will develop an understanding of what distinguishes science fiction from historical fiction.
2. Students will use a variety of lenses to analyze the text: direct and indirect characterization; time and place, with a focus on description; relationships between and among characters; and word choice.
3. Students will be able to analyze figurative language and to connect the author's choice of language to theme, setting, and characterization.
4. Students will apply the concept of agency to the characters in *47*.
4. Students will compare and contrast the science fiction to the social realism in *47* in order to understand Mosley's purposes in writing *47*.
5. Students will write a short story incorporating elements of science fiction.

Background

In the Core Curriculum, emphasis is placed on what is called text-dependent analysis (TDA), formerly referred to as the close reading of a text. One aspect of this iteration of close reading is the demand that teachers not “front load” the text by introducing vocabulary, showing pictures of the setting, or using other non-textual devices to help students make sense of text. Instead, students are to wrestle with the text and to use the text alone to arrive at an understanding of the author's meaning.

Christopher Lehman and Kate Roberts devise a system for teaching the close reading required by TDA in their book, *Falling in Love with Close Reading: Lessons for Analyzing Tests—and Life*. Lehman and Roberts use what they call a series of lenses through which readers gather information to discern patterns in the text. Readers then analyze these patterns to develop a better understanding of the text.

In a narrative text like *47*, our students would be expected to look at direct and indirect characterization; time and place, with a focus on description; relationships between and among characters; word choice. Students would begin with one of these “lenses” and go through the text gathering evidence. Students are expected to develop charts and then to figure out if and how the information they have gathered can be seen as part of a pattern. (Obviously, not everything will fit into a pattern.) Students then use these patterns to refine their understanding of the text, looking at issues that help them understand individual characters or whole text issues like theme, author's point of view, symbols, motifs, tone, and purpose.

Another change that accompanies the Common Core is that Bloom's Taxonomy is no longer favored as a method of organizing questions. Instead, the Common Core uses what is called Depth of Knowledge (DOK), a system that essentially compresses Bloom's Taxonomy into 4 levels. Where Bloom's Taxonomy was most celebrated for its verbs (for example: recall, analyze, evaluate) which were said to characterize questions of an increasing order of difficulty, the Depth of Knowledge system attempts to assess how complex the task of the student is, no matter the language (or verb) used to set forth the task.

Content Standards

Standards of the PA Common Core English Language Arts Curriculum

1.3 Reading Literature

Students read and respond to works of literature - with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

1.3.8.A

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text.

1.3.8.B

Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

1.3.8.C

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

1.3.9-10.E

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it and manipulate time create an effect.

1.3.9-10.F

Analyze how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.

1.3.8.H

Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from traditional works, including describing how the material is rendered new.

1.4 Writing

Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

1.4.8.O

Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, and pacing, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, relevant

descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

Strategies

I will regularly read aloud to my students, which enables me to model fluent reading and to stop to discuss vocabulary, figurative language, and to otherwise analyze, comment upon, or question the text. Students will work with partners or in triads to read sections of the novel. In small groups, students will use choice boards to reread and discuss significant sections of the novel. Whole group discussion will focus on what students are learning or thinking about as they read. We will compare the science fiction sections of the book to the social realism of historical fiction. Students will write a story that addresses a past or current real life problem, and they will use science fiction to develop a solution.

Instructional Activities

The pacing of instruction will depend largely upon the ability of the students to engage with the required text. Best practice would be to make a copy of the book available for each student to mark up and to enable assigning reading for homework. Students who are struggling and English Language Learners may require additional support. There is an audio version of *47* that may be accessed or purchased online. For students who are English Language Learners, additional instruction may be needed to develop a sufficient background of information to understand the story of life on a Southern slave plantation in 1830.

Choice boards have been designed to accompany sections of the novel and are indicated after each group of chapters has been completed. Teachers may assign some or all of these tasks to be assigned based on ability and time constraints. Page numbers have been included where appropriate to make these tasks easier, but they may be deleted if the teacher prefers that the students spend more time skimming through the text.

Assignment 1

Introduce the topic of slavery by having students work with a partner or in a small group to create a K-W-L chart. Distribute chart papers, which students should display in landscape format, and have them create 3 columns, labeled K, W, and L. Under K, students will list what they know about slavery; under W, they will list what they want to know; and under L, what they would like to learn. Give the groups 10 minutes to gather their thoughts and write. Then have each group share out as the teacher asks questions to clarify issues and creates a classroom chart.

Assignment 2

Distribute copies of “Conditions of antebellum slavery” from the PBS program, *Africans in America*. This informational essay may be read independently, with a partner, or as a teacher read-aloud, depending upon the needs of individual classes. Direct students to circle unfamiliar words they encounter as they read. When the students have finished reading, have them return to their K-W-L charts and add new information as well as any new questions they have. Follow up with a class discussion of how slaves lived in the antebellum South.

Assignment 3

After this discussion, distribute the worksheet Appendix 1, *Conditions of Antebellum Slavery*. Students should complete this worksheet with a partner or in a small group.

