



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

THE BLUEST EYE

BY TONI MORRISON



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Written by Kelley Stacey Morrison

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Questionnaire****Objective:** Preparing for a close reading of the text**Activity**

In her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison deals with a variety of difficult and controversial subjects. Such topics include racism, poverty, child abuse, rape, and incest. To better understand and appreciate the novel, think about the following questions. Write a short answer for each question, containing at least two or three sentences.

1. Do you believe that racism is prevalent in American society today? Give examples to support your point.
2. The setting of the novel is Ohio in the early 1940s. Do you think racism was more of a problem in 1940s America than it is today? What things may have been different for black people back then, as opposed to today? Give reasons to support your answers.
3. Have you ever felt that you didn't quite measure up to a standard of beauty? In other words, did you ever wish that your hair was different, or that you were taller, or that you looked like a movie star, etc.? If so, how did you deal with those feelings? If not, what advice would you give to someone who is unhappy with the way he or she looks?
4. Have you ever been bullied at school? If so, describe the experience and how it made you feel. If not, how would you imagine a bullied person might feel?
5. The novel takes place during the Great Depression, a time in which America experienced extremely high levels of poverty and unemployment. What do you think it might have been like to a child growing up in such a time?
6. What do you think should happen to someone who abuses a child?
7. If someone is brought up in an abusive environment, do you think that person is more likely to become an abuser as well? If so, how can such a cycle be stopped, in your opinion?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Autumn – Summer**Personification Chart****Objective:** Identifying personification in the text**Activity**

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison uses several literary devices to lend a style all her own to the novel and to make descriptions more interesting. Personification is a literary device that occurs abundantly in the novel. Personification occurs when an inanimate object or idea is given human qualities—for example, “The house was so small and dark that it seemed to crouch down and cover itself with the trees surrounding it.”

While reading the novel, keep an eye out for instances of personification that you encounter. As you find them, use the Personification Chart to write the quote from the book that shows personification. In the second column, write down what the personification is trying to say. You can keep adding to the chart until you have finished reading the entire book. The first example is done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Prologue – Summer**Symbolism Chart****Objective:** Understanding symbolism**Activity**

Symbols usually stand in for abstract ideas and serve to illustrate important themes. For example, the marigolds in the story symbolize hope and the renewal of life. Claudia and Frieda plant the marigolds with the belief that if the marigolds take root and survive, then Pecola's baby will also survive.

The Bluest Eye is filled with symbolism. As you read the novel, look for instances of the symbols listed in the following chart. As you encounter those symbols, write what you believe the symbol represents. You may encounter many more symbols than those listed. If so, then add those to the chart or write them on a separate sheet of paper. The first one is done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Autumn**Newspaper Article****Objective:** Writing a newspaper article**Activity**

Early in the story, we learn that Cholly Breedlove has burned down his own house, leaving his family homeless. We are not told any details about the circumstances surrounding his crime. Your job is to imagine the details of Cholly's act and write a newspaper article on the incident.

Split up into groups or pairs. Each group should have a blank sheet of poster board upon which the newspaper article will be written. You may choose to designate which person should do the writing and which decides what to include in the article. Create your article by following the instructions below.

- Devise a catchy headline for your article. Imitate actual newspaper headlines that you have seen. Make your headline short and to the point, and leave out articles such as *a*, *an* and *the*.
- Remember the *Five W's 1 H* of newspaper writing: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Try to answer all five questions in the first paragraph of your article. This may be difficult, so any that are not answered in this paragraph should definitely be addressed in the second paragraph.
- In subsequent paragraphs, go into further detail about the crime and its effect on the community. In doing so, insert a quote from each of the following people:
 - Pauline Breedlove
 - Pecola Breedlove
 - a fireman
 - a neighbor
 - a police officer
- Feel free to include a drawing or a cut-out picture to go along with the article. If you do so, remember to give the drawing or picture a caption explaining it.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Winter**Writing****Objective:** Writing a descriptive paragraph about a scene**Activity**

Toni Morrison describes Geraldine's house through Pecola's eyes:

How beautiful, she thought. What a beautiful house. There was a big red-and-gold Bible on the dining-room table. Little lace doilies were everywhere—on arms and backs of chairs, in the center of a large dining table, on little tables. Potted plants were on all the windowsills. A color picture of Jesus Christ hung on a wall with the prettiest paper flowers fastened on the frame. She wanted to see everything slowly, slowly....another room, even more beautiful than the first. More doilies, a big lamp with green-and-gold base and white shade. There was even a rug on the floor, with enormous dark-red flowers.

