

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Bluest Eye

by Toni Morrison

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The Bluest Eye

Notes

The Bluest Eye is Nobel Prize winning author Toni Morrison's first novel, written in 1970. It is the story of a young black girl living in the 1940's, who is searching for her identity in a predominately white-controlled world. Pecola wishes for blue eyes because she is convinced that if she had blue eyes, she would be beautiful, happy, and loved.

Although the themes of this story, which center around one's dependency on the world for self-identification and self-worth, are universal, the story includes some controversial incidents: incest, rape, personal hygiene, and sexually explicit descriptions. The vocabulary level is also challenging with some profanity and use of the word "nigger." The more difficult-to-handle sections should be approached tactfully. Overall, the novel is appropriate for mature high school students and is likely to spark some interesting discussions on whether or not the voice of society, concerning what is and what is not beautiful, has changed since the writing of this work.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the ways the quotations from the primer at the start of the chapters represent the collective voice of society.
2. infer information about characters and events when it is not explicitly stated.
3. discuss what the following may represent in the story: milk, the quilt, the Shirley Temple cup, Pauline's foot, the color green, marigolds, and Mary Jane candy bars.
4. recognize Morrison's writing style, which includes interesting descriptive phrases and images.
5. recognize when the narrator changes from Claudia (first person narration) to third person narration; discuss the advantages of each type of narration for this story.
6. define vocabulary words from the story.
7. discuss the importance of family love to help black children overcome or resist the social forces that promote racial self-loathing.
8. define and cite examples from *The Bluest Eye* of the following literary terms:
 - metaphor
 - simile
 - symbol
 - irony
 - folklore
 - theme
 - parallelism
 - allusion
 - omniscient
9. relate the ways each of the following characters try to escape from their unhappy lives: Cholly, Pecola, Sammy, Mrs. Breedlove, The Maginot Line, Geraldine, Soaphead Church; comment on whether or not they succeed.
10. discuss the reasons Pecola wishes for blue eyes.
11. understand the overall theme of the novel: how the collective voice of society, which tells black people they must adhere to unattainable white standards and expectations, is destructive to black people, and results in racial self-loathing; explain how the theme impacts Pecola's relationship with the black community, her family life, her friendships, her sexuality, and her sanity.
12. comment on the significance of the fact that the four parts of the novel correspond with the four seasons of the year.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. State the overall theme for this novel.
2. What do the reading primer passages at the beginning of chapters represent in this story? Why are the phrases of the primer repeated and run together?
3. The second short section (referred to in this unit as a “prologue”) begins with the sentence, “Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941.” What information about the story does this beginning give to the reader about the setting and tone or mood of the story?
4. Marigolds are also mentioned in the last two chapters of the story. What do you think they might symbolize in this novel? Explain how the symbolism of marigolds and other symbols add to the overall mood or tone of *The Bluest Eye*.
5. What do each of the following items represent in the story?
 - three quarts of milk
 - the quilt
 - the Shirley Temple cup
 - Pauline’s foot
 - Mary Jane candy bars
6. Who narrates the chapters in the book describing Cholly’s childhood and Pauline’s childhood? Which chapters does Claudia narrate? Why do you think Morrison switches between the two narrators?
7. What does the color green symbolize in the story? Find two passages in the novel to support your answer.
8. Both Pecola and Frieda experience sexual abuse. Why does Frieda seem to survive the abuse with her emotions intact; why does Pecola go insane?
9. Pecola prays for blue eyes. Why does she think blue eyes will improve her life?
10. How do the black women in the community feel about Pecola after her rape?
11. Why is it ironic that Cholly covers Pecola with a quilt after the rape?

Autumn**Chapter 1**

VOCABULARY

acridness – bitterness of taste or smell
chagrined – annoyed, disappointed, embarrassed
consolidate – to combine into a single whole; merge; unite
dismember – to remove the limbs of by cutting
fraudulent – deceitful
fructify – become fruitful
furtive – acting in a stealthy manner, sneaky
interminable – endless, seeming to last forever
irrevocable – cannot be changed
metaphysical – supernatural
moronic – very foolish or stupid, idiotic
peripheral – only slightly connected with what is essential or important; merely incidental
preened – showed satisfaction with or vanity in oneself
pristine – pure
psyche – the human soul
sadism – getting pleasure from inflicting pain
soliloquies – talks with oneself
unsullied – untarnished, pure
verification – confirmation of the truth or accuracy of a fact

1. Who is the narrator for this chapter? Morrison's writing style includes many descriptive phrases and interesting imagery. What adjectives does she use to describe her home?

3. Why do you think Pecola is attracted to Geraldine's cat?

4. What message about herself does Pecola receive when Geraldine kicks her out of the house? What does Geraldine think about Pecola?

5. Why do you suppose Morrison titles this part of the book Winter?

9. There is no real excuse for Cholly’s act of rape. However, some critics believe Cholly’s terrible action is explained by his past. Cite some incidents from his past that you believe help to make it possible for him to rape his daughter.

10. In Chapter 3 of Autumn, Pauline covers Cholly with a blanket after knocking him unconscious. Why is it ironic that Cholly covers Pecola with a blanket after raping her?

11. What does the last line in this chapter imply to the reader concerning Pauline’s reaction to Pecola’s rape?