Assignment 4 (Chapter 1)

Have students work with a partner or small group. Instruct students to write down the names of any novels, short stories, TV shows, or movies that deal with slavery. Share out responses, and then tell students to create categories for these titles. The categories may be any that they choose, such as biographical, fictional, documentary, etc. Use this activity to open a discussion of the differences between fiction and nonfiction. Have the students reorganize their titles into those two groups and ask them to explain the division of their titles into those two groups.

Tell students that you are now going to focus strictly on literature, and ask them to list characteristics of historical fiction. Students should be able to note that historical fiction should be historically accurate in terms of setting, dialogue, conflicts, plot, and theme. It may mix fictional and real characters and incorporate fictional events, but in doing so, quality historical fiction is careful to work within the parameters of what was truly possible in a particular historical era.

Discuss any historical fiction students have previously read, and have students consider how well these works reflect the reality of its historical period.

Tell students that they are going to begin reading a book that combines another genre with that of historical fiction: science fiction. Ask what they know about science fiction, and use this discussion to generate a list of characteristics of science fiction. Students will probably be able to state that science fiction may take place in a future time or alternate universe; that it may speculate about what life would be like “if”; that it may address current social problems by placing them in a different context; and that it may include aliens, advanced technologies, and time travel.

Ask students to suggest reasons for Walter Mosley's decision to blend historical fiction and science fiction. Ask students to think about and discuss how they will know if a story moves from one genre to another as *47* does.

Distribute the book *47* and give students several minutes to examine the front cover. Ask them to write down a 25-word story about the cover art. Writing within a very confined limit appeals to students, and they generally approach this task with enthusiasm. Students will note that the artwork shows workers in a cotton field, probably slaves, and that one of them is surrounded by a gold outline, possibly because he is the hero of the story. Solicit ideas about what the title means. Then have students read the back cover. Ask them to find the words that indicate that this story will contain elements of science fiction. ("I am no older today than I was back in the year 1832.")

Read aloud the preface and then ask students what the story is going to be about. Ask them to find a sentence that clearly tells the reader that this novel will combine both historical fiction and science fiction. ("It's about science that seems like magic even today and about the barbaric practice of slavery that so many of our ancestors had to endure." P. vii)

Read the first chapter aloud, pausing as needed for clarification. More advanced groups of students may need little support, but others may benefit from rereading with an audio version of the book or reading quietly with a partner. Before reading, tell students that they must be prepared to discuss the characters who are introduced in the first chapter and the initial conflict that the narrator faces. The first chapter of *47* is packed with information about the main characters and the setting, and students should be guided to note these details. (See Appendix 2 for accompanying worksheet to support accurate recall of this introductory material.)

Teachers may wish to reproduce Appendix 3, a Character Chart, which students may expand as new characters are introduced.

Assignment 5 (Chapter 2)

Begin today's lesson by referring asking students to discuss their answer to question 15 on the Chapter 1 Review. (How much control does the narrator have over his life? How does this affect his interaction with Miss Eloise?) Display the word *agency*, and have students suggest uses with which they may be familiar, such as employment agency, child welfare agency, and detective agency. Point out that in all of these instances, an agency is a place where something is done, where action is taken. In literature, agency is the degree to which a character has control over the choices he or she makes, or the circumstances in which he or she is situated. (There is much more to be said on the topic of agency, but for the purposes of middle school students, this seems to be an adequate

explanation.) Have students copy this definition of agency to reinforce that it is a concept they are expected to consider as they read 47.

Assign Chapter 2 as the day's reading. (The first two chapters of 47 are dense with information about the setting, conflicts, themes, and characters, and are worth examining in detail before moving at a more rapid pace through the novel.)

As students read this chapter, tell them to pay particular attention to the dialogue. They should note instances where dialogue reveals clues to the character of the speaker, perhaps marking these instances with post-its or using highlighters. The slave Pritchard's dialogue, for example, reveals that he is bitter, jealous, and vindictive in his attitude toward Forty-seven, who has just been moved from the safety of the Big House to the brutality of the slave quarters. The reader gains insight into Pritchard's character when he makes remarks such as:

"If it ain't Fat Flore's little puppy dog." (p. 18)

"Here all this time you been layin' up in the barn, huggin on Fat Flore an' eating corn cakes while us niggers be out here eatin' sour grain and strainin' in the cotton fields. Now you gonna know what it's like to sweat and strain and hurt." (p. 21)

"I'ma burn that numbah so far into you...that after you die they gonna find it burnt into the bone." (p. 22)

"I's still useful, Mastah," I remember the miserable man crying. "Don't do me like a dawg. I's still a useful nigger, you'll see." (p. 16)

Students should be able to infer from this dialogue that while Pritchard is envious as well as vicious, he has little if any agency. He has been treated with inhuman disregard of an unhealed leg, broken in the service of his master, who will shoot him dead if he cannot prove that he is more benefit than cost on the plantation's books. His response to a life of degradation is to become vicious and spiteful, in marked contrast to Champ Noland, who protects Forty-seven from him. Champ Noland's words:

"'Why you wanna make that little boy hurt?' Champ asked, and then he hit him." (p. 24)

Later, Champ comforts Forty-seven, saying, "It's okay, boy...We all cry when they burn us like that. I'm just sorry you didn't have us around you to help you feel bettah about the pain." (p. 25) These words reveal Champ to be a humane champion of the weak, a man who has earned his name for his spiritual as well as physical strength.

