

The Bluest Eye Book Notes

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

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Author/Context

Toni Morrison, the eighth American to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, is a widely acclaimed African-American writer. Her strong ties to her black culture and oral tradition create a rich foundation for her novels.

Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Her family had migrated North to escape racial prejudice and to seek educational and employment opportunities. In Ohio, Morrison was predominantly surrounded by racist whites. However, this did not stop her from achieving great success. She attended Lorain High School, where she excelled as a student. She was a member of the student council, worked in the school library (an honor at her school), and was an associate editor of the high school yearbook. She graduated with honors.

Morrison attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious colleges. There she was shocked to find superficiality among the students around her. Most people seemed concerned with socializing, their physical appearance, and going to parties. Morrison was mostly concerned with her studies and sometimes found it difficult to find a place for herself at Howard. People had trouble pronouncing her name, so she shortened it to her middle name, Anthony. This later became her now accepted name, "Toni." She majored in English and minored in classics. While at school, she discovered the theater and became a member of the Howard University Players, the campus theatrical company. After graduating from Howard, she received a Master's degree in English from Cornell University in 1955. From there, Morrison went to Texas Southern University in Houston, to teach introductory English.

In 1957, Morrison returned to Howard as a member of the faculty where she had the opportunity to teach and to meet many students who would later become famous writers and civil rights activists. Some of these students included: the poet Amiri Baraka; mayor of Atlanta, Andrew Young; civil rights activist and leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Stokely Carmichael; and finally the famous writer, Claude Brown.

At Howard, Morrison met and fell in love with an architect from Jamaica, Harold Morrison. They were married in 1958 and had their first son, Harold Ford, in 1961. Although her marriage did not go as hoped, Morrison and her husband stayed together for six years. In 1964, the family moved to Europe and Morrison became pregnant with her second child. However, by the time she returned from Europe, her marriage had ended. She attributes her marriage failure to the cultural differences between her and her husband.

When Morrison returned from Europe, she moved to Syracuse, New York, where she accepted a position as an associate editor with a textbook subsidiary of Random House. She worked hard during the days and came home to parent her two sons. Then, at night, she would work on her writing, and specifically, the book that would bring her



world acclaim, *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison drew on many of her own life experiences and memories growing up in Lorain, Ohio to write this first book.

After twenty years of editing for Random House, Morrison left in 1984 to become a professor at the State University of New York in Albany. She worked there for five years, working on many literary pieces. But in the spring of 1989 she left and became the first African-American woman writer to hold a named chair at an Ivy League university. She was named the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University. She taught in the creative writing program, and participated in the African-American studies, American studies, and women's studies departments.

On October 7, 1993, Toni Morrison became the eighth woman and first black woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. When she learned of the honor, she said: "This is a palpable tremor of delight for me." Along with *The Bluest Eye*, some of her other highly acclaimed work includes: *Beloved*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Jazz*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

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Plot Summary

Claudia MacTeer recounts the events of the year that lead up to her best friend's, Pecola Breedlove's, rape and the death of her baby. The year is 1941, and Claudia remembers that no marigolds bloomed that year. She thought at the time that it was because of Pecola's rape by her father, Cholly Breedlove, that no marigolds bloomed.

Her memories go back to the fall of 1940 (one year before the marigolds did not bloom). Claudia and her older sister, Frieda, live in a home that takes in borders. Mr. Henry moves in and flatters the young girls by telling them they look like Ginger Rogers and Greta Garbo. Soon after that, a young girl named Pecola moves in with them, as ordered by the county. She will live there until the county can find a better home for her, as her father, Cholly, burnt down her old home. Pecola and the two girls become friends and go through many experiences together, including Pecola getting her first period.

Pecola's family background is then described. Her parents, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, have a bad marriage. Her mother is always working hard and nagging Cholly, while Cholly is always coming home drunk and beating Pauline. They yell and fight, and Pecola and her brother, Sammy, each look for an escape in their own ways. Sammy will frequently run away to get away from his family. Pecola meanwhile, prays that her eyes will turn into a beautiful blue color. She thinks that if her eyes were blue, things would be different - they would be pretty, and more than that, she would be pretty. Pecola becomes obsessed in her quest for blue eyes.

Winter arrives and Claudia tells of a new girl, named Maureen Peal, who comes to their school. Maureen is revered for her "white" looks. She has long hair, green eyes, light skin, and nice clothes. She is very popular with teachers and other classmates. However, Claudia is disgusted with her. Claudia is very turned off from the part of her culture that seems to favor "white" things, or things that resemble white people. Pecola, on the other hand, is obsessed with white ways, and wants to look white herself. She wishes she had blonde hair and blue eyes, and is frequently found admiring Shirley Temple's picture on the cups in Claudia's house.

The next section describes Geraldine, her son Junior, and their blue-eyed black cat. Junior has Pecola come over one day. He meanly throws the cat on Pecola and it scratches her. Pecola goes to leave Junior's house, but he does not let her. The cat rubs against her leg and she is taken with its beautiful blue eyes. Junior then takes the cat and starts swinging it around. Pecola goes to save the cat by grabbing Junior, but Junior throws the cat and it lands against the window. Geraldine walks in and Junior blames the cat's death on poor Pecola.

Spring arrives and Claudia tells of how Mr. Henry touched Frieda's breasts and then was beaten by their father. The two girls go to visit Pecola in her new house, a downstairs apartment. Above, there are three prostitutes, Marie, China, and Poland, whom Pecola often visits and talks with.



Pauline Breedlove's younger years are described. It explains how she would often go to the movies, and because of this eventually became fascinated with Hollywood ideals of beauty. She saw famous movie stars like Jean Harlow as true representations of beauty, and anything straying from that was not deemed beautiful. She even thought her own daughter, Pecola, was ugly. This is why Pauline treated the daughter of the people she worked for, the Fishers, like she was her own daughter. She had blonde curls and blue eyes, and Pauline became absorbed with their white lifestyle. It was the closest she could get to having it herself.

Cholly Breedlove's background is then explained. He is abandoned by his mother and father and is raised by his great Aunt Jimmy, who later dies. Cholly has his first sexual experience with Darlene. They are caught in the woods by two white men and Cholly is humiliated. He thinks Darlene might be pregnant so he runs away to Macon, Georgia to try and find his real father. He finds him, but discovers that his father is a drunk and a gambler who wants nothing to do with Cholly. Cholly runs to Kentucky where he meets and marries Pauline. They eventually have two children, Sammy and Pecola.

The rape of Pecola by her father is then described. Cholly comes home drunk one afternoon and sees Pecola in the kitchen washing dishes. She reminds him for a moment of his wife, Pauline, and in a fit of confusion and love, he rapes his daughter. He leaves her on the kitchen floor feeling ashamed and alone.

