

Human behavior in a book the bluest eye

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Bluest Eye is about what it's like to be hated for things that are outside of your control. She addresses the larger implications of that, probably something that all of us have experienced in our lives. Specially, she is talking about what it's like to be hated for being a poor black girl. For many people, knowing that they're hated for things that are outside of their control actually makes that hate easier to dismiss, especially if they have the support of family, friends, and a community who validates them and can see that hate for what it is. The Bluest Eye is about people who internalize that hate rather than deflecting it. Specifically one young black girl who does not have the support of her family or a community, and life just keeps beating her up until there is no resistance left. Toni Morrison calls it "the death of self-esteem."

An interesting thing about the way the book is written is that the story initially focuses on two young sisters so you think the story is about them. You don't realize until they keep talking about their friend Picola that the story is actually hers. I thought that was very clever interesting writing, not because there is an element of surprise to it, but that you realize that Picola never could have told her own story. As Toni Morrison confirms, "She's too passive to narrate her own life." Only these other young girls in the community who do have the support of their families and some degree of self-esteem could tell the story. What makes this device so effective is that you realize this story is not just about Picola because she can't even get her own story. The story is also about the people in her community who do see her and do not blame her for the things that have happened to her, and yet are really helpless to save her from this dilemma. These girls are not in a

situation completely unlike Picola's, so you see how little it could have taken for her to live a very different life. You see how little power these little girls have even if they are full of empathy in this one heartbreaking scene. They say that they want to change the course of events and alter a human life and they just can't because they don't have that power.

The feeling that her young classmates have in just helplessly watching her is something that I felt a lot as a child, but now I have more power and think about what am I doing with it. I think that my education very much has trained me to look at my role in things rather than immediately identifying with whoever is being oppressed. I think it's actually more important to look at the role that you are playing in oppressing people, and yet I am not sure if I was doing that when I read *The Bluest Eye*. I don't know if I felt maybe a little too removed from the situation so I simply pitied her or if I felt empathy where I was too much identifying with her rather than looking at my role in oppressing her. It is definitely a question I am going to be considering when I am reading other books. Another theme of the book is the idea that the community does not value the kind of beauty that Picola has and only values the beauty of white women, especially young, blonde haired, blue eyed girls. It relates back to a conversation that Toni Morrison had as a child with a girl her age who wanted blue eyes. She was writing this novel in the late 60s at a time where reclaiming racial beauty was a big movement and she wanted to get at the kind of self-loathing and internalized hate that would make a young black girl want to racially transform her appearance and think that would change everything. One thing I think is so powerful about *The Bluest Eye* is that the so-called villains of the book, the people who don't just

overlook Picola suffering but directly caused it, are given these really rich backstories where you have to somewhat empathize with them. At least you can see how they became the people that they are. It's not simply that they are evil, it's that they've also lived these difficult lives. It certainly makes for a more real and complicated moral message. You have to see your involvement in everything rather than simply blaming evil people.

The last theme I am going to touch on is the way that sexual assault and sexual abuse is written about where it is kind of removed. The way that authors write about sexual abuse, the language that they use and that Toni Morrison really deliberately uses, puts us at a distance from it. I don't know if that is reflective of the experience of being sexually abused or if that's the only way that we can stand to read about it or if it makes us think about it differently. I wonder about that distance and if it creates any problems where we feel so removed from it that it doesn't feel real or that it saves us from some impact of it or what the consequences are of that and is it the best way to do it. The writing used about sexual abuse this way is interesting because it feels so removed as if the reader is not sure it's really happening until at a certain point it becomes obvious, but it's not clear from the beginning because there is almost a language barrier or this distance as if you are not in the situation. You are outside of it somehow, and I think that's supposed to be a reflection of how the characters feel as well. I am just wondering about how authors write about sexual abuse and I would definitely like to consider that as I continue reading more novels that I know deal with this issue. There are so many other things in this incredibly rich novel and the story is so powerful and well-written. It is this kind of writing that feels so natural, and

yet it feels like Toni Morrison considered everything that she was doing and was very deliberate about how she told this story and it just makes for such a powerful novel.