Have students find other example of dialogue indirectly revealing character. Connect these revelations to the themes of human dignity and self-respect.

Before closing discussion, return to the concept of agency, and evaluate how much control each of the characters is able to maintain over the circumstances of their lives.

Assignment 6 (Chapters 3 and 4)

After students have read these chapters, they should return to this material for a closer look at the setting of the story, noting descriptions that provide details about what this plantation was like in the year 1830. The teacher may want to introduce this lens, setting, by displaying several examples from earlier chapters, such as the following:

“And every night they chained your feet to an eyebolt in the floor.” (p. 12)

“The slave cabins were long and narrow like the barracks for soldiers in the army...with twenty-three two-tiered bunks down each side...” (p. 14)

“The stench of the slave cabin was unbearable to my spoiled nose. There were the odors of sweat and urine and vomit and general rot.” (p. 15)

“Every field slave on the plantation had their number branded on their right shoulder.” (p. 19)

Students should be led to evaluate possible reasons Mosley has for describing the plantation. Students should be guided to see that the setting of the novel creates a world that is as frighteningly brutal as it is spiritually deadening. Against this harshness, the resilience of many of the slaves will set a standard for measuring human dignity on a scale unrecognized by the white men who wield the power of life and death.

Several new characters are introduced in these chapters (Julie, Mud Albert, Eight-four, Brother Bob, Nigger Ned, and Mr. Pike). Upon completion of these chapters, students should enter these new characters onto the Character Chart included as Appendix 3.

A choice board for the material through Chapter 4 is included as Appendix 4.

Assignment 7 (Chapters 5 and 6)

In these chapters, Mosley infuses science fiction into this historical novel with the arrival of Tall John. Review conventions of science fiction before students begin to read, and tell students to note the conventions that appear in 47. Students should be able to report that in chapters 5 and 6, an alien appears and that his perspective on slavery shows him to be from a superior civilization. He is an astute observer of his time and can alter his presentation of self to meet the requirements of the social situation, another way that he shows his superiority to the slave-owning master and his overseer.

After the initial reading, students should reread using the lens *characterization*. With a partner or in a small group, students should find the exact text that describes Tall John. Some examples include:

“He was the most beautiful being I had ever seen.” (p. 47)

“His skin was the color of highly polished brass but a little darker, a little like copper too but not quite.” (p. 47)

“He was bare-chested and slender, but there was elegance in his lean stance.” (p. 47)

“When our eyes met the boy seemed to be looking for something inside of me.” (p. 47)

“I’ve searched everywhere from Mississipp to Alabam, from Timbuktu to Outer Mongolia.” (p. 47)

“‘Never say master,’ the copper-and-brass-colored boy said. ‘Not unless you are looking inward or up beyond the void.’” (p. 48)

“‘He done arrested me, mastuh,’ the runaway slave Tall John said. He no longer sound like the mischievous child I had met.” (p. 52)

Ask the students what these descriptions teach us about Tall John. Students should be able to note that Tall John seems quite different from any slave Forty-seven has thus far met. His appearance is unusual in its elegance, which matches his unusual, and to Forty-seven, perplexing speech. Point out to students that some dramatic irony is taking place here, as the reader has an experiential understanding of a science fiction character that would have been unavailable to a real-life Forty-seven.

The introduction of Tall John provides an opportunity to return to the Character Chart and describe him. Encourage students to reread for examples that indicate how much more in control of his life Tall John is than the other slaves on the Corinthian plantation.

A choice board for Chapters 5 and 6 is included as Appendix 5.

Assignment 8 (Chapter 7)

Assign students to read Chapter 7 with special emphasis on using the lens: *relationships between and among characters*. Have them use post-its, highlighters, or some similar method to keep track of instances that reveal these relationships. Students may refer to such examples as the following:

“In that time I had never heard general laughter among the men.” (p. 59)

“There was a great deal of shouting but as angry as the men sounded they were still having a good time.” (p. 59)

“I’m gonna put Number Twelve and Forty-seven in the same cot.” (p. 61)

“I also knew that Mud Albert was free to say anything he wanted as long as Champ Noland was there to back him up.” (p. 62)

“‘This ain’t no foolin’, boy,’ Albert said in his most serious tone. ‘These white folks’ll kill a smart-mouf nigger like you an’ then sit down to Sunday suppah.’” (p. 63)

Students should be led to discuss how the arrival of Tall John enriches the slave cabin and unites its inhabitants through their appreciation of his humor. These are men who have few reasons to be merry, and although the men become angry as Tall John confuses

them, they still enjoy this break from the dullness that marks the few hours they are neither working nor asleep. The reader also sees that although Albert is the protective father figure in this group, he relies upon the physical and moral support of Champ Noland to maintain some level of human decency among men who have little to live for.