The character of Elihue Micah Whitcomb (Soaphead Church) is introduced. He is a psychic healer of sorts, who hates people. He comes from a racially mixed family; he is part white and part Chinese, which accounts for his attitude of superiority over others. Pecola visits him one day, and asks him to make her wish come true of having blue eyes. He tricks her into poisoning an old, sick dog that he hates. He tells Pecola that if the dog behaves strangely, then that was a sign from God that her eyes would turn blue the next day. After Pecola feeds the dog the strange meat (which had poison on it), she sees that the dog chokes, falls down and dies. Horrified, she runs out of the house.

Summer comes and Claudia tells of how she and Frieda learned from rumors and gossip that Pecola was pregnant by her father. Claudia feels so badly for Pecola that she decides to not sell the marigold seeds she was planning on selling for money for a bicycle. Instead, she and Frieda bury the seeds and say that if the marigolds bloom, then everything would be fine. And if not, then things would be bad.

Pecola is left to talk to her only friend, an imaginary friend about the new blue eyes that she thinks she now has. She is only concerned that they are the bluest eyes in the world. She has driven herself into a state of madness over these blue eyes, and she is all alone. Claudia says that she saw Pecola after the baby was born and then died. Pecola walks up and down the street flapping her arms, as if she was a bird that could not fly. Pauline still works for white folks, Sammy ran away, and Cholly died in a workhouse. Claudia finally says that the marigolds did not bloom because some soil is just not meant for certain flowers.



Major Characters

Claudia MacTeer: Narrator of the story, she is nine years old and lives in a green and white run-down, but functional house. Claudia and her older sister, Frieda, are supposed to be seen and not heard, as all children are, and therefore spend much of their time quietly observing events as they take place. Claudia despises the American ideals of beauty, which say that one must have blonde hair, blue eyes, and pink skin to be beautiful. She resents and even reacts violently to these ideals when she destroys the pretty white dolls given to her at Christmas. Pecola moves in with Claudia's family, and she becomes best friends with Claudia and her sister, Frieda.

Pecola Breedlove: Eleven year-old little black girl, who is plain and homely. By orders of the county, the MacTeers take Pecola into their home to temporarily take care of her until the county finds another home for her. It is here that she meets and becomes best friends with Claudia and Frieda. She is not happy with herself and longs for blue eyes, as they are symbolic of American white beauty. Pecola has a very difficult life growing up, as people torment her for being black and ugly. She is also raped by her father, and eventually becomes pregnant with his baby. However, the baby dies. Her mother treats her coldly, as she believes Pecola is ugly and is ashamed of her.

Cholly Breedlove: Father of Pecola. He is often drunk and beats his wife and children. He rapes his daughter, Pecola, and she becomes pregnant with his child. In one of his drunken stupors, he lights their house on fire and burns it down. He is an awful father, one who does not show love and who is often absent. His blackness angers him and leads him to believe he is ugly and does not deserve a better life. He uses his anger negatively by hurting those around him.

Frieda MacTeer: Older sister of Claudia, she is around ten years old. Frieda and her sister befriend Pecola when she moves in with them.

Mr. Henry Washington: Handsome older man who moves in as a border with the MacTeers. Previously, he lived with Della Jones, but her inability to take care of things due to her stroke forces him to look elsewhere to live. He is playful with the children in the MacTeer house, and somewhat too playful when he touches Frieda's breasts.

Pauline Breedlove: Pecola's mother. She is beaten by her abusive and alcoholic husband, Cholly. When Cholly burns down their house, Pauline is forced to move in with the Fishers, the well-to-do white family for whom she works. She adapts to their white ways and becomes the ideal servant. However, she treats Pecola in a cold and cruel manner, as Pauline is ashamed of her daughter's ugliness. Pauline herself, as a black woman, also believes that she is ugly. She tries to combat this by living in a world of fantasy, mesmerized by white Hollywood glamour and beauty.

Sammy Breedlove: Pecola's older brother, he believes that he is ugly because he is black. As a result, he takes his anger out on others by inflicting pain on them. He is also known to run away whenever things in his house get out of control.



Elihue Micah Whitcomb (Soaphead Church): The nasty old mystic whom Pecola visits. He hates to be around people, but has a disgusting fondness for little girls. She sees him because he is a healer, a teller of visions, a decoder of dreams, and a wish-fulfiller. She hopes that he can make her wish of having blue eyes come true. Soaphead fools Pecola into thinking that he made her wish come true, and she descends into a state of madness because of it.

Minor Characters

Rosemary Villanucci: Claudia and Frieda's white next-door neighbor. She lives above her father's café and has many things, including arrogance, good food, a nice car, and a sense of ownership that make Claudia and Frieda jealous.

Mrs. MacTeer: Mother of Claudia and Frieda. She is a strong woman who sometimes comes off as cold, but she loves her children dearly, and they know it. She works hard to keep their house nice. She hates American ideals of beauty and tries to teach her children that they have to have self-respect and self-worth.

Della Jones: Mr. Henry's former landlady. Her husband supposedly ran off with a woman named Peggy, because Della was too clean for him. After having suffered a stroke, Della seems a bit crazy and Mr. Henry looks elsewhere to live.

Peggy: A woman from Elyria. She is the woman whom Della Jones' husband supposedly ran off with.

Old Slack Bessie: Peggy's mother.

Hattie: Della Jones' sister. She is often made fun of, as she frequently grins absent-mindedly.

Aunt Julia: Della Jones' aunt. She is often made fun of for walking up and down the streets talking to herself.

Mr. Yacobowski: The owner of the vegetable and meat store Pecola goes to for candy. She buys Mary Janes there, and realizes that Mr. Yacobowski does not even want to touch her hand when she reaches out to give him the money for the candy. Pecola thinks he dislikes her because she is black and ugly.

China, Poland, and Miss Marie: The three black prostitutes that live in the apartment above the Breedloves. Pecola often goes up there and talks to these women. They adore Pecola and make her feel comfortable.

Dewey Prince: Marie's ex-boyfriend. She ran away with him when she was younger and she tells Pecola all about him. From this, Pecola wonders about love and what it must feel like.



Maureen Peal: New girl in school, she is a light-skinned black girl with long brown hair in two braids and dark green eyes. Classmates and teachers admire her, as her features are lighter than the average black person's. Claudia and Frieda are very jealous of her beauty, wealth, and charm. They even go so far as to search for and point out flaws that Maureen has to make her look bad, and make them feel good.

Bay Boy, Woodrow Cain, Buddy Wilson, and Junie Bug: Young black school children that torment Pecola by calling her names and harassing her. They are ashamed of their own blackness, and thus take it out on Pecola, whom they see as ugly as themselves.

