



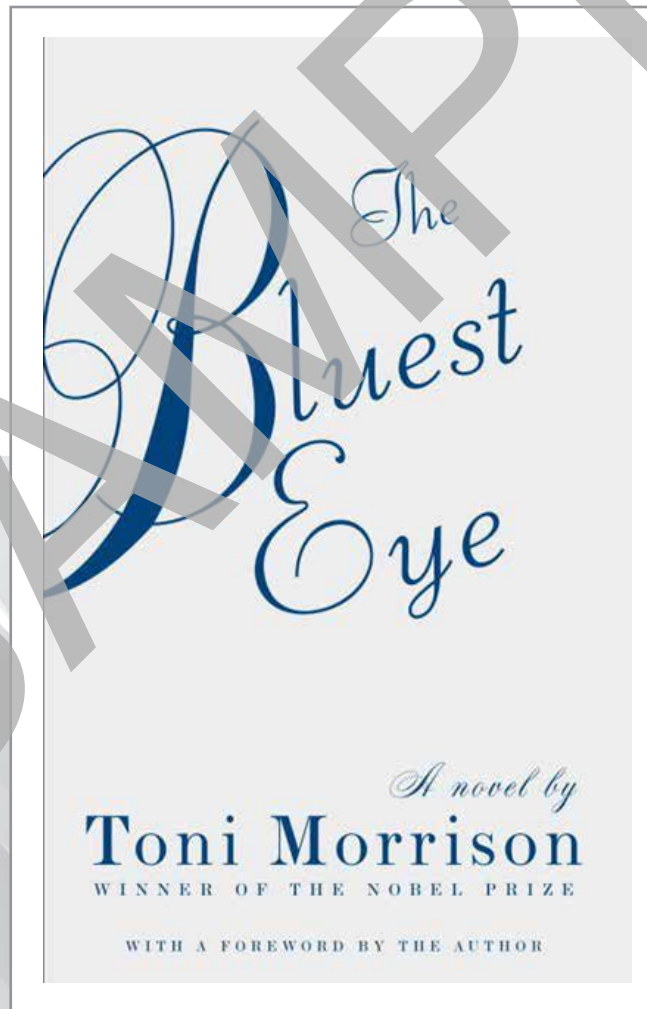
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Bluest Eye

Toni Morrison



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# The Bluest Eye

Toni Morrison

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

---

**ISBN 978-1-50203-628-5**

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2020 by Novel Units, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc.

Reproduction of any part of this publication for an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Conn Education.

Printed in the United States of America.

To order, contact your  
local school supply store, or:

Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

## Table of Contents

Summary .....	3
About the Author .....	5
Initiating Activities.....	6
Nine Sections .....	13
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions .....	26
Post-reading Extension Activities.....	28
Assessment.....	29
Glossary.....	30

## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Research, compare/contrast,  
analysis

### Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,  
application

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral  
presentation

### Comprehension

Predictions, cause/effect,  
current events

### Literary Elements

Characterization,  
personification, simile,  
metaphor, allusion, theme,  
symbolism, universality

### Writing

Poems, response, dictionary,  
critique, personal,  
advertisements

### Across the Curriculum

Art—collage, drawing,  
montage; Drama—acting,  
script; Music—ballad

---

**Genre:** fiction

**Setting:** Lorain, Ohio, early 1940s

**Point of View:** first-person and third-person omniscient

**Themes:** self-hatred, rejection, racism, survival

**Conflict:** self vs. self; family conflict; race vs. race

**Subject Material:** adolescence, self-image, sexuality, incest, family relationships, mental illness

**Style:** passages shift between narrative and the third-person omniscient voice, including stream of consciousness

**Tone:** pessimistic, hopeless

**Date of first publication:** 1970

## Summary

Pecola Breedlove, an eleven-year-old black girl, grows up in the hopelessness of a dysfunctional family and the rejection of white people and prosperous black families. She prays for blue eyes, believing this will make her loved and accepted. Pecola is raped and impregnated by her father, but the baby dies when it is born too soon. The trauma of her life and the manipulation of a self-proclaimed psychic drive her into madness.

Claudia MacTeer relates the first-person narrative sections and the omniscient voice provides information with which Claudia is not familiar. Stream-of-consciousness segments provide additional information through fragmented memories.

