The Bluest Eye

*The Bluest Eye,* a novel by Toni Morrison, unveils the tragedy of beauty in society. Living in Lorain, Ohio in 1939, an 11 year old African American girl Pecola Breedlove yearns for the ‘bluest eye’, which she associates with a better life where adults wouldn’t look at her with a detached look and children wouldn’t mock her. Drinking milk from a Shirley Temple cup and choosing ‘Mary Jane’ candies for the classically beautiful girl decorating the wrapper, Pecola shows her desire to one day have her family become the epitome of the “Dick and Jane” family. Far from her ideal, Pecola’s family struggles to have any sense of love live in their home. Both Mr. and Mrs. Breedlove physically abuse each other, and later on, Pecola is sexually abused by her father, the climax of the story. When her father is in jail for a different crime, her family is split up. She then goes to the MacTeers’ more stable home where Pecola becomes almost like a sister to the MacTeer girls, Frieda and Claudia. Eventually, Pecola’s far-fetched wish gets the best of her, and she goes insane, believing she possesses the bluest eyes. Because she does not have blue eyes (she was tricked by evil Elihue, or Soaphead Church), people are not able to see them, so she concludes they are just jealous.

Character Descriptions- Kathryn Surmeier

**Pecola Breedlove:** abused, unloved, hopeful, poverty-ridden, self-loathing. She is the protagonist fighting against several antagonists: an abusive family, a racist society, and even herself. She believes with all her heart that she is ugly and because of this ugliness that no one will love her. Pecola uses dandelions as a metaphor for herself. When she is happy she believes that the dandelions are beautiful--certainly not weeds. She wonders why people say, “Mrs. So-and-so keeps her yard so nice. Not a dandelion in sight.” But when she is angry, she tells them they are ugly weeds and don’t deserve beauty. She wants to have blue eyes more than anything--
something she associates with a loving home, even to the extreme of the “Dick and Jane” family--
perfect in every way. This ideal is very far from her abusive home, which is in an abandoned
store-front. She has one older brother who has run away 27 times to deal with his parents
fighting. Pecola’s ugliness is very important because she believes it is the fault of all her
problems while the solution is blue eyes. Her father rapes her once when she’s only 11, in the
kitchen filled with broken dishes. The broken dishes represent her ‘ruined’ state of being. As a
result of the rape, she becomes pregnant, something that affects her forever. Later, she always
feels pitied or blamed by members of her society. She goes completely insane at the end,
believing she’s been given blue eyes. Obviously, this is a change from the beginning when she
was sane, even hopeful, to going insane. This quote on page 38 really wraps on Pecola in two
sentences: “How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?”

**Frieda MacTeer**: motherly, helpful, fun-loving, loving, guilt-ridden. Frieda risks
harassment to defend her friend Pecola from bullies. When she’s only about 12, she’s sexually
abused by Mr. Henry. Frieda feels guilty when Pecola’s baby dies, even though she has no fault
in it. Whippings not only physically wounded her, but insulted her as well (pg 31) “We tried to
see her without looking at her, and never, never went near. Not because she was absurd, or
repulsive, or because we were frightened, but because we had failed her. Our flowers never
grew….so we avoided Pecola Breedlove forever.” She tries to help Pecola when she gets her
period, even though she benefits nothing. That is just the type of caring person Frieda is. She
abandons caution to have fun. She and Claudia are very close. According to her sister, she
knows everything. Claudia and she call Maureen Peel ‘Meringue Pie’ because they are jealous of
her. She understands jealousy is natural, but is new to envy. She is the older of the two MacTeer
sisters and takes charge of situations because of it.
Claudia MacTeer: prideful, helpful, awe-full of Claudia. Like Frieda, she feels guilty about Pecola’s dead baby. She wanted that baby, not because she was interested in babies, but because everyone hated that baby. As the younger sister of Frieda, she has the younger-sister awe of her and believes she knows everything. She hated baby dolls because she had no interest of being a mother, only the interest of children her own age. The novel is written in her point of view. She has violent notions expressed throughout the book, but rarely acts on them. She is bemused, fascinated, and irritated of Maureen Peel along with her sister. She searched the girl for flaws (p 63) “We always responded to the slightest change in weather, the most minute shifts in the time of day.” (p. 64) Claudia (and her sister Frieda) were eager for change, so they celebrated the very least amount. She expects white people to not be friends with black people, or even be nice to them.

Maureen Peel: adored, white, dream-child, enchanting, two-faced. Maureen is “a high yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back.” She is wealthy compared to the other children, and loved by all. “She even bought and liked white milk.” (p. 63) She was not afraid to stand out from the crowd. She has a charming dog tooth, and was born with a sixth finger on each hand, which, when removed, left a tiny nub. She has high quality clothes and green eyes. “She enchanted the entire school.” (p. 62) She buys Pecola ice cream but ignores Frieda and Claudia completely when walking home with them. She calls Pecola and the MacTeer sisters ugly and black, so they get into a fight.