Geraldine: A socially conscious middle-class black. She is concerned only with white things, and does everything possible to disconnect herself from her African roots. She mistreats her son, Louis Junior, as she prefers to give love and affection to her black cat with blue eyes.

Louis Junior: Son of Geraldine. He is neglected by his mother, who shows affection only to her blue-eyed black cat. Louis Junior is strongly affected by this neglect and takes it out on others, specifically Pecola.

The Fishers: The well-to-do white family that Pauline Breedlove works for down by Lake Shore Park. She is their maid, and she idolizes everything they have and do, including their perfect little daughter. Pauline even shows their daughter more affection than her own daughter, Pecola.

Chicken and Pie: Pauline Breedlove's two younger twin brothers. She took care of them while growing up, as their mother and father both worked.

Aunt Jimmy: Cholly's great aunt. She was kind and loving and rescued Cholly from his mother (as his mother was trying to get rid of him by leaving him on a trash heap). She raised Cholly by herself.

Samson Fuller: Cholly's birth father. He was never around, even when Cholly was born.

Blue Jack: Older black man whom Cholly meets at one of his first jobs. They become great friends, and Blue even becomes a sort of father figure to Cholly. Cholly loves and respects Blue, and enjoys listening to Blue tell stories.

M'Dear: An older woman who lived in shack near the woods, near Cholly's house, while growing up with Aunt Jimmy. M'Dear was a midwife and was known for her knowledge of herbal medicine. She was called in to diagnose Aunt Jimmy when she became sick.

Essie Foster: Friend of Cholly and Aunt Jimmy. Her peach cobbler is blamed for killing Aunt Jimmy, as she gave Aunt Jimmy a piece the night before Aunt Jimmy died.

Jake: Cholly's fifteen-year old cousin. Cholly meets Jake for the first time at Aunt Jimmy's funeral. They fool around together and meet girls.

Darlene: Cholly's first girlfriend and sexual partner. Their first sexual experience is tarnished when they are caught having sex in the woods by two white men.



Objects/Places

marigolds: The flowers that everyone in Claudia's neighborhood had planted. Claudia and Frieda were going to sell the seeds for money, but when they found out that Pecola was pregnant, they decided to bury them. If the flowers bloomed, it would be a sign that everything was going to be all right with Pecola and her baby. As it turned out, these flowers did not blossom that fall.

Greta Garbo and Ginger Rogers: Two white American female movie stars who symbolize ideal beauty. Charmingly, Mr. Henry tells Claudia and Frieda that they look like these two actresses, and the two girls are very happy with this comment.

outdoors: A type of situation Claudia describes. It is when you have no home and nowhere to live. It is a permanent and dreadful condition. Pecola and her family were put outdoors by Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father, and because he did this to his own family, Claudia sees this as the worst condition one could be put in.

Shirley Temple: With her blonde curly hair and blue eyes, she is a cultural icon of a beautiful white child. She is a popular young actress and adored by many in the late 1930s and early 1940s. However, Claudia hates Shirley Temple because Claudia does not resemble her at all. Eventually though, she learns to love Shirley Temple, as a means of dealing with her anger towards white ideals of beauty.

Mary Janes: Type of candy Pecola buys at Mr. Yacobowski's store. She admires the little girl of Mary Jane on the wrapper with her blonde hair and blue eyes. Pecola thinks that if she eats the candy, then maybe she will transform into the little girl.

Betty Grable: A white American female movie star. Her blonde bombshell look made her desired by many men as a pin-up girl during World War II. Maureen and Pecola note their admiration for Betty, while Claudia disagrees.

Hedy Lamarr: A white American female movie star of the 1930s and 1940s. Claudia notes that she prefers Hedy, who has dark hair, to a movie star like Betty Grable, who has blonde hair.

Lake Shore Park: The well-to-do white community where the Fishers live, the family that Pauline Breedlove works for. No blacks are allowed here, unless they are the employees of a family.

Jean Harlow: American female movie star of the 1930s. Before Marilyn Monroe, she was the model for Hollywood's blonde bombshell. Pauline Breedlove envies her and tries to fix her hair like Jean's.

Macon: Where Cholly's real father supposedly lives. Cholly runs away after Aunt Jimmy's funeral to go and try to find his father in Macon.



Quotes

Quote 1: "We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth." pg. 9

Quote 2: "We loved him. Even after what came later, there was no bitterness in our memory of him." pg. 16

Quote 3: "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window sign - all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. 'Here,' they said, 'this is beautiful, and if you are on this day "worthy" you may have it.'" pp. 20-21

Quote 4: "They slipped in and out of the box of peeling gray, making no stir in the neighborhood, no sound in the labor force, and no wave in the mayor's office. Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality - collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there. From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another, they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do with the way they found each other." pg. 34

Quote 5: "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike." pg. 45

Quote 6: "Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, 'They *are* ugly. They *are* weeds.' Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack. Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame. Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth." pg. 50

Quote 7: "It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds - cooled - and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path." pg. 65

Quote 8: "'I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!'" pg. 73

Quote 9: "White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud." pg. 87

Quote 10: "Pauline and Cholly loved each other. He seemed to relish her company and even to enjoy her country ways and lack of knowledge about city things. He talked with



her about her foot and asked, when they walked through the town or in the fields, if she were tired. Instead of ignoring her infirmity, pretending it was not there, he made it seem like something special and endearing. For the first time Pauline felt that her bad foot was an asset. And he did touch her, firmly but gently, just as she had dreamed. But minus the gloom of setting suns and lonely river banks. She was secure and grateful; he was kind and lively. She had not known there was so much laughter in the world." pg. 115-16

Quote 11: "In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap....She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen." pg. 122

Quote 12: "Cholly, moving faster, looked at Darlene. He hated her. He almost wished he could do it - hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much. The flashlight wormed its way into his guts and turned the sweet taste of muscadine into rotten fetid bile. He stared at Darlene's hands covering her face in the moon and lamplight. They looked like baby claws." pg. 148

Quote 13: "Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty. A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. Of all the wishes people had brought him - money, love, revenge - this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment. A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes." pg. 174

Quote 14: "I thought about the baby that everyone wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin. No synthetic yellow bangs suspended over marble-blue eyes, no pinched nose and bowline mouth. More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live - just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals." pg. 190

Quote 15: "[Pecola beat] the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach - could not even see - but which filled the valleys of the mind." pg. 204

Quote 16: "This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers." pg. 206



Topic Tracking: Beauty

Beauty 1: Claudia is constantly faced with white ideals of beauty. For Christmas one year, she receives a blue-eyed, blonde-haired, pink-skinned doll. Rather than adore the doll, she destroys and dismembers it as a result of her anger. Claudia feels she can never measure up to the beauty of white children, the beauty that all the world reveres.