## Characters

### The Breedlove Family

**Pecola:** protagonist; poor, considered ugly, rejected by almost everyone in her life; convinced that only those with blue eyes are accepted and loved; is raped and impregnated by her father; after the rape, invents an imaginary friend with whom she converses

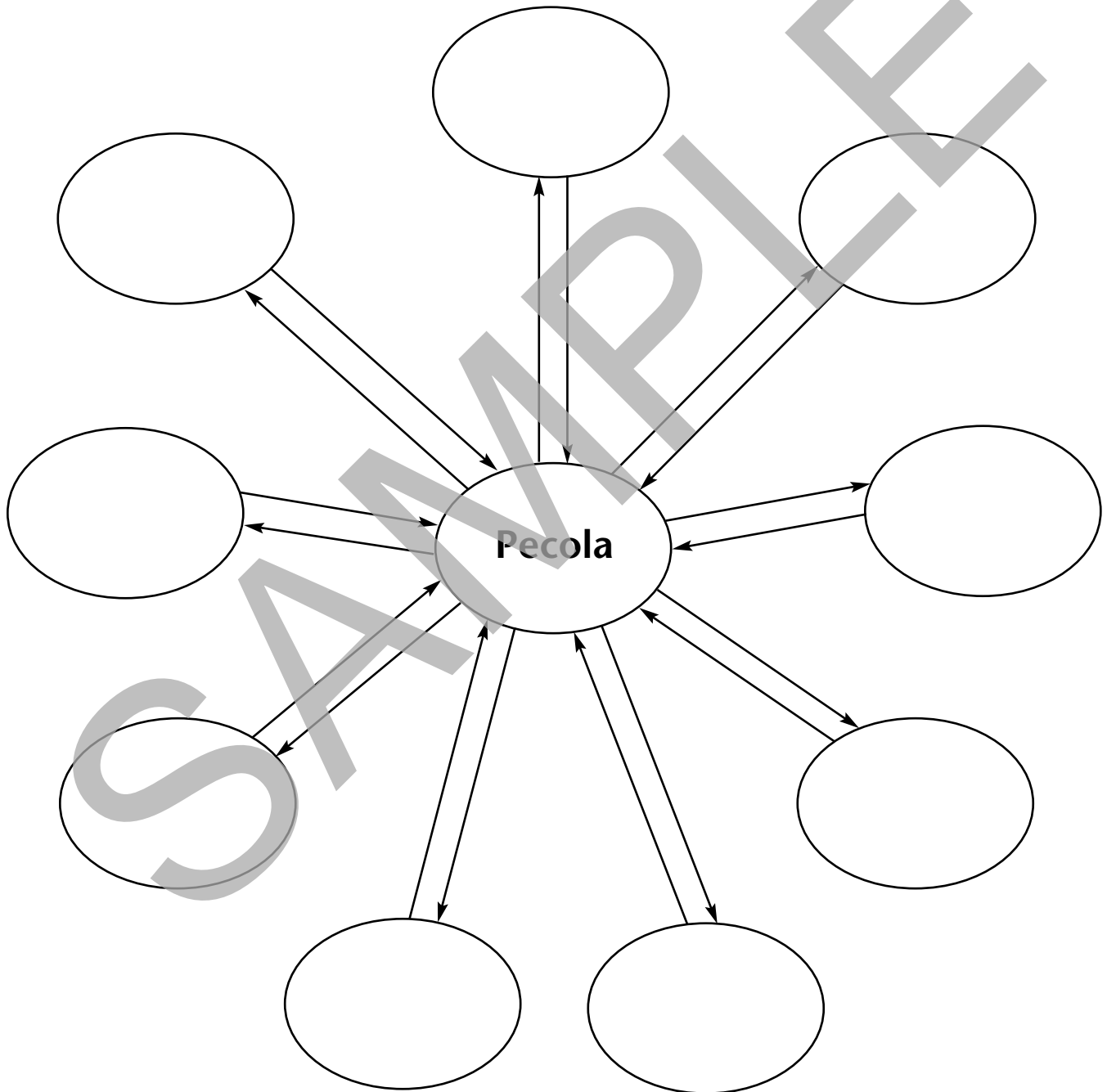
**Pauline:** wife and mother; has a lame foot; harsh and abusive toward her family; an “ideal” employee, kind and considerate to the Fisher family, for whom she works; vindictively religious, develops a “martyr” image

**Cholly:** husband and father; slothful, abusive alcoholic; abandoned as a child by his parents; raised by his great aunt; rapes his daughter; dies in the workhouse

---

## Sociogram

**Directions:** Complete the sociogram below by adding major and minor characters to the blank ovals. On the arrows, write a word or words to describe the relationship between Pecola and that character. Remember, relationships go both ways, so each line requires a descriptive word. Find examples from the text to justify your answers and refer to page numbers.



---

## Autumn

### Preface–page 32 (primarily first-person)

The preface introduces two ideas: a selection from a “Dick and Jane” primer, which will be used throughout the book to show the decline of Pecola Breedlove’s life, and Pecola’s impregnation by her own father. Claudia MacTeer, the narrator, reveals that Pecola comes to stay for a few days with the MacTeer family because her father is in jail for setting their house on fire. Pecola begins her menstrual cycle while at the MacTeer’s, introducing Claudia and her sister Frieda to the process of maturation.