Mrs. Breedlove: no self-esteem, crippled, abusive, needed fights. “She wore ugliness”, and that conviction made her ugly. She had small eyes set closely together under heavy straight eyebrow. Her narrow forehead, low irregular hairline, crooked nose, insolent nostrils, and high cheekbones, did nothing to contradict her opinion of her beauty (or lack thereof). She had ears
turned forward. Mrs. Breedlove, Pauline, abuses her husband as well as she is abused by her husband. She starts fights with her drunk husband over little things. She is called Polly by the little Fisher girl, but she’s called Mrs. Breedlove by her own family. She smacks her injured daughter for accidentally knocking over a pie, but coddles the Fisher girl when she gets some stains on her dress at the same incident. She has a twisted foot she always felt was a disability until Cholly (Mr. Breedlove) who made her think it was an asset. Pauline took care of her house and her little siblings when she was a young teen, (younger than 15). At first, she loved housekeeping and the solitude, but later on, she refuses to keep her house nice. She kept the beauty and order of the Fishers house to herself, “never introduced it to her storefront of her children.” In this way, Mrs. Breedlove is partially selfish because she has something nice and doesn’t want to share it.

1. Why do you think Mrs. Breedlove lacks confidence?

2. Why do you feel that Maureen Peel is important to this story?

Settings-Marina Dennis

The settings in, “The Bluest Eye” moves around, and is symbolic of the situation the characters, are in. The different places also have different meanings in how the story plays out; these setting changes the playing rules in what the characters can and cannot do. Freida and Claudia's house is the closest Pecola ever gets to, “Dick and Jane’. The Breedlove home is where the trauma of Pecola’s life takes place. We find out why that house is so twisted, what happens in Virgina and the Fisher's house.

Claudia describes her house as cold, but she still says the house is green. There for symbolizing that this house is as close to the “Dick and Jane” scenario as it gets. This is the only
place where Pecola is taken care of. This is the safest she ever was in the story. This house is a
dream come true compared to the other place Pecola had lived.

The falling down store front where the Breedlove’s live, is described as a falling box of
gray in a worn down area. the place had had many lives before the breed loves moved in adding
to the atmospheres and the smells within the lace. There was piping for a professional kitchen,
and grease stained ceilings from when the pace was a pizza parlor. A fine layer of dust seemed
permit in the place reminisce of the flower coated air from when the place had been a bakery.
Hiding the plain wall paper and cooperate feel underneath. The large plate glass windows with
long high seals, were left behind by a whore house. Taking what was left behind the Breedlove’s
move in, adding thick news paper to the Windows and dents from fling objects in the walls.
Beaver wood (also know a ply wood) divides the place into two rooms. The emotional scares left
from this place contribute to Pecola’s horrible self esteem.

Why the house lacks the feel of a home is partly because of Miss. Breedlove’s
hopelessness when is comes to her family. When Miss. Breedlove started her job at the Fisher’s
home. She saw everything that the fishers had. A nice large white home with a yard, running
water, a thermostat all the food they could want, It was “Dick and Jane” in the flesh, lake view
and all.

The violence comes from Colly. He grew up in rural Virgina. This run town town had
problems every where. In a back ally with a stupid girl, Cholly is take advantage of by two white
boys. From that moment of the setting gets bleaker and bleaker.

Every one of these setting is compared to, “Dick and Jane”. Pecola’s world is a half
cracked swirl. the atmosphere around her doesn't help her find her self it just drives her closer
and closer to the edge.

Claudia and Freida's home. pages 10
Breedloove home pages 34, 35
Fisher home pages 105- 109
Virgina town pages 132-135

1. How do you think our subconscious comparison between our lives and the characters in the book, affects our view of the characters?

2. How do you think the affects of the setting helped lead to Pecola break down?

Style-Lindsay Chandler

_The Bluest Eye_ is written by Toni Morrison, who writes with many similes, metaphors, as well as imagery that helps create vivid pictures. It starts with the classic tale of “Dick and Jane” which creates irony. Dick and Jane are part of a perfect, happy, playful, white family. Jane wears a pretty red dress, has a dog, and a beautiful white house. The author then runs the sentences together, and the gap between the two worlds is emphasized. The world of Pecola, Cholly, Claudia, and Frieda is nothing like Dick and Jane’s.