Pretend you are a Hollywood screenwriter. A character in your script has just walked into someone else's home. What kind of place is it? Is it an opulent mansion? Is it a small, cramped apartment with dirty dishes in the sink? What does the place smell like? What colors does your character see? Your job is to write a paragraph describing in detail what your character sees. Remember to use lots of appropriate adjectives to describe the scene. Have the character look around. What is unusual; what seems perfectly normal; what is out of place? What might be outside a window? Does the room have a "feel" about it? Remember, also, to consider the five senses as you are writing: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Your paragraph should be long enough to get the feel and look of the room across to the reader.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Winter**Writing a Play****Objective:** Rewriting a scene as a play**Activity**

Claudia and Frieda MacTeer have a conversation with Mr. Henry in the kitchen of their home. Re-read this scene, imagining the characters on a stage; then rewrite it as a scene in a play. Make sure you include stage directions. Here are some things to remember:

- Use italics when describing a scene and when writing stage directions.
- Use brackets for stage directions.

Begin with the line, "The house was quiet when we opened the door." The scene has been started for you.

[Claudia and Frieda enter the house. Everything is quiet. The smell of cooking turnips fills the scene.]

Claudia: Mama!

Mr. Henry *[shuffling down the stairs in his bathrobe]*: Hello there, Greta Garbo; hello, Ginger Rogers.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Spring**Letter of Reference****Objective:** Writing a letter of reference**Activity**

Throughout *Spring*, we learn many new things about Pauline Breedlove, including her actions and attitudes as a nanny and maid at the Fishers' house. Her past, her marriage, and her interpersonal relationships are revealed. However, while we may disapprove of the way she deals with her own family, we cannot deny that she does a superlative job working for the Fishers.

Imagine Pauline is applying for a new position with a different household. Pretend you are Mr. or Mrs. Fisher and Pauline has asked you to write a letter of reference for her. Write at least three paragraphs about her, mentioning her dress, manners, attitude, punctuality, work ethic, and anything else you think the prospective employer should know. The letter of reference has been started for you.

To Whom It May Concern:

For the years I have known Pauline Breedlove...

Name: _____

Date: _____

Summer**Dialogue****Objective:** Rewriting dialogue in paragraph form**Activity**

In this section, a long dialogue takes place in Pecola's mind. The dialogue continues for a few pages. Reread these pages and imagine what it would be like if Toni Morrison wrote them in paragraph form instead of in dialogue form. Your job is to distill the entire dialogue into at least three paragraphs. Make sure you hit on all major points of the dialogue. The first paragraph has been started for you. You may certainly change the beginning to suit the way you want to write your version.

Pecola stares into a mirror and speaks; she is clearly delusional. The conversation is with an imaginary friend in the form of an interior monologue. Pecola keeps checking to make sure her eyes are still blue. She is afraid the blueness may go away, despite Soaphead's assurances that if she killed Bob, she'd have the blue eyes she wants....

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Letter to the Author

Objective: Composing a letter to the author

Activity

Writing about her novel twenty-three years after its publication, Toni Morrison has discussed her reasons for writing *The Bluest Eye* and her feelings toward the book. She expressed some dissatisfaction with her own writing. She wrote:

One problem was centering: the weight of the novel's inquiry on so delicate and vulnerable a character could smash her and lead readers into the comfort of pitying her rather than into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing. My solution—break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader—seemed to me a good idea, the execution of which does not satisfy me now. Besides, it didn't work: many readers remain touched but not moved....I was not able to secure throughout the work the feminine subtext that is present in the opening sentence...The shambles this struggle became is most evident in the section on Pauline Breedlove, where I resorted to two voices, hers and the urging narrator's, both of which are extremely unsatisfactory to me.

What do you think about Ms. Morrison's criticism of her own book? Do you agree with her? Do you disagree? Write a letter to Toni Morrison telling her your feelings about the book and giving your opinion regarding her points of criticism. Tell her what you liked about the book and what you disliked. Tell her who your favorite character was and why you liked that character. Tell her anything you would like to say about the book. Make your letter at least four paragraphs long. The first few lines have been done for you.

Dear Toni Morrison,

I really enjoyed reading *The Bluest Eye*. It made me think a lot about beauty and how destructive "ideal" beauty can be. I find it interesting that you are dissatisfied with the way you broke apart the narrative...