Assignment 9 (Chapters 8 and 9)

Students should reread these chapters to examine in detail two lenses, word choice and characterization. Word choice is one aspect of the writer's craft, which can be difficult for students to evaluate. Have students find examples of word choices, either phrases or complete sentences that strike them as unusual or important in some way, even if they can't initially say why. For this activity, students should make a written list. After they have completed the list, tell them to think about categories that these items could fall into. Some of the items may fall into more than one category. Then have them suggest possible reasons that the writer may have had for choosing to use the words in the text instead of any other words. Some examples of language that may be of interest to students are:

"Them cotton balls ain't gonna fall off into yo sacks." (p. 76)

"...web of flattery John had been weaving." (p. 79)

"Don't tell me I gots ta put up wit' you two lazy niggahs this monrin..." (p. 78)

Encourage students to note the differences between the language Forty-seven uses when he thinks and when he speaks. His thoughts are those of a well-spoken and educated man, but his spoken words are the humble speech of the illiterate. The language of the other slaves is similarly without embellishment and confined largely to the labor that consumes their lives.

The second lens to which students should attend is characterization. In particular, Eighty-four comes in for close scrutiny in this section. Some descriptions of her appear in the following:

"She wore a faded and torn blue dress that seen lots of sweat and dirt, little water, and no soap at all." (p. 78)

"Eighty-four had unkempt bushy hair that was festooned with tiny branches and burrs."

"...why would he be saying such nice and charming words to a surly and taciturn field slave who was black as tar and ugly as a stump?" (p. 79)

"Cold watah on my skin an' down my th'roat. That an'a crust'a bread an' my life be heaven." (p. 80)

The reader gets a clear picture of this worn, toil-marked woman. There is nothing that can relieve her misery, a slave whose babies have been sold from her. Her definition of heaven—cold water and a crust of bread—is a painfully simple reflection of how harsh her life has been.

Ask students why it is that Tall John is able to respond so differently to Eighty-four than her fellow slaves have. See if students are able to trace any effects this difference has upon Forty-seven. This is also a good opportunity to bring up the topic of agency and to have students reflect upon the circumstances (both physical and psychological or spiritual) that affect one's sense of power.

A choice board for Chapters 7 to 9 is included as Appendix 6.

Assignment 7 (Chapters 10, 11, and 12)

Assign students to read these chapters emphasizing the lens, *relationships between and among characters*. At this point, we see the influence that Tall John is beginning to have on the other slaves as he voices thoughts they have never felt free to express. The experience of the slaves has taught them to be wary, but they are attracted to as well as disturbed by his insistence on freedom. As students return to the text for examples of relationships, they may note the following passages:

“There was no more laughing that night. I could see in the men's faces that they were thinking about John's words.” (p. 91)

“The power to bring happiness into that sad slave's face was greater than healing my hands, taming the master's dogs, and putting the plantation to sleep all rolled together.” (p. 92)

“‘You could take care of yourselves,’ he said. ‘Buy your own farms, raise your own food.’ Nobody had ever said anything like this to me before. The idea scared me. How could I do all the things that white people did? All I knew was how to be lazy and how to work like a dog.” (p. 94)

“We stared into each other's eyes and a profound feeling passed between us. There was a promise and an obligation that we both recognized.” (p. 96)

“She knelt down next to me and wrapped me in her arms.” (p. 98)

“I told Flore about Pritchard branding me and about Champ's beating him.” (p.99)

“I loved her whiteness when I was still a slave because that whiteness meant freedom...” (p. 101)

“‘I was only allowed to take her pulse,’ John said.”

“You love Eloise and so she is beautiful to you, but Eighty-four needs your love too.” (p. 106)

In these lines, the reader sees how complicated and repressed are the relationships among the slaves, as well as how foolishly destructive the ruling class behaves when Mr. Turner limits John's ability to accurately care for his dying and beloved daughter because as a slave, John is not permitted to touch more than Miss Eloise's wrist. Students should also record further examples of John as an exemplar of an alien and superior civilization. John has both healing and seemingly magical powers. He is highly educated and scientifically

advanced far beyond the technology of the time and indeed, that of the 21st century. His body is dependent upon solar power, which constitutes the most significant weakness that he and Forty-seven must manage.

A choice board for Chapters 10 to 12 is included as Appendix 7.

Assignment 8 (Chapters 13 and 14)

In these chapters, Forty-seven is transported to an alien world that exists in a parallel universe where time no longer exists in a linear way. Chapter 13 is the most highly speculative section of the novel, and students should be encouraged to consider in detail the philosophy that John teaches. John tells Forty-seven, “In the physical world every being is different, but there, in the higher place, we are all the same.” (p. 121) As Forty-seven absorbs these words and experiences John’s planet, his altered understanding will lead him to sacrifice himself for another.

Deeply contemplative, Forty-seven returns to earth, miles from the Corinthian Plantation. He must decide if saving Miss Eloise is worth the punishment he must take to do so. Forty-seven consciously chooses to return not only to Miss Eloise but also to Mama Flore, accepting the pain of maintaining his bond to loved ones.