Morrison uses metaphoric language on page 50 when Pecola compares herself to ugly dandelions after the clerk at the candy store makes her feel ashamed of herself. Then, to keep herself from crying, she eats one of her Mary Janes. She says eating the candy is like ‘eating Mary Jane’ and her eyes. Metaphoric imagery is used on page 61. It is the opening of winter where Claudia says, “My daddy’s face is a study. Winter moves into it and presides there.” His eyes become a cliff of snow, his eyebrows bend like tree limbs etc. She compares him to a Vulcan guarding the flames, which means he teaches them how to distribute heat, rake, feed, bank the fire, and more. Toni also reveals imagery when she describes the terror of the “outside world”, and the Breedlove’s home. The Breedlove’s moved into a storefront that became ugly and empty right when they moved in, so their home represents who they are. Another technique
Morrison uses is making her writing clear by she using imagery to describe the events in her scenes. For example, she describes exactly what happened when Cholly came home drunk and fought with his wife, when Junior taunts Pecola with his cat and blames her for its death, or when Pecola thinks she has blue eyes and goes mad. Readers will get an incredibly accurate mental picture of these three scenes.

The chapters in this novel are divided into four seasons: Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer. One would think that happy things would happen in the spring because it is described as hopeful, but basically everything that happens has a negative impact on the character’s lives. The mood of this novel could be hopelessness, anger, or admiration. There is a lot of giving up, so it is upsetting, and many characters in this book are unjust. White people always looked down upon blacks, and everyone looked down on Pecola. They looked at her and felt better about themselves. It says on page 205, “The birdlike gestures are worn away to a mere picking and plucking her way between the tire rims and the sunflowers...among all the waste and beauty of the world-which is what she herself was. All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed...All of us-all who knew her-felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her.”

This book makes us sympathize with every character, therefore it has a sympathetic tone. Pecola is the most obvious, but we don’t get to read about how she feels as much as what happens to her, whereas, the other characters, especially Claudia, have parts about their feelings. Claudia makes sense of the story. To sympathize with Cholly and Pauline, the author uses flashbacks. Also, the tone could be reflective since Claudia, Frieda, and Mrs. Breedlove are the ones telling the story.

The diction in this novel comes in with dialogue that captures African American speech patterns. Morrison gives credit to her family for giving her the rhythms of African American culture.

The symbol that is most obvious in *The Bluest Eye* is Pecolas’s blue eyes. It represents the theme for the entire book.
1. From what you know about the book, what are some other words to describe the mood? Does it change at the end?

2. How does Toni Morrison’s style reveal her personality?

Theme/Purpose- Mary Kate Kelly

There are two major themes in *The Bluest Eye*. The first is the struggle to find beauty in everyone. This is what Pecola Breedlove especially struggles with, the stereotype of white, blued-eyed girl being the defining factor of beauty. Because she is African American, Pecola has been deemed ugly by the town’s white population. In a desperate desire to be seen as pretty in the eyes of others, Pecola wishes for blue eyes. These precious blue eyes symbolize how one person perceives another. For example, Mrs, Breedlove works for a well-off white family. When Pecola is at the family’s house also, Mrs. Breedlove chooses to care for and pay much more attention to the young white girl as opposed to her own daughter. Part of Pecola’s desire for blue eyes is her desire to be seen as white girls are seen. She wants to be loved as they are and to possess society’s white definition of beauty. This theme of the beauty inside every person is just as applicable today as it was in the 1940’s.

A second thematic element in this book is the horrors of sexual abuse. As if she didn’t already have enough heavy burdens on her shoulders, Pecola encounters another horrible situation. Cholly Breedlove, Pecola’s alcoholic father, rapes her in the kitchen of their home. Cholly’s twisted justification for his act is that he is the only one who loves her enough to ever give her this sexual act. Although Cholly might believe that he has reasonable motives, the rape forever scars Pecola. She becomes pregnant with her father’s baby, and the baby dies after being born prematurely. Pecola’s childhood is yet again shaped for the worse. In the book, the broad
term “ruined” is used to describe a female who is damaged because of sexual reasons. In truth, Pecola’s rape did ruin her, for it brought her downfall into insanity.

1. What do you think is society’s current definition of beauty? How are teenagers especially susceptible this?

2. If you were in Pecola’s situation, how would you handle being sexually abused? How would the situation be different in the 1940’s compared to present day?

Extra Credit--

**Langston Hughes'**

*Mother to Son*

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor --
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin’ corners, 
And sometimes goin' in the dark 
Where there ain't been no light. 
So boy, don't you turn back. 
Don't you set down on the steps 
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard. 
Don't you fall now -- 
For I'se still goin', honey, 
I'se still climbin', 
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

**How it relates:** This poem relates to *The Bluest Eye*, because like young Pecola, the speaker in “Mother to Son” has had a hard life. Unlike in *The Bluest Eye*, however, the speaker never gave up, while Pecola ended up going mad from her hard life. Pecola tried to keep going, but her life just became too hard, and she ended up believing that she was given blue eyes. Rather than facing the reality that the speaker in *The Bluest Eye* had—that life was hard and there was no perfect answer, Pecola truly needed to believe that there was an answer and she had it.