Beauty 2: The Breedloves are poor and ugly. At least that is how they think the world views them. Their beliefs that they are ugly come from white American media always portraying whites as representations of what is beautiful. Because of this, they do not strive for more, for they think that they do not deserve to have more.

Beauty 3: Pecola wishes that she had blue eyes. She thinks that if her eyes were blue, and therefore beautiful according to white American standards, then her problems would go away and her life would be beautiful. Then maybe, her classmates and teachers would not despise her and think she was so ugly. She so hates herself that she stares at herself in the mirror trying to figure out where her ugliness comes from.

Beauty 4: For one year Pecola prays that her eyes will turn blue. She has many problems in her life, starting with family issues, and she thinks that if she had blue eyes, her problems might go away. And even more than that, if she had blue eyes, people would see her as beautiful, and then she would be able to see herself as beautiful too. Being a black little girl in a society that idolizes blonde-haired blue-eyed beauty, Pecola thinks she is ugly. Pecola sympathizes for the dandelions because she knows what it is like to be devalued. She finds beauty in the weeds, for she thinks that people see her as a weed.

Beauty 5: A new little girl, named Maureen Peal, comes to Claudia and Frieda's school. Maureen is revered for her looks, which people deem beautiful. She has lighter skin and eyes than most of the other children, and everyone adores her because of this. She is looked upon as beautiful because her characteristics are somewhat more "white" than other black people's. This causes many to be jealous of her. However, Claudia and Frieda are not jealous. They see through the standards placed on beauty, and if Maureen is what is beautiful, this means that they are not beautiful (according to society).

Beauty 6: When the girls are walking home from getting ice cream after school, they pass a movie theater with a picture of Betty Grable on the building. Maureen and Pecola both say that they love Betty Grable, an icon for white American beauty with her blonde hair and blue eyes. However, showing her disdain for such standards placed on beauty, Claudia says that she prefers the actress, Hedy Lamarr, who has dark hair.

Beauty 7: In her younger years, Pauline Breedlove occupied herself by going to the movies. It was here that she got her first glimpse into what idealized beauty was. She saw the Hollywood blonde-haired, blue-eyed bombshells as being true representations of beauty. And anything that strayed from these looks, including her own, was seen as

not pretty. American society placed their standards of beauty onto the world, and because of this, many people began to realize how far away they were from those standards.

Beauty 8: Pecola goes to visit Soaphead Church with the hope that he will be able to fulfill her wish to have blue eyes. She thinks that with blue eyes, all of her problems will disappear and the world will love her because she will be beautiful. The world, seen through blue eyes, will also appear beautiful to Pecola.

Beauty 9: Claudia prays that Pecola's baby will survive. She needs the baby to live to counteract society's standards set on beauty, which say that blonde-haired, blue-eyed little girls are all that is pretty. Claudia hopes that with this new black baby people will change and see blackness as something that can be admired and something that is beautiful.



Topic Tracking: Culture

Culture 1: Mr. Henry moves into Claudia and Frieda's house. One day, the girls come home and when they walk in Mr. Henry greets them. He flatters them by telling them they look just like Greta Garbo and Ginger Rogers, two white American female actresses. These two actresses represented American society's ideal beauty, with their blonde hair and blue eyes. They, and other actresses like them, were so idealized by the media that it forced young American girls, both white and black, to question their own beauty if it differed from the standard of blond hair and blue eyes.

Culture 2: After seeing the cup with Shirley Temple on it, Claudia explains her ill feelings for her. Shirley Temple was the epitome of what all of America adored in little girls: her bouncy blonde curls and big blue eyes. This sickened Claudia, as she was so different from Shirley Temple and all of the other little girls who looked like Shirley.

Culture 3: Claudia tells the story about the doll she received for Christmas one year. This doll was a beautiful doll that had blonde hair, blue eyes, and pink skin. Instead of appreciating the doll like most other children would have done, Claudia dismembered and destroyed the doll. She was sick of having American ideals of beauty placed on her, which said that being white with blonde hair and blue eyes was what was deemed as beautiful.

Culture 4: This excerpt from a first grade reading primer describes the perfect white family. Morrison uses these excerpts in many points of the story to illustrate the dichotomy between the ideal white family, and the family of blacks, specifically Pecola's family. The reading book perpetuates the stigma that what is seen as "ideal" in American culture means having a neat little house, run by two loving parents, with two children, one of which has blonde hair and blue eyes, and a fun loving dog who plays with the children. This social stigma presses on children who are "different" that are reading these books, and makes them think they are abnormal and unacceptable.

Culture 5: The Breedloves are described. They think they are poor and ugly, and it says that much of the reason they think this is because of the white American media. The media, as part of our culture, sets the standards for what defines beauty, and anything straying from these standards is viewed as ugly.

Culture 6: Pecola is constantly faced with the standards set on her society by American culture. She cannot even enjoy a piece of candy without feeling that she is different and lacking in some way in terms of beauty. When she goes to eat her Mary Jane candy, she is mesmerized by the little girl of Mary Jane on the cover, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl. These cultural pressures of what defines beauty make Pecola aware of just how much she strays from that defined beauty. This eventually leads to her desire for blue eyes, which in turn leads her into madness.

Culture 7: When Pecola, Maureen, Claudia and Frieda are walking home from the ice cream shop, they pass a theater with a picture of Betty Grable on it. Young girls are



bombarded with American culture's ideals of beauty, such as pictures of famous actresses. Betty Grable in particular, with her blonde hair and blue eyes, makes Pecola and Maureen want to look like her. However, despite all of their hopes and wishes, they will never be able to look like that, and they are left as the victims of a culture that standardizes and limits young children.

Culture 8: During her younger years, Pauline Breedlove spent a lot of time at the movie theater. It was here where she learned American standards of true beauty. Constantly faced with actresses like Jean Harlow, the ultimate Hollywood blonde bombshell, Pauline was forced to examine her own beauty in terms of Harlow's. She realized that she did not look anything like Harlow, and based on this, came to the conclusion that she must be ugly. However, her feelings of ugliness were purely based on cultural standards set on her through the medium of Hollywood.

Culture 9: Claudia feels the need for Pecola's baby to be alive and healthy. She wants the baby to survive because she wants to counteract the cultural emphasis placed on white girls with blonde hair and blue eyes, exemplified by the types of white baby dolls most children adore (dolls that look like Shirley Temple). If Pecola's baby lives, maybe people can learn to love a black baby and see black as beautiful too. At least this is what Claudia is hoping for.