This decision provides an opportunity for returning to the idea of agency. At this point in the novel, Forty-seven is fully in charge of his destiny, although once he returns to the Corinthian Plantation, this agency will be dramatically curtailed.

Students can create a comparison and contrast chart or a Venn Diagram to examine life on Elle and that experienced in the 1830 setting of the story. An alternate assignment that would lead to an effective rereading of Chapter 13 would be to have students draw a picture of the planet Elle, using at least one sentence from the novel as a caption.

Assignment 9 (Chapters 15 and 16)

In these chapters, Forty-seven and John are entombed as a punishment for John’s stepping out of place. As they await the whipping that will follow, Forty-seven continues to grow as a moral and increasing self-aware character. He is able to see and forgive John’s shortcomings, and John himself recognizes that his position as an alien in Forty-seven’s world has led him to remain aloof and ignorant of the reality that these slaves cannot, in fact, avoid the brutality that imprisons them physically as well as spiritually. In these chapters, John will learn for the first time what it is to suffer. Both characters become more knowing, and the reader sees that Forty-seven’s transformation enables him to become the leader of the pair.

This transformation provides another opportunity to discuss agency. Students may note the irony of the setting, where both characters are imprisoned, knowing that worse punishment is imminent, and yet spiritually embracing freedom and love.

A choice board for Chapters 13 to 16 is included as Appendix 8.

Assignment 10 (Chapters 17, 18, and 19)

After their initial reading, students should reexamine the text through the lens *relationships between and among slaves*. These chapters are rife with conflict as Forty-seven assumes leadership and leaves the refuge he has found to save Mama Flore. He cannot escape the fear that accompanies him as he faces potential annihilation in this quest. His maturity cannot shield him from the knowledge that the unavoidable suffering that awaits him may be more than he can survive. His test is as much a test of character as cunning as he plans to outsmart the alien who has come to rob civilization of the harmony that John's planet embodies as a future attainable by humankind.

There are numerous passages in the text that reveal the intricacies of these relationships, but students may note the following among others:

“A great she-bear stood on her back legs on the shore and roared me welcome.” (p. 162)

“He talked to me like he could see right in my heart.” (p. 163)

“Pickin’ that cotton make a mad dawg out of a bunny rabbit.” (p. 164)

“And even though I trusted him I knew that he was capable of making mistakes.” (p. 165)

“Eighty-four gazed at me with an emotion in her face that I could not decipher. Maybe she hated me for standing in the way of her happiness. Maybe she wondered at the deep connection between me and her man.” (p. 166)

“‘Champ and Flore stood up for us,’ I said to John. ‘Mud Albert gave his life tryin’ to help Mama Flore. If I didn’t he’p’em then how could I do anything else worthwhile?’”

Students should note that forgiveness and self-sacrifice are aspects of love that Forty-seven can now appreciate as a soul that is spiritually free. In freedom, Eighty-four is also able to engage with Forty-seven as considerably more than the furious, barren spirit of her earlier self.

The portrayal of Mr. Stewart as Cyclops and Zombie lends itself to graphic art, and his encounter with Forty-seven makes an appropriate subject for a cartoon interpretation of this section.

Assignment 11 (Chapters 20, 21, and 22)

Forty-seven and John acknowledge that it is now Forty-seven's turn to become the hero of the story. He will not make the choices that John would have made, and Forty-seven

accepts the burden of becoming his own man. As he struggles to save his friends, he understands how John's teaching that "every life is holy" sets him on a path that John would not have taken.

Students should reread this section through the lens *word choice*. Some phrases and sentences that may stand out include:

"All we can do is hope that they survive the attack,' the strange bronze-colored boy said, hanging his head down." (p. 183)

"And while he knew much more than I did, I had a deeper knowledge of what it meant to be on the brink of losing everything. That's why he deeded me, because I would make the choice for living against any odd." (p. 184)

"As I said,' John replied, 'I will follow your lead.'"

"The one-eyed ghoul, Mr. Stewart, was in their lead."

"Under the hanging tree,' he said ominously."

"I moved as nimbly as an African cheetah."

"We both turned our heads to the sky, looking for God's retribution."

"...I ran off in the woods faster than a deer fleeing a cougar."

"...I easily climbed high and moved through the upper branches like a wily chipmunk." (p. 194)

"Scared is the lamp that lights the way." (p. 196)

The selections above were chosen because they either signal an important philosophical point, the increased agency exercised by Forty-seven and accepted by John, or they contain imagery that reflects the setting of the story amidst the rural South.

A choice board for Chapters 17 to 22 is included as Appendix 9.

Assignment 12 (Chapters 23)

The science fiction elements of 47 are notable in this chapter. Students should examine the text to wrap up John's account of his voyage to Earth in search of Forty-seven. Students should be able to find examples of foreshadowing, as when John says, "Your courage gives me the strength to surrender myself...All life flows toward the Upper Level."

The complication of the slave/master relationship is highlighted in the section as Nola, now a runaway, considers her former mistress, Miss Eloise. "I s'pose that I will miss her. But I can see how things will never be same." Students may want to examine Nola's loyalty to Miss Eloise and to distinguish their relationship from other slave/owner relationships in the novel.

