

The bluest eye by morrison: characters, themes, personal opinion essay



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Toni Morrison wrote her first and famous novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970. The author tells the story about the tragic fate and death of Pecola Breedlove, an African-American girl whose mother knew that her dark-skinned child would grow up ugly. *The Bluest Eye* “portrays the tragedy, which results when African Americans have no resources with which to fight the standards presented to them by the white culture.”¹ The novel was banned in many American schools because of vulgar and obscene language, as well as sexually explicit descriptions. Nevertheless, this book addresses some crucial issues, such as appearance stereotypes, racism, and femininity, and depicts complex relationships between the main characters.

The story begins in 1940, it is told on behalf of nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer, Pecola’s only friend, who is younger than the main character for two years. Pecola Breedlove, a dark-skinned girl, lives in a world owned by whites. She believes that her life would be better and easier if she were white, too. Blue eyes are a symbol of whiteness for the little girl. She watches her father, Cholly Breedlove, who becomes increasingly violent and frustrated as his dreams are shattered. Moreover, he suffers constant humiliation because of the color of his skin. Her mother, Pauline, fends off the problems by an orderly life, continuous cleaning, and working as a maid in a white family.

One spring evening, Pecola is raped by his drunken father. She gets pregnant after he rapes her a second time.² The traumatized girl loses touch with reality and goes to the priest and swindler Elihue Micah Whitcomb, nicknamed Soaphead Church, with a request to make her eyes blue. He claims that he can help, but in exchange for a favor. Soaphead

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Church wants to get rid of the old, sick dog and gives Pecola the poisoned meat, saying that only feeding the dog will show if her wish comes true. When the dog starts gagging and limping, Pecola believes she will get her blue eyes.

The rape and the incident with the dog drive Pecola crazy. More than that, her baby dies, which finally leads to destroying her connection with reality. The girl believes that her eyes have turned blue, and she invents an imaginary friend who is always there and tells her that her eyes are the bluest in the world. Pecola Breedlove, who could not see herself figuratively before, has solved the problem. Now she literally sees herself in the most perverted and tragic form.

The protagonist of *The Bluest Eye* is a young dark-skinned and poor girl growing up in the early 1940s. Almost all people repeatedly call her ugly, from other pupils to her mother. This continuous bullying and criticism, that Pecola has to suffer, lead her to seek escape from her misery. That is why she begins to dream of becoming more beautiful and possessing blue eyes. This false belief becomes entirely destructive for the little girl, consuming her life, and creating critical mental problems. At the end of the novel, Pecola becomes convinced that everyone looks at her strangely because she eventually got blue eyes. Furthermore, she imagines a friend whom she frequently talks to about her dream come true.

The primary narrator of the novel is a curious, emotional young girl who is brought up in a loving family. Besides, she represents a rebel character throughout the book as, unlike Pecola, she tries to resist appearance

stereotypes and beauty icons. This position can be exemplified by the way she treats the protagonist. Claudia is kind to Pecola Breedlove, loves her, and even sincerely feels guilty about Pecola's tragic fate. What is more, she and Frieda sacrifice their money, which they save to buy a bicycle as a payment to God, as they hope that it will help Pecola's baby to survive.

Pauline is Pecola's mother, and her character allows readers to see how appearance stereotypes and beauty perception can determine the person's behavior and relationships with others. Like her daughter Pecola, Pauline imagines her elaborate world, which entirely consumes her. For example, she believes that in the household where she works as a servant, the kitchen is her kitchen; the money she is given to buy food for the employer's family is her money. Furthermore, she pretends even that their little daughter is her daughter.

Soaphead is a very controversial character as he is the most religious man in the novel, but, at the same time, he is one of the most immoral people. His real name is Elihue Micah Whitcomb, and he got his nickname for his hair and profession. He considers himself to be " a Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams." ³ That is why he tries to help people solve their problems. When Pecola Breedlove asks him to give her blue eyes, he tells her to feed his landlord's dog, and then, her dream will come true. ⁴ However, he poisons the meat, and the dog dies, which results in Pecola's losing her mind and believing that she now has blue eyes.

One of the central issues addressed in *The Bluest Eye* is racism. The main characters of the novel associate white skin and blue eyes with beauty and

innocence. For example, the psychological traumas of Pecola's father, who was humiliated by white men, resulting in his rape of his daughter. Besides, Soaphead Church is obsessed with genetic and racial cleanness. As for the protagonist, she seeks to have these features of beauty throughout the story, which, eventually, turn into the loss of her mind. Another critical theme of the book is femininity, as the author describes the life of African-American women in the 1940s. At those times, they could only get married, have children, and work for white families. 5 Otherwise, dark-skinned women and girls inevitably become prostitutes and socially excluded people.

Toni Morrison managed to depict wisely the horrible effects that racism, poverty, and imposed stereotypes might have not only on adults but on children as well. The Bluest Eye makes readers reconsider their principles and values as everyone has his or her vision for beauty. More than that, nowadays, the media and fashion industry enforce their rules, and people often forget that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison discusses an unusual point of view in American historical fiction. She purposefully wrote this story focusing on the realities of African-American women's lives in the 1940s. Due to addressing some controversial topics, such as racism, humiliation, and child molestation, there were numerous attempts to prohibit the novel in schools and libraries. Nevertheless, this book is thought-provoking and remains relevant even in the 21st century. That is why *The Bluest Eye* is still popular among readers across the world.

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