#### Vocabulary

melancholy (preface)  
acridness (22)  
chagrined (24)

senile (14)  
pristine (23)  
verification (31)

peripheral (17)  
sadism (23)

plaintive (21)  
soliloquies (24)

#### Discussion Questions

1. Read aloud and analyze the preface. Discuss the selection from the “Dick and Jane” primer and the importance of the portion beginning, “Quiet as it’s kept there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941.” Note the analogy between the marigold seeds and Cholly’s seed. (*The “Dick and Jane” primer presents a perfect family doing exactly the right things, in contrast to the Breedlove family, an imperfect family doing all the wrong things. Claudia reveals a troubling secret. Cholly Breedlove impregnates his daughter, Pecola, because of his lust and despair. The MacTeer sisters believe that, by planting the marigold seeds, they can ensure that Pecola’s baby will live. Only in retrospect do the sisters realize it is not their fault that the marigolds do not grow and that the baby dies. The analogy: the sisters drop their seeds in a little plot of black dirt; Pecola’s father drops his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Just as the marigold seeds shrivel and die, so does Pecola’s baby. Preface*)
2. Analyze why the words begin to run together in the “Dick and Jane” section. (*Responses will vary. Note this gibberish pattern used to identify the third-person sections, indicating the invalidity of the “perfect family” and the increasing intensity of an out-of-control family [the Breedloves] and Pecola’s descent into insanity. Preface*)
3. Discuss Claudia’s portrayal of her home and what this reveals about her family. (*Their house is old and drafty, the family is poor, they live economically, and they take in a boarder to help ease financial strain. Their mother’s word is law, and, primarily, the children are to fit the cliché of being “seen and not heard.” Although their mother speaks brusquely, she shows deep love and concern for Claudia and her sister Frieda. Claudia realizes, as an adult, how much love existed in their home. Although Mrs. MacTeer complains about the amount of food Pecola consumes, she reacts with understanding and compassion when Pecola begins her menstrual cycle. pp. 9-15, 23-25, 31-32*)
4. Discuss why Pecola comes to stay with the MacTeer family and examine what this reveals about her family. (*She comes as a welfare case who has no place to go. She brings nothing with her. Cholly Breedlove, her father, has set their house on fire, hit his wife in the head, and forced his family “outdoors.” Cholly is in jail, Mrs. Breedlove is staying with the family for whom she works,*

---

and Pecola and her brother Sammy are staying with different families. The community considers Cholly to be a “dog.” pp. 16-19)

5. Analyze Claudia’s reaction to blue-eyed, white baby dolls. (*Claudia, a black child, hates the white dolls and wants to dismember them. Finding them uncomfortable to sleep with and hating their appearance, she breaks off their fingers, loosens their hair, removes their eyes, etc. This hatred extends to little white girls and leads her to despise anything connected with Shirley Temple, who reminds her of the dolls. Claudia’s hatred is indicative of her confusion over people’s delighted responses to white children but never to her.* pp. 19-23)
6. Examine the relationship between Pecola and the MacTeer sisters. Discuss the universality of the girls’ reaction to Pecola’s first menstrual period. (*Pecola is complaisant, and the girls get along well. The sisters enjoy having Pecola with them and want her to feel welcome. Pecola is frightened when she begins her menstrual period. Frieda understands what is happening, and the girls attempt to take care of her until their neighbor Rosemary sees them and tells their mother; universality: they realize the importance of such a big event and discuss the possibility of having a baby, showing their partial understanding of sex and maturity.* pp. 18-19, 27-32)

### Supplementary Activities

1. Refer to home remedies Mrs. MacTeer uses (pp. 10-11). Have students ask parents or grandparents about early home remedies and present their findings to the class.
2. Have students analyze the metaphor comparing the lives of the black people with a garment: “Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment” (p. 17).
3. Note the literary devices: **Similes**—nuns go by as quiet as lust (p. 9); it (Claudia’s vomit) moves like the insides of an uncooked egg (p. 11); love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup (p. 12); their conversation is like a gently wicked dance...with laughter like the throb of a heart made of jelly (p. 15); propertied black people...like frenzied, desperate birds (p. 18); pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips (p. 21); cry sounded like bleat of a dying lamb (p. 21); Saturdays sat on my head like a coal scuttle (p. 26) **Metaphor**—Cholly: dog, snake (p. 18) **Allusions**—movie stars Greta Garbo, Ginger Rogers (p. 16), Shirley Temple (p. 19); references to time period: Henry Ford, Roosevelt, CCC camps (p. 25)

### Pages 33–58 (third-person omniscient)

Note the phrases from the Dick and Jane reader at the beginning of each third-person section. Relate this “gibberish” to the ensuing section.

This section portrays the bleakness of the Breedloves’ home in the front of an abandoned store, their poverty, and their dysfunctional family life. The family is black and believe themselves to be ugly. The parents fight violently, Pecola endures, and her brother, Sammy, runs away or joins the fracas. Pecola prays for blue eyes, believing they will make her beautiful and loved. She finds refuge with the three prostitutes who live above the storefront.