Assignment 13 (Chapters 24 and 25)

In the resolution of the novel, students should be able to point to the novel's most prominent theme: "This kinship, this relation, was even more important to me than my newly found freedom...the love in our hearts...was the power that would save both his race and mind."

Students should also note that that a happily-ever after ending is explicitly ruled out, and should be able to point to specific text that makes this clear. Students should also be clear that Forty-seven leads his fellow runaways to Canada, where "at least for some of us there was happiness and freedom at the end of the trail."

A choice board for Chapters 23 to 25 is included as Appendix 10.

Culminating Activity

Students will create a short story that includes several of the characteristics of science fiction. They may work with individually, in partner pairs, or with a small group to produce a short story that includes at least two of the following characteristics of science fiction:

- 1.) The story is set in a future time or in on an alternate planet;
- 2.) The story speculates about what life would be like "if";
- 3.) The story addresses a current social problem by placing it in a different context; and
- 4.) The story includes aliens, advanced technologies, and time travel.

These stories must also contain traditional plot elements and include dialogue.

Annotated Bibliography

“Agency.” 30 June 2015. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agency_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agency_(philosophy))

This article provides a clear and grade-appropriate discussion of the concept of agency.

"Antebellum Slavery." Africans in America²⁹. PBS, n.d. Web. 29 June 2015.

<www.pbs.org/wgbh/iai/part4/4p2956.html>.

This article accompanies the PBS series Africans in America. It provides a concise summary of the conditions under which slaves typically worked during the antebellum period.

“Genre characteristics.” 29 June 2013. http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson270/genre_sheet.pdf

This is a helpful pdf from The International Reading Association, describing characteristics of basic literary genres.

Hess, Karin. "Applying Webb's Depth of Knowledge."

[Www.nciea.org/publications/DOKreading_KH08.pdf](http://www.nciea.org/publications/DOKreading_KH08.pdf). Web.

This article examines the types of questions that are appropriately asked while moving through Webb’s Depth of Knowledge sequence.

Lehman, Christopher, and Kate Roberts. *Falling in Love with Close Reading: Lessons for Analyzing Texts--and Life*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2013. Print.

Lehman and Roberts provide a series of “lenses” for gathering information to refine the student’s understanding of plot, character, theme, and dialogue. The book includes a number of useful charts and very clear discussion of the how to use these lenses to promote a deeper understanding of the text.

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Use complete sentences to answer these questions about antebellum slavery. Make sure you reread the selection and highlight the exact words from the text upon which you are basing your written response.

1. Why couldn't African Americans ever forget their status as property?

2. How many Southern whites owned slaves?

3. How many slaves did most slave owners own?

4. Why did non-slaveholding white Southerners defend the system of slavery?

5. What kinds of crops did slaves raise?

6. Besides farm work, what other kinds of jobs did slaves perform?

7. How did the Southern heat and humidity affect slaves?

8. Why was the constant threat of sale one of the worst conditions that slaves faced?

9. How was plantation discipline maintained?

10. How did slaves demonstrate their resistance to slavery?

Name _____

Date _____

Directions: You may work with a partner and use the text to complete the following questions.

Match each character with his/her role in 47.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. _____ Big Mama Flore | A. the oldest slave on the Turner plantation |
| 2. _____ babychile | B. Master Tobias' daughter |
| 3. _____ Psalma Turner | C. the narrator |
| 4. _____ Tobias Turner | D. the strongest slave on the plantation |
| 5. _____ Mr. Stewart | E. Master Tobias' deceased wife |
| 6. _____ Miss Una | F. the overseer |
| 7. _____ Miss Eloise | G. the owner of the plantation |
| 8. _____ Mud Albert | H. house slave |
| 9. _____ Champ Noland | I. butler |
| 10. _____ Fred Chocolate | J. the narrator's deceased mother |

11. What were the Rules? _____

12. What happened in Mr. Stewart's *killin' shack*? _____

14. Why did Master Tobias hate the narrator? _____

15. How much control does the narrator have over his life? How does this affect his interaction with Miss Eloise? _____

47 by Walter Mosley
 Preface to Chapter 4, Pages vii to 44
 Depth of Knowledge Choice Board

Appendix 4

Name _____

Date _____

DOK Level 1 Choose ____	DOK Level 2 Choose ____	DOK Level 3 Choose ____
What is the setting of the story? (p. vii)	Summarize Forty-seven's life up until he is sent to the slave quarters. (p. 4-6)	What do the precautions taken to lock slaves into their bunks reveal about life on this plantation? (p. 27-28)
Who are the main characters?	How did the death of Forty-seven's mother in childbirth affect Forty-seven's treatment on the plantation? (p. 5)	How do you think Forty-seven's life might have been different if his mother had lived?
Who is the narrator?	Using at least 3 examples from the story, describe the narrator.	Do you consider the narrator to be reliable? Explain why you do or do not trust him, using at least two quotations from the text.
Which fellow slave wants to punish Forty-seven? Use at least 1 example from the text to prove this. (p. 18-21)	Compare Champ Noland to Pritchard. Use at least two examples from the text to support your response. (p. 20-25)	Relate the role played by either Champ Noland or Pritchard to another character you have encountered in a book, movie, or TV show.