Culture 10: Pecola beats her arms like a bird, and attempts to fly up to the sky. However, she cannot. The reason she cannot is because she has been held back by the culture in which she lives, a culture that values white beauty, and ignores black beauty. It was an inevitable end result that Pecola would never be able to achieve the standards of beauty she wanted to. She was born a black child, and unfortunately, her culture does not accept black beauty. Thus, her dreams would never be fulfilled. And even though she thinks she has blue eyes, the world around her does not recognize her as she wishes to be seen. And because of this, she is driven to madness, caused by the pressures and social standards of her culture.



Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred

Self-Hatred 1: Claudia and Frieda stare at Rosemary Villanucci. Rosemary has what Claudia and Frieda want, things that white people have, such as bread and butter and a nice Buick car. Claudia and Frieda hate Rosemary because she stands for all of the things that Claudia and Frieda will never have nor be, specifically white. This forces a feeling of self-hatred for being black upon the girls.

Self-Hatred 2: Claudia receives a white baby doll for Christmas one year. Instead of adoring and cradling the new gift, as most other children would have done, Claudia, in a fit of rage, dismembered and destroyed the doll. She hated the doll's blue eyes and blonde hair staring back at her, reminding her of how different she looked from the doll. She knew that to destroy the doll was wrong, but she could not help it. The doll, so revered for its white established ideals of what beautiful was, made Claudia hate herself for being the complete opposite of those ideals.

Self-Hatred 3: Pecola is just as upset by her parents' fighting as is her brother, Sammy. He runs away sometimes, and Pecola often wonders why he never takes her with him. She secretly thinks that maybe if she were prettier, if she had blue eyes for example, then things would be different. People would see her differently, including her classmates and teachers, and she would even see herself differently. She would see herself as beautiful, instead of the ugly little girl she is disgusted with when she looks into the mirror.

Self-Hatred 4: When Pecola is walking down the street, she notices the dandelions. She thinks they are pretty, and wonders why everyone else sees them as merely weeds. She sympathizes with them. However, after her ugliness repulses the storeowner, Mr. Yacobowski, and Pecola starts to walk home, her feelings towards the same dandelions change. She now thinks they are ugly, and she is angered. They remind her of her own ugliness and how people think she is ugly. She hates herself for being so ugly and feelings of anger envelop her.

Self-Hatred 5: Pecola is walking home from school one day, when a group of schoolchildren (boys) surround her and make fun of her. They call her names and make fun of her family. It is out of their own hatred for themselves that they harass poor Pecola. They have issues with their own ugliness and blackness that force them to take it out on her. If they torment Pecola, then they might feel that they aren't so ugly or black, for here is a girl that is uglier and blacker than they are, and if they make fun of her, they in turn think they are putting themselves in a position of superiority over her. However, it is only an admittance of the insecurity they have about their own identities.

Self-Hatred 6: Mrs. Breedlove works for a wealthy white family, The Fishers, down by Lake Shore Park, a place where black people are not allowed. She idolizes this family and their white ways. She even adores their little blonde-haired, blue-eyed daughter. She treats the little girl better than she treats her own daughter, Pecola. All of this can be attributed to the fact that Mrs. Breedlove does not like herself nor the social position



she has been placed into due to her blackness. She dislikes herself so much that she tries to adopt white ways. She even goes so far as to sort of pretend that their beautiful little daughter is her own daughter.

Self-Hatred 7: To occupy some of her time when she was a young woman, Pauline Breedlove frequently would go to the movies. She began to accept the Hollywood idealized representations of absolute beauty, such as Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, and Ginger Rogers. She accepted these representations of beauty so much so that she began to judge beauty based on these standards. And because she saw herself as so far away from that scale of beauty, she began to hate herself.

Self-Hatred 8: There is a description of Soaphead Church's family background. Racially, he comes from a very mixed family. His mother was half-Chinese and his father was half-white and half-black. His extended family was mixed black and white. His family had the mindset that if they were as far away from their black roots as possible, then that would be a good thing, and a thing to strive for. They always stressed education, with the thought that if they were educated, they were closer to being "white" and farther away from their African roots.

Self-Hatred 9: Pecola now thinks she has the blue eyes she has always longed for. She hopes that they are the bluest eyes in the entire world. Pecola thinks that if she has blue eyes, then the world will see her differently. She wishes that they would all see her as a beautiful little girl, like all of the other little white girls Pecola has always wished she looked like (e.g. Shirley Temple). Her feelings of self-hatred have caused Pecola to desire something she will never truly have, blue eyes. Unfortunately, because of society and the media, Pecola is certain that without them, she will never be seen as beautiful, and therefore, cannot ever see her own life as beautiful. The pressures of society and her own self-hatred drive Pecola into a state of madness.

Here is the house.

Here is the house.

This first part of the book is taken from a traditional American children's reading book, often used in elementary schools to teach children how to read. It describes a typical white American family. There is a very nice Mother, a strong Father, a friend, a cat, a friendly dog, a pretty little girl named Jane, and they all live in a very pretty green and white house with a red door. This family is described as being happy and everything is in order; they are picture-perfect.

This excerpt from the children's book repeats itself. However, this time, there is no punctuation. The sentences run on and on together and capital letters disappear.

Finally, the paragraph repeats itself a third time. This time, the sentences run on and on together, but the spaces between the words have now disappeared along with the punctuation.

Quiet as it's kept...

Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941.

Claudia MacTeer retells the story of possibly why the marigolds did not bloom in the year of 1941 in Lorain, Ohio. She says that she thought it was because Pecola Breedlove was having her father's baby and that everyone was so concerned with the safe delivery of the baby. Apparently though, no one's marigolds grew that year. Claudia explains that her and her sister, Frieda, thought it was their fault that the marigolds did not bloom. They thought that if they had just planted the seeds a little bit better, then maybe they would have grown. However, Claudia realizes now, looking back, that it was not her or her sister's fault. It was just the way things were. She goes on to explain that Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father, is dead, the baby died, the seeds died, and so too, did Claudia's innocence.

Claudia says that the only question left is *why*. However, that is too difficult to answer, so she settles for answering *how*.



Autumn: Nuns go by as quiet...

Nuns go by as quiet as lust, and drunken men and sober eyes sing in the lobby of the Greek hotel.

Claudia MacTeer talks about her life and her surrounding environment in the fall of 1940. She and her sister, Frieda, live next door to Rosemary Villanucci. Rosemary is white and Claudia and her sister are black. They want what Rosemary's white privilege gives her: good food, arrogance, and ownership.

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 1

"We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth." pg. 9

Claudia and Frieda live in an old, one-room, run-down green house. As children, they are to be seen and not heard. If Claudia becomes ill, she is told it is her fault and that she should have been more considerate because now, she cannot help around the house with the work that needs to be done. People, including Claudia's own mother, Mrs. MacTeer, are very cold, and Claudia resents this. She sobs at her mother's anger towards her becoming sick. However, despite her mother's anger, Claudia knows that her mother desperately and selflessly loves her.

