Chapter 3

1. What, according to the text is *rememory*? How has this concept already defined and

influenced the novel?

1. Why is this chapter—even though it recounts Sethe’s escape from Sweet Home—largely

told from Denver’s perspective?

1)Sethe describes rememory as “a picture floating around out there outside my head”—this

may be seen as a sort of combination of memory and imagination, something that leaves

a powerful, living imprint on the individual. In the context of this chapter, that rememory

is Sweet Home, the plantation on which she and Paul D. were enslaved: the reader knows

Sethe escaped from Sweet Home, but it is clear that “that place is real” even as she has

(physically) moved on. Students should note that the novel has a considerable number of

flashbacks at this very early point of the novel—of Sethe’s marriage, pregnancy, and escape;

of the baby and Baby Suggs’ deaths; and of Paul D’s recollections of Sweet Home. Rememory,

then, coalesces many of the early thematic strands of the novel: Sethe’s attempts to protect

her children at the expense of her own personal identity; the singular and shared suffering

of characters as well as protection from it; and the inability for the past—be it the ghost or

Baby Suggs—to stay in the past.

2) There are several possible responses, the source of which should be derived from the last

words of the chapter, in which Sethe notes her responsibility for “keeping [Denver] from the

past that was still waiting for her,” which conveys her fierce protectionism and her belief in

the inevitability of Denver’s suffering. Ironically, though, the chapter reveals Sethe has failed

in both cases: it is Denver who is particularly enchanted with the story of her birth—even

as she knows or cares little of Sethe’s slave experience—who recognizes the “plans” of the

ghost, who seems particularly “worn out” by the loneliness of her isolation. In this sense,

the “rememory” that Sethe speaks of, and from which she hopes to protect her daughter, has

very much been realized by Denver: her imagination “[produces] its own hunger and its own

food” and she “easily stepped into the told story” of her past.