47 by Walter Mosley
 Chapters 5 to 6, Pages 45 to 57
 Depth of Knowledge Choice Board

Appendix 5

Name _____

Date _____

DOK Level 1 Choose ____	DOK Level 2 Choose ____	DOK Level 3 Choose ____
<p>What character is introduced in Chapter 5? What makes him unusual? (p. 45)</p>	<p>How has Forty-seven begun to change even before he meets John? (p. 45-46)</p>	<p>Explain how the funeral for Nigger Ned might have led Forty-seven to “see that there might not be magic in the world after all.” (p. 46)</p>
<p>Describe John. How does he convince the other slaves that he can appropriately be called <i>Tall John</i>? (p. 58)</p>	<p>“There you are at last,” John says upon encountering Forty-seven. Why does John use the words <i>at last</i>? (p. 47)</p>	<p>Explain what John means when he tells Forty-seven, “Neither nigger nor master be.” Use at least 2 examples from the story to support your response.</p>
<p>Summarize the story John tells to trick Mr. Tobias out of punishing Forty-seven for roaming the woods. (p. 52)</p>	<p>Why does John blame “abolitionists” for the burned down plantation of his former master? Is John’s story true? (p. 54)</p>	<p>Keeping in mind how easily John lies to Mr. Tobias, explain why you do or do not believe him when he describes where he is from. Cite text to support your response. (p. 72-73)</p>
<p>Describe the conditions under which the slaves worked on the Corinthian plantation. (p. 55-56)</p>	<p>How does John explain calling Mr. Tobias <i>master</i> when he insists that Forty-seven stop using the term? (p. 56)</p>	<p>Compare John to the hero of another book you have read or to a TV show or movie you have seen.</p>

47 by Walter Mosley
 Chapters 7 to 9, Pages 58 to 89
 Depth of Knowledge Choice Board

Appendix 6

Name _____

Date _____

DOK Level 1 Choose ____	DOK Level 2 Choose ____	DOK Level 3 Choose ____
Forty-seven believes that he has dreamed John’s story when Champ Noland unlocks his chains in the beginning of Chapter 8. What makes him change his mind? (p. 75)	Explain why Forty-seven describes Eighty-four as <i>surly</i> and <i>taciturn</i> . How does John’s response to Eighty-four show her in a different light? Cite the text to support your response. (p. 79)	“Sometimes I would suck on a bite-sized rock just to pretend that I was eating.” Explain Forty-seven’s behavior. (p. 83)
What internal conflict does 47’s friendship with John produce? (p. 76)	Why is Eighty-four <i>smitten with Tall John the flatterer</i> ? How has his treatment of Eighty-four differed from that of the other slaves? (p. 81)	John refers to the “chains of freedom.” What is meant by remark? How could freedom be seen as a chain? (p. 85)
Why is Forty-seven dismayed when Mud Albert assign him and John to work with Eighty-four? (p. 77)	How do the slaves respond when John says that Forty-seven is the conqueror among them? How does Forty-seven respond? Cite from the text to support your answer. (pp. 84-85)	Who are Abraham and LeRoy, and why does John cry along with Eighty-four? What does this show about John’s character? (p.87)
“Cold watah on my skin an’ down my throat. That an’ a crust’a bread an’ my life be heaven. Compare Eighty-four’s words with Forty-seven’s “suck on a bite-sized rock just to pretend I was eating.” (p. 80; p. 83)	“My mam was the hangin’ tree. My daddy din’t know his own name.” Turn this into a rhyme, naming other family members and maintaining the tone of these lines. (p. 83)	Draw a picture of one of the slaves described in this chapter. Use text from the story to that tells what it is that you are drawing. Be sure to include the page number of these words.

47 by Walter Mosley
 Chapters 10 to 12, Pages 90 to 113
 Depth of Knowledge Choice Board

Appendix 7

Name _____

Date _____

DOK Level 1 Choose ____	DOK Level 2 Choose ____	DOK Level 3 Choose ____
How did Fred Chocolate receive his name? How does his name contrast with his elegant and disdainful appearance? (p. 97)	Predict: John is only allowed to take Eloise's pulse in Chapter 11. How might this affect his ability to treat her? Do you think Mr. Tobias will be forced to change his attitude toward John in order to save his beloved daughter? (p. 102)	"...it is only the human heart that I fail to understand." (p. 105) What does this reference to John's failure for understand the human heart foreshadow?
Why is Forty-seven struck by the activity of the ants as he waits on the back porch at Mr. Tobias's house? (p. 98)	List several examples of figurative language in Forty-seven's description of Fred Chocolate. What does Forty-seven's choice of comparison fit with what you know of his world? (p. 97)	Retell the story of John and Forty-seven's arrival at Mr. Tobias's house from the point of view of Fred Chocolate. (p. 97)
How does Forty-seven react when he sees Mama Flore? What accounts for this change? (p. 98)	John argues that "Eighty-four is just as beautiful in her own way" as Eloise. Why does John have trouble believing his?	"All I knew was how to be lazy and work like a dog." Evaluate Forty-seven's thoughts. Who gained from this type of thinking? (p. 94)
Fred Chocolate calls John a "copper colored piece'a trash." Why does he do so? What does it matter to him whether or not John is truly a healer? (p. 100)	Find an example of foreshadowing on p. 91. What do these words suggest?	Why does John correct Forty-seven's use of the word <i>nigger</i> while ignoring its use by other slaves? (p. 94)

