

Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye: Summary & Analysis

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison tells the story of a young African American, Pecola, and the social struggles of the time period, including the difficulties of growing up as a young black woman in the 1940s. In this novel, the upper class creates a standard of beauty that society mimics, aided by advertising through various media outlets, such as magazines and television. The remainder of society questions where they belong and they confuse their true identity with mimicry of the upper class. Morrison uses point of view, setting, and symbolism in her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, to demonstrate society's longing to mimic the quintessence of beauty during the 1940s.

Throughout *The Bluest Eye*, physical beauty affects the self-esteem of almost every character because several media outlets define it based on the culture of the time period. In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison states, "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (26), which sheds light on the epitome of beauty that the media creates. Claudia's outlook on the racially biased idea



Claudia's outlook on the racially biased ideal of beauty represents one where she tries to resist the pressure of worshipping such ideals and even though she tries it really changes nothing.

African Americans, based on the definition of beauty established, lack the consideration of attractiveness. Morrison states, "Except for the father, Cholly, [€!], the rest of the family – Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove – wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them" (25). For example, Pauline tries to replicate what she believes matches the idealized form of beauty that she sees through media outlets yet she finds out that this beauty is unattainable because of her different hair, skin, and features. African Americans in the novel come up with definitions of beauty from the "white supreme" culture and members of the community that match those ideals are considered to be beautiful, like Maureen Peal. These communities isolate the rest of society who does not match up to these ideals and least resembles them, such as Pecola.

Morrison integrates the pressure that blacks feel the need to live up to the beauty standards set by white society with regards to racism in Lorain, Ohio. Morrison mentions little about white neighborhoods such as those belonging to Rosemary Villanucci, even though white characters exist throughout the book. According to *Novels for Students*, Morrison focuses on the neighborhoods of the MacTeers and Breedloves because these characters of African American descent obsess over the beauty standards created by society (77).

Pecola defines beauty as one who has blue eyes and only then can she transcend from her ugliness to live in a world where everything is easier, including the behavior her parents exhibit. According to *Novels for Students*, "Pecola worships the beautiful, white icons of the 1940s: she drinks three quarts of milk at the MacTeer's house so that she can use the cup with Shirley Temple's picture on it, buys Mary Janes at the candy store so that she can admire the picture of the blond haired, blue eyed girl on the wrapper" (72). Pecola believes she possesses blue eyes towards the end of the novel, and the delusion she goes through represents the damage the ideals of white society can have on a young girl who revolves her life around these ideals.



(72). Pecola believes she possesses blue eyes towards the end of the novel, and the delusion she goes through represents the damage the ideals of white society can have on a young black girl who revolves her life around these ideals since young, minority women believe they have no choice other than to fit in.

Morrison uses the Dick and Jane excerpts to show the changes that occur during the time period of the 1940s through the 1960s.

According to critic Phyllis R. Klotman, the three versions of the reader presented on the first page of *The Bluest Eye* represent the three lifestyles presented in the novel (77). Morrison uses the first excerpt with proper punctuation to represent the ideal white family in the novel.

Morrison uses the second version which does not contain proper punctuation or capitalization to represent the MacTeers. Morrison describes the MacTeer family as loving and stable in comparison to the Breedloves (Henningfeld 83).

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