


On this day

In 1972, TV comedy M.A.S.H, starring Alan Alda, Loretta Swit and Wayne Rogers, debuted on CBS in the U.S.



Nikki Giovanni visits ICA to celebrate Toni Morrison film, 'The Pieces I Am'

The ICA hosted a screening of the Toni Morrison documentary, "The Pieces I Am," on Sept. 11. Photo by Jon Mirador

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Ever-changing pieces of paper — ranging from flower patterns to thick portions of a woman's face — were displayed on a wide screen at the Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU. In a scrapbook-like fashion, these fragments slowly create the face of Toni Morrison in different stages of her life.

This scene is from the documentary, "Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am." Directed by Timothy Green-Fields, the film explores the life of novelist, essayist, editor and professor, Toni Morrison, from her humble beginnings in Lorain, Ohio.

"The Pieces I Am" was released on June 21, less than two months before Morrison died on Aug. 5.

Enjoli Moon, curator of film at the ICA, saw the film for the first time in New York and immediately knew she wanted to bring it to Richmond.

"While it was a privilege to bring the film initially, now it has transitioned into an honor," Moon said. "I'm glad that we can share this space here together and I'm excited to be able to present this film. It's something that I think will be able to elevate her legacy."

The ICA hosted a screening of the film on Sept. 11, as well as a discussion afterward with poet, activist and professor Nikki Giovanni.

In the film, several celebrities, activists and writers shared stories about Morrison's life, such as Angela Davis, Oprah Winfrey and Sonia Sanchez.

"The Pieces I Am" is narrated by Morrison in a conversational style, directly to the camera, making the viewer feel as though it is an intimate discussion of her journey as a black author in the U.S.

As she provides comedic and insightful commentary, Morrison shares details about

her life from adolescence to adulthood. The film acts as a literary portrait with videos, images, pictures and text.

Some of her notable works: "The Bluest Eye" (1970), "Sula" (1973), "Song of Solomon" (1977) and "Beloved" (1987), were highlighted through her writing processes and comments from various celebrities that were close friends of Morrison's.

Oprah Winfrey shared a memory in the film that included her reading "Beloved" for the first time. She said she called Morrison immediately after she finished with plans of turning it into a movie.

Described as being from Morrison's "sister circle," Giovanni has published works of poetry, nonfiction and children's books, and is a distinguished professor at Virginia Tech.

"It's like having a big sister in many respects. Just somebody that you can relax with," Giovanni said about her relationship with Morrison.

She came to the event to reflect on Morrison's life and to share memories in a Q&A session after the film.

"Toni read The New York Times with a pencil — she would correct it. I always laughed about things like that with her because I can't spell. I was always amazed like 'girl, you caught that?'" Giovanni.

Moon mentioned Morrison and Giovanni's strong sisterhood, highlighting when Giovanni helped to organize the event "Sheer Good Fortune" with Maya Angelou at Virginia Tech in 2012, after Morrison's son, Slade, died from pancreatic cancer in 2010.

"We knew that Slade had pancreatic cancer. ... So you know, it's gonna be a hard transition," Giovanni said. "And I teach at Virginia Tech, and Maya [Angelou] is — was — at Wake Forest. So I drove down to Wake Forest and I said to Maya 'What should we do for Toni?'"



After the film, a discussion was held with poet, activist and professor, Nikki Giovanni. Photos by Jon Mirador

Maya Angelou, who died in 2014, was also part of Morrison's circle.

"What I had wanted, just in terms of vision, was that we give something back to Toni," Giovanni said.

The poet also mentioned that all of the writers at the event read their favorite pieces by Morrison.

"What she said that struck us all, was that 'If nothing else ever happens for me

in my public life, this does it for me.' That brought tears to my eyes," said Giovanni on Morrison's reaction to the 2012 event.

Giovanni shared more fond memories of her friendship with Morrison.

"She [Morrison] loved sunfish," Giovanni said. "Every time I had fried fish, I'd always take a picture with my iPhone no matter where I was in the world. ... And I would send it to her and say 'wish you were here.'"