47 by Walter Mosley
 Chapters 13 to 16, Pages 114 to 161
 Depth of Knowledge Choice Board

Appendix 8

Name _____

Date _____

DOK Level 1 Choose ____	DOK Level 2 Choose ____	DOK Level 3 Choose ____
Forty-seven sees a mother deer and a fawn. What questions arise in his mind about his own mother as he watches them? (p. 124)	“Being his friend was my first experience with the responsibilities of freedom.” (p. 126) Explain what Forty-seven means. Do you agree with his decision to go back to the plantation to heal Eloise?	“The human heart is always filled with love and the need to hope.” (p. 132) Is this true? Use examples from the text to support your response.
What internal conflict does Forty-seven experience when John offers to escort him to Canada? (p. 125-125)	How does Mr. Tobias justify sending John and Forty-seven to the Tomb after John saves Eloise’s life? (p. 139)	Cite examples of Forty-seven’s behavior in Chapters 14 to 17 that justify John’s confidence in him as the promise of the future.
Why does John say that his “pride was my downfall”? (p. 149)	Forty-seven has a vision of Tobias beating Pritchard. Has does his reaction show a change in Forty-seven since the day Pritchard branded him? (p. 115)	Illustrate a scene from the story and use one or two sentences from the story to help explain your picture.
Why are there “a dozen or so white riflemen” (p. 152) in the yard when John and Forty-seven are punished? Why are the field slaves chained? Why are the house slaves <i>not</i> chained?	How easily could the slaves at the Corinthian Plantation overthrow Mr. Tobias? Use information from the story to support your response.	Draw a map that shows a possible escape route from the Corinthian Plantation to Canada. Consult an atlas to make your map accurate.

47 by Walter Mosley
 Chapters 17 to 22, Pages 162 to 204
 Depth of Knowledge Choice Board

Appendix 9

Name _____

Date _____

DOK Level 1 Choose ____	DOK Level 2 Choose ____	DOK Level 3 Choose ____
What is the meaning of Forty-seven's dream on p. 162?	Find the words on p. 162 that describe how Forty-seven feels. Make up two other similes that express the same meaning.	Write a letter to Mr. Tobias and attempt to persuade him that slavery is wrong.
“Pickin’ that cotton make a mad dawg out of a bunny rabbit.” Explain these words of Forty-seven’s. What do these words reveal about Forty-seven? (p. 164)	How does Eighty-four change as she becomes acquainted with John? (p. 162-164)	Create a found poem using phrases from one of the chapters in this section of the novel.
Describe the process by which John saves Forty-seven’s life. (p. 169-170)	Pick a scene from this section of the book and create a short play with dialogue and stage instructions.	“Scared is the lamp that lights the way.” (p. 196) Apply this belief to your own life. When has fear led you to better knowledge of yourself or of life?
What words does John use when describing Mama Flore’s injuries that show he was not a man of the 1830’s? (p. 176)	Pretend that you are one of the slaves on the Corinthian Plantation and write a diary entry describing John and Forty-seven’s encounter with Mr. Stewart in Chapter 19.	Which actions in this section of the novel can be described as heroic?

47 by Walter Mosley
 Chapters 22 to 25, Pages 190 to 232
 Depth of Knowledge Choice Board

Appendix 10

Name _____

Date _____

DOK Level 1 Choose ____	DOK Level 2 Choose ____	DOK Level 3 Choose ____
How does Forty-seven prevent Mr. Stewart from killing the slaves escaping the plantation? (p. 195)	“Your courage gives me the strength to surrender myself,” John tells Forty-seven. What does he mean by this? (p. 206)	Write a letter of condolence to either Mama Flore or Eloise on their loss of a loved one.
What does Forty-seven realize as he gazes at the dead body of Mr. Tobias. (p.195)	Why, according to John, would war only benefit his enemy? (p. 211-212)	Explain why being called <i>brother</i> means more to Forty-seven than his freedom? (p. 217-218)
Why does Forty-seven run off with the buggy? (pages 199-201)	Pretend to be a Tamal, and write a letter describing the attack of the Calash on your homeworld. (p. 213)	For John, the afterlife is the “river of dreams where we all flow together.” Describe your idea of an afterlife.
Forty-seven wishes that Nola had a name to call him instead of just a number. Think of several good names for Forty-seven and explain your choices. (p. 202)	Why does Queziastril “keep certain information from those living in the past?” (p. 215)	Write an epilogue. Include a visit or some communication from Tamal warning of the reappearance of Wall.