During that fall, a man named Mr. Henry Washington moves in with the MacTeers. He previously lived with Della Jones, who was left by her husband. Della's husband apparently ran off with a woman named Peggy, Old Slack Bessie's daughter. Della also had a sister, Hattie, and an Aunt Julia that were thought to be crazy. Claudia and Frieda eavesdrop on conversations about people while they clean the dishes. This is how Claudia came to know all of this gossip.

Mr. Henry arrives and amuses the children by giving them a penny and telling them they look like Greta Garbo and Ginger Rogers. The girls are pleased with the attention he pays to them. Claudia even notes that they felt so strongly for him that they in fact loved him: "We loved him. Even after what came later, there was no bitterness in our memory of him." pg. 16

Topic Tracking: Culture 1

Claudia's mom tells her and Frieda that a young girl, named Pecola, is coming to stay with them in their house for a while. The county placed Pecola in the MacTeer house until they can find a permanent home for her. Pecola's drunkard father burnt down Pecola's house and everyone was put outdoors. Claudia thinks that being put outdoors is the worst condition that could happen to a person, and so she feels bad for Pecola. Pecola's father is in jail, her mother, Pauline Breedlove is living with the people she works for, and Pecola's brother, Sammy is living with some other family. When Pecola



arrives, Claudia and Frieda are thrilled to have a playmate. They treat Pecola as a guest in their house.

Frieda brings Pecola a cup of milk. The cup has Shirley Temple on it. Claudia goes into a discourse about how she hates Shirley Temple. She tells the story of her childhood when she received a blue-eyed white-faced doll for Christmas. Instead of adoring the doll, like most other children would do having received such a lovely gift, Claudia hated the doll.

"Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window sign - all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. 'Here,' they said, 'this is beautiful, and if you are on this day "worthy" you may have it.'" pp. 20-21

Topic Tracking: Culture 2

Topic Tracking: Culture 3

Topic Tracking: Beauty 1

Claudia destroyed the doll by dismembering it. She knew that this was violent and that there was something inherently wrong with behaving in such a way, but she could not help herself. She hated white baby dolls and she felt shame for feeling and behaving in such ways.

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 2

Mrs. MacTeer is upset over how much milk was drunk (three quarts). She yells at the girls without mentioning names. Pecola is the one to blame. She keeps drinking milk because she just wants a chance to admire Shirley Temple on the cup. The girls listen as Mrs. MacTeer goes on and on about how she is going to be in the poor house. Claudia says that eventually her mother will start to sing, and that is what she loves the most. She almost wishes for hard times, just so she can hear her mother sing about them. The girls are bored on this slow Saturday afternoon. They are sitting outside on the steps and cannot agree on anything to do. Pecola stands up and blood runs down her legs. Frieda says that it is Pecola's first menstrual period. Frieda tells Claudia to get some water to wash off the steps. Frieda gets napkin and pins it to Pecola's dress, only to be seen by Rosemary. Claudia grabs her nose and Rosemary screams to Mrs. MacTeer that the girls are doing something nasty. Mrs. MacTeer runs out of the house and hits Frieda. Just as she is about to hit Pecola, the bloody napkin falls out from under her dress. Claudia explains everything and Mrs. MacTeer feels badly about the whole thing. She takes Pecola into the bathroom to wash her off.

That night, the girls are lying in bed. Claudia and Frieda are jealous of Pecola's transformation into a woman. Pecola asks if having your period means that you can have a baby and Frieda says that someone has to love you first. Pecola asks how do you get someone to love you. Frieda is asleep and Claudia does not know the answer to that question.

Autumn: Here is the house...

Here is the house . . .

The section begins with an excerpt from a first-grade reading book. It describes an ideal green and white house, where a white family lives. This house is a strong contrast to the house about to be described, Pecola's house.

Topic Tracking: Culture 4

The tiny store-front apartment where Pecola and her family live is described. Before, it was a gypsy place of operations, a real estate office, a Hungarian bakery, and finally, a pizza shop, all alive with energy and life. Now, the apartment is run-down, with no life or spirit to run through it. It actually hurts people's eyes to look at it. However, it is theirs, the Breedloves, and this is all that matters. It gives them a sense of belonging and ownership.

"They slipped in and out of the box of peeling gray, making no stir in the neighborhood, no sound in the labor force, and no wave in the mayor's office. Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness, each making his own patchwork quilt of reality - collecting fragments of experience here, pieces of information there. From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another, they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do with the way they found each other." pg. 34

There is absolutely no life left in the house. Even the coal stove, which usually has life in it, burns and eventually dies in the morning.



Autumn: Here is the family...

Here is the family . . .

This section is preceded with an excerpt from a first-grade reading book. It describes a perfect white family that consists of Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane, all living in the very pretty green and white house.

The Breedloves are strongly affected by what others think of them. Others think they are poor and ugly, and so they think of themselves as poor and ugly, and do not strive for more. Furthermore, much of their beliefs that they are ugly stem from white American media, where what is defined as pretty means having blonde hair and blue eyes.

Topic Tracking: Beauty 2

Topic Tracking: Culture 5

Each family member deals with this ugliness in his own way. Mrs. Breedlove uses it to define what she believes she is, a martyr. Sammy uses it to inflict pain on others, and Pecola hides behind it. On Saturday morning, the family awakens only to have Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fighting. Cholly, still drunk from the night before, does not want to get up out of bed to get wood for the stove. Mrs. Breedlove sneezes from the cold, and they start physically fighting. Cholly is an abusive husband, and Mrs. Breedlove, which is what the whole family calls her, thinks that it is her duty to send Cholly to Christ the Judge, where he will be judged for all of the sins he has committed. The two children deal with the fighting in different ways. Sammy often runs away because of his parents' fights. Pecola, on the other hand accepts them, and tries to endure the pain of the fighting. Pecola sometimes wishes that she would disappear, so that she would no longer have to deal with the issues at home. She often wonders why her brother never takes her along with him when he runs away. She thinks it is because she is ugly, and if she looked different, maybe beautiful, then he would take her. Pecola also wonders what is it about her ugliness that makes her so hated by teachers and classmates. She thinks that if she was beautiful, and had blue eyes, then there would be no problems, and maybe her parents wouldn't fight. "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike." pg. 45

Topic Tracking: Beauty 3

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 3

For a year, Pecola prayed for blue eyes, thinking that if she had them, people would think she was beautiful. She walks down the street and admires the dandelions at the base of the telephone pole. Whereas most people think they are simply weeds, she finds beauty in them, and cannot understand how someone could think they were ugly.

