



## Study of Characters and Plot Summary of the Novel The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

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**Abstract :** The Bluest Eye was written by Toni Morrison in 1970. Morrison, a single mother of two sons, wrote the novel while she taught at Howard University. Morrison's novel is set in 1941. She centers the story around a young African American girl named Pecola who grows up during the years following the Great Depression in Lorain, Ohio. Pecola's dark skin color and harsh characteristics, are why she is constantly called "ugly". As a result, she develops an inferiority

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complex, which fuels her desire for the blue eyes she equates with "whiteness". The point of view of the novel switches between the perspective of Claudia MacTeer, the daughter of Pecola's foster parents, and a third-person narrator with inset narratives in the first person. Due to the controversial topics the book raises such as racism, incest, and child molestation, there have been numerous attempts to ban it from schools and libraries.

### Plot summary

In Lorain, Ohio, 9-year-old Claudia MacTeer and her 10-year-old sister Frieda live with their parents, a tenant named Mr. Henry, and Pecola Breedlove, a temporary foster child whose house is burned down by her unstable, alcoholic, and sexually abusive father. Pecola is a quiet, passive young girl who grows up with little money and whose parents are constantly fighting, both verbally and physically. Pecola is continually reminded of what an "ugly" girl she is by members of her neighborhood and school community. In an attempt to beautify herself, Pecola wishes for blue eyes – a standard that was perpetuated through the gifting of white, blue-eyed dolls throughout her childhood. Additionally, most chapters' titles are extracts from the Dick and Jane paragraph in the novel's prologue, presenting a white family that may be contrasted with Pecola's. The chapter titles contain sudden repetition of words or phrases, many cut-off words, and no interword separations.

The novel, through flashbacks, explores the younger years of both of Pecola's parents, Cholly and Pauline, and their struggles as African-Americans in a largely White Anglo-Saxon Protestant community. Pauline now works as a servant for a wealthier white family. One day in the novel's present time, while Pecola is doing dishes, drunk Cholly rapes her. His motives are largely



confusing, seemingly a combination of both love and hate. After raping her a second time, he flees, leaving her pregnant.

Claudia and Frieda are the only two in the community that hope for Pecola's child to survive in the coming months. Consequently, they give up the money they had been saving to buy a bicycle, instead planting marigold seeds with the superstitious belief that if the flowers bloom, Pecola's baby will survive. The marigolds never bloom, and Pecola's child, who is born prematurely, dies. In the aftermath, a dialogue is presented between two sides of Pecola's own deluded imagination, in which she indicates conflicting feelings about her rape by her father. In this internal conversation, Pecola speaks as though her wish for blue eyes has been granted, and believes that the changed behavior of those around her is due to her new eyes, rather than the news of her rape or her increasingly strange behavior.

Claudia, as narrator a final time, describes the recent phenomenon of Pecola's insanity and suggests that Cholly (who has since died) may have shown Pecola the only love he could by raping her. Claudia laments on her belief that the whole community, herself included, have used Pecola as a scapegoat to make themselves feel prettier and happier.

### Characters

- Pecola Breedlove: One of the main characters of the novel, Pecola is a young African American girl who comes from a financially unstable family. Between a combination of facing domestic violence, bullying, sexual assault, and living in a community that associates beauty with whiteness, she suffers from low self-esteem and views herself to be ugly. The title *The Bluest Eye* refers to Pecola's fervent wishes for beautiful blue eyes. Her insanity at the end of the novel is her only way to escape the world where she cannot be beautiful and to get the blue eyes she desires from the beginning of the novel.
- Claudia MacTeer: The narrator of the majority of the novel. She is the child of Pecola's foster parents and is Frieda's sister. She is not only Pecola's fostering sister but she is also considered to be her friend. She is an independent, mature and passionate 9 year old girl in a world where there are many social issues. However, even though she is unaware of all of these major social issues, she is one of few, if any, characters that feel sympathy for Pecola.
- Frieda MacTeer: Is Claudia's 10 year old sister. She is seen to defend both Claudia and Pecola within the novel. Frieda can be classified as determined, independent and stubborn at times.
- Cholly Breedlove: Cholly is Pecola's father. Abusive and an alcoholic, Cholly's violent and aggressive behavior reflects his troublesome upbringing. In addition to being rejected by his father and discarded by his mother as a four-day-old baby, Cholly's first sexual encounter is ruined when it is interrupted by two white men, who force Cholly to continue while they watch and sneer. Traumatic events like these influence Cholly to



become a violent husband and father who beats his wife and eventually rapes his daughter. These gesture of madness are said to be mingled with affection, as they are his way of showing love.