Topic Tracking: Beauty 4



Pecola makes her way to Yacobowski's Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries Store. Mr. Yacobowski is the white owner of the store. Pecola enters the store with the intention of buying three Mary Janes. When she reaches out to hand Mr. Yacobowski the money, he hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand. She thinks it is because she is black and ugly, just like the dandelion no one wants in their yard. She starts to feel bad for the dandelion, but then agrees with everyone else that they really are ugly.

"Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, 'They are ugly. They are weeds.' Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack. Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame. Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth." pg. 50

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 4

Pecola unwraps her candy and admires the picture of Mary Jane on the cover. She has blonde hair and blue eyes, just what Pecola wants. Pecola thinks that if she eats the candy, then she will turn into Mary Jane. She walks home and goes upstairs to the apartment above hers. It is where China, Poland, and Miss Marie live. They are three black prostitutes that Pecola often enjoys talking to and being around. Pecola sits and talk with them for a while, asking them all about their lives and love. Marie tells her that she once was in love with a man named Dewey Prince. Pecola wonders what love is like and whether or not it hurts. She thinks about her parents and when they make love. Her father makes a lot of noises that sound like he is in pain, while her mother doesn't make any noise at all, as if she is suffocating or choking.

Topic Tracking: Culture 6



Winter: My daddy's face...

My daddy's face is a study.

Claudia describes her father's face as being very cold and harsh like winter. Claudia tells about a new girl in school named Maureen Peal. She is very beautiful. She is described as being somewhat more "white" than other black people, with her lighter skin, longer hair, and lighter eyes (even though they are dark green). Although Claudia and Frieda are jealous of her beauty, wealth, and charm over classmates and even teachers, they are not envious of Maureen's whiteness.

Topic Tracking: Beauty 5

One day, Maureen attempts to talk to Claudia and Frieda, to be friends with them. Although Claudia and Frieda outwardly put Maureen down (by calling her names like Meringue Pie and other little annoyances), they secretly want to be friends with her. The three girls start to walk home from school one day when they see Pecola surrounded by a group of boys, Bay Boy, Woodrow Cain, Buddy Wilson, and Junie Bug. The boys are harassing Pecola and calling her names. They are ashamed of their own blackness and thus take it out on Pecola.

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 5

"It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds - cooled - and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path." pg. 65

Pecola cries at the boys harassing her. Frieda jumps in and tell them to leave her alone. Soon, Claudia, and even Maureen stick up for Pecola. The boys leave and the four girls begin to walk home. They stop for ice cream, but only Maureen can afford it. She buys one for Pecola, and Claudia and Frieda stare at it with envy. While walking back, they pass a theater with a picture of Betty Grable on it. Maureen says that she thinks Betty Grable is great, and Pecola agrees. Claudia on the other hand, says that she thinks Hedy Lamarr is better.

Topic Tracking: Culture 7

Topic Tracking: Beauty 6

Maureen asks Pecola if she has seen her father naked (she heard the boys say this to Pecola). Pecola denies this, even though she knows it is true. Claudia and Frieda get into a fight with Maureen for saying that it is shameful to see one's own father naked. They are sticking up for Pecola, but also deep down they are defending themselves, as they too have seen their own father naked. Claudia insults Maureen's appearance, and Maureen yells, "I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!" pg. 73

Maureen runs away from them, Pecola walks off, and Claudia and Frieda make their way home.

When they arrive home, they are greeted by Mr. Henry, who seems uneasy and quick to get the girls out of the house. He gives them money for ice cream, but they decide to get potato chips and end up back home sooner than Mr. Henry had expected. They arrive home and see Mr. Henry in the window with two prostitutes. Claudia and Frieda hide in the grass as the two women leave. When Frieda asks who the two women were, Mr. Henry lies and says that they were part of his Bible study class. He tells them not to tell their mother that they were over, and Claudia and Frieda agree not to. They start to cook turnips and eat graham crackers, as they wait for their mother to come home.



Winter: See the cat...

See the cat . . .

An excerpt from a first-grade reading book notes the perfect white family with their perfect playful cat. This is in contrast to the cat described in the next section.

Women from the cities of Mobile, Aiken, Newport News, Marietta, and Meridian are described. They are all do-gooders, with homes in good black neighborhoods. They always have dinner ready on time, keep their homes spotless, and have their husbands' work clothes washed and ironed for their next wear. They adore cats more than any family member because the cat can appreciate and respect her cleanliness and need to keep things in order. One of these women is Geraldine. She has a son named Louis Junior, and her neglect of him for her cat makes him hate his cat, and even torment other children. Geraldine is concerned only with white things and does everything in her power to disconnect herself from being black. She tells Junior to only play with white children and she dresses him in white shirts with blue pants. "White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud." pg. 87

One day, Junior sees Pecola walking home from school. He pleads with her to come inside his house to see his kittens. She agrees and goes with him inside his house, but once inside, Junior throws a big black cat on her when she isn't looking. The cat scratches Pecola's face and chest, and Junior laughs at her as she cries. When she goes to pet the cat and make it see that she is really nice, the cat responds kindly to her. Pecola is mesmerized by the cat's blue eyes. Junior sees this and thinks of his mother's relationship with the cat. He remembers how his mother neglects him for the cat. He takes the cat and swings it above his head. Pecola tries to stop him, and when she does the cat goes flying at the window. It hits the window, falls onto the radiator, and dies. Just as this takes place, Geraldine walks in and asks what is going on and who the little girl is. Junior immediately says that Pecola killed their cat. Geraldine sees Pecola's torn clothing and dirty, messy hair, and realizes what kind of person she is - one who Geraldine does not associate with. She yells at Pecola to get out of her house. Pecola leaves sorrowful and helpless, and makes her way home in the snow.



Spring: The first twigs...

The first twigs are thin, green, and supple.

Claudia remembers being whipped by forsythia twigs in the springtime. These whippings hurt worse than being hit by a belt strap or hairbrush. Claudia comes home and sees Frieda lying on the bed crying. Claudia thinks she was whipped, but Frieda tells her about how Mr. Henry touched her budding breasts. She ran outside to tell her parents, and her father beat up Mr. Henry. Mr. Henry ran away as their father was shooting a gun at him. Frieda gets worried because she hears someone say that she might be "ruined," meaning a girl who has lost her virginity. Claudia and Frieda are confused by this term because they have only heard their mother use it to describe one of the fat prostitutes. Frieda thinks this means she might get fat. She and Claudia know that some of the other prostitutes are thin and they think it is because of all of the liquor they drink. They decide to go find Pecola and try to get some alcohol from her father, as they know he is frequently drunk and will probably have some at his disposal.