- Pauline "Polly" Breedlove: Pecola's mother. Mrs. Breedlove is married to Cholly and lives the self-righteous life of a martyr, enduring her drunk husband and raising her two awkward children as best as she can. Mrs. Breedlove is a bit of an outcast herself with her shriveled foot and Southern background. Mrs. Breedlove lives the life of a lonely and isolated character who escapes into a world of dreams, hopes and fantasy that turns into the movies she enjoys viewing. After a traumatic event with a foul tooth, however, she relinquishes those dreams and escapes into her life as a housekeeper for a rich white family who give her the beloved nickname "Polly."
- Sam Breedlove: Pecola's older brother. Sammy, as he is more often referred to in the novel, is Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove's only son. Sam's part in this novel is minimal. Like his sister Pecola, he is affected by the disharmony in their home and deals with his anger by running away.
- Auntie Jimmy: Cholly's great aunt, who takes him in to raise after his parents abandon him. She is friends with a Miss Alice and is briefly ill, tended to by the medicine woman whom the locals call "M'Dear." Aunt Jimmy dies suddenly when Cholly is still a young boy during a meal of peach cobbler that was made by a friend, Esse Foster.
- Samson Fuller: Cholly Breedlove's father who abandoned Cholly before he was born. After Aunt Jimmy dies, Cholly runs off in search of Samson in Macon, Georgia where he is left distraught and disappointed with his discovery.
- The Fishers: The rich, white couple who employ Pauline as their servant and as the caretaker of their little girl.
- Geraldine: A social conscious upper class black woman in the community who exaggerates the fact that she is above traditional black stereotypes and is more "civilized" than other black families in Lorain, Ohio. When she feels that her husband isn't fulfilling her need for love, she finds a cat and pours her affections into it. Her lack of attention to any but the cat causes unintended hatred for the cat from her son, whom she neglects often.
- Louis Junior: Geraldine's son who bullies Pecola and blames her for accidentally killing his mother's beloved cat.
- Maginot Line (Marie): Prostitute. She lives with two other prostitutes – named China and Poland – in an apartment above the one that Pecola lives in. These ladies are ostracized by society, but teach Pecola a lot about being a social outcast, and offer her the support that few others do.
- Rosemary Villanucci: The MacTeers' next-door neighbor who constantly tries to get Claudia and Frieda in trouble.



- Mr. Yacobowski: The discriminatory white immigrant, owner of the grocery store where Pecola goes to buy Mary Janes.
- Maureen Peal: An African-American girl Pecola's age, who considers herself and other people "of color" to be above black people. Frieda and Claudia mock Maureen, calling her "Meringue Pie."
- Soaphead Church: Born by the name Elihue Micah Whitcomb who received his nickname, "Soaphead Church" for his hair and profession has proclaimed himself to be "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams." He is a "light-skinned" West Indian failed preacher that hates all kinds of human touch. He considers himself to be a "misanthrope." He refuses to confront his own homosexuality and therefore, the touch of little girls whom he views as innocent and "seductive" are the cleanest form of human touch that he pursues. He is also a religious hypocrite as a past preacher. Although as someone who hates humans, he as a "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams," takes on the trouble of others and works closely with them to help solve their problems. When Pecola approaches him asking for blue eyes, he tells her to give meat to his landlord's dog, and that her wish will be granted if the dog has a reaction. However, he secretly poisons the meat, and the dog dies, leading Pecola to be insane and immersing in her illusion that she has blue eyes.

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