Claudia and Frieda go to Pecola's house. When they discover that she is not there, they go to find her at her mother's work place, a house down by the lake. Mrs. Breedlove works for the Fishers down by Lake Shore Park, a well-to-do white community where blacks are not allowed. The Fisher's house is very nice and well kept. Everything is white and shiny, and Mrs. Breedlove is the maid. She idolizes this family and their white ways so much that she shows their daughter more affection than her own daughter.

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 6

Claudia and Frieda find Pecola down by the house. They all go inside and wait while Mrs. Breedlove goes into the basement to get the laundry. The Fisher's daughter, who has long blonde hair in pink ribbons, comes in and calls for Polly. This is what she calls Mrs. Breedlove. This annoys Claudia because even Pecola calls her mother Mrs. Breedlove. The girls wait for Mrs. Breedlove to come upstairs. There is a freshly baked berry cobbler sitting by the stove. Pecola goes over to it to touch it and it spills all over the floor and the hot juice splatters on her legs and the little Fisher girl's dress. Mrs. Breedlove comes upstairs, hits Pecola, and scolds her for making a mess out of the floor. She comforts the Fisher girl and tells Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda to get out of the house.



Spring: See Mother...

See Mother...

There is an excerpt from a first-grade reading book. It describes a nice, playful mother of a perfect white family.

Pauline Breedlove, born Pauline Williams, led a very difficult life as a child. She was born in Alabama, the ninth of eleven children. Problems with her foot (it flopped when she walked due to an incident when she was younger when she stepped on a rusty nail) caused her to always feel separate and unworthy. Her family moved away from Alabama to Kentucky for better job opportunities. Here, she tended the house, cooked, and took care of her younger twin brothers, Chicken and Pie. One day, while Pauline was leaning against her fence, cleaning her fingernails, a stranger came up to her. It was Cholly Breedlove, the man that would eventually become her husband. It was love at first sight for Pauline. He made her feel like no one had ever made her feel before.

"Pauline and Cholly loved each other. He seemed to relish her company and even to enjoy her country ways and lack of knowledge about city things. He talked with her about her foot and asked, when they walked through the town or in the fields, if she were tired. Instead of ignoring her infirmity, pretending it was not there, he made it seem like something special and endearing. For the first time Pauline felt that her bad foot was an asset. And he did touch her, firmly but gently, just as she had dreamed. But minus the gloom of setting suns and lonely river banks. She was secure and grateful; he was kind and lively. She had not known there was so much laughter in the world."
pg. 115-16

Cholly and Pauline decided to marry and move up North to Ohio for better job opportunities. Pauline was very lonely in Ohio, and she found herself surrounded by more whites than she ever imagined. Even the Northern blacks had airs about them that made Pauline feel like she was less than them. Cholly found many friends, and started to leave Pauline alone. Their marriage went sour. Pauline started to work in order to earn some money. She wanted to buy some nice clothes so the other women in the town would accept her. Cholly did not care for the money, but used it to buy drinks more and more. Pauline had a bad run-in with a white woman she worked for (cleaned her house). The woman wanted Pauline to leave Cholly because she thought Cholly was a no good drunk. Pauline refused and she stopped working for the woman. Pauline soon discovered she was pregnant. She went back to staying at home, and Cholly became nice again, and drank a little less. But Pauline was still so lonely. She occupied her time by going to the movies and losing herself in the fantasy world of Hollywood and all its glamour. It was in the movies that she developed a sense of what beauty was. She began to hate herself when she realized that she didn't match up to the beauties on screen, like Jean Harlow.

"In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap....She was never able, after her education in the movies, to



look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen." pg. 122

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 7

Topic Tracking: Beauty 7

Topic Tracking: Culture 8

Pauline had her first child, Sammy, and eventually her second child, Pecola. She thought Pecola was ugly when she first saw her. She eventually had to go back to work, and stop living the fantasy life of the movies. She got a job working as a maid for a well-to-do white family, the Fishers. Pauline loved working for them. Everything they had was neat, ordered, and rich. She did everything right for the Fishers, and they referred to her as their "ideal servant" and "Polly." She loved them so much that she stopped tending to her own house and children. This made Sammy want to always run away and had Pecola always afraid of everything. But Pauline did not care nor see what she was doing to her children. She worked too hard and was too virtuous to put up with anything from her children or Cholly.

Pauline has a memory of Cholly and her in bed together. She remembers a time when he would reach out to touch her and she would willingly accept his affection. They made passionate love and Cholly was always gentle with her. However, now he is not. Now, their lovemaking has become mechanical and Pauline finds herself disinterested in it. She knows though that He, the Lord, will make things better for her later.



Spring: See Father...

See Father . . .

There is an excerpt from a first-grade reading book. It describes a happy father of the perfect white family. The father is big and strong and plays with the daughter, Jane.

When Cholly was born, his birth mother did not want him. She tried to dump him on a trash heap by a railroad. His Aunt Jimmy rescued him and raised him. His birth father, Samson Fuller, was never around either. Cholly went to school for a few years and then quit so he could work. He worked in a store, sweeping, weighing, and cleaning up. This is where he met Blue Jack. Cholly loved listening to Blue Jack's stories (both real and made up) and Blue Jack became a sort of father figure to Cholly. Cholly grew up listening and watching black women conduct their lives (specifically, his mother and her girlfriends). When Aunt Jimmy got sick, she was examined by all sorts of people. They even called in M'Dear to use her knowledge of herbal medicine to try and see what was wrong with her. One night, Essie Foster came over to visit Aunt Jimmy. She brought a peach cobbler for Aunt Jimmy to have. The next morning, however, Cholly found Aunt Jimmy dead. From that point on, Essie's peach cobbler was thought to have killed Aunt Jimmy.

At Aunt Jimmy's funeral, Cholly played around with his cousin, Jake. They met girls, and fooled around. This was where Cholly first met Darlene. Cholly had his first sexual experience with Darlene, but it was tarnished when they were caught in the woods by two white men. The two men embarrassed Cholly and Darlene by making Cholly have intercourse with Darlene in front of them. Cholly's original longing for Darlene turned into hatred.

"Cholly, moving faster, looked at Darlene. He hated her. He almost wished he could do it - hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much. The flashlight wormed its way into his guts and turned the sweet taste of muscadine into rotten fetid bile. He stared at Darlene's hands covering her face in the moon and lamplight. They looked like baby claws." pg. 148

Cholly thinks that Darlene may be pregnant. So, instead of sticking around to see if she really is, he runs away to find his real father in Macon. When Cholly eventually found his father, his father treated him with much disrespect and unconcern. It was not the encounter Cholly had hopes for. Cholly ran down an alley and sat waiting for tears to stream down his face. Instead, he soiled his pants, and in order to escape embarrassment once again, he ran as fast as he could to a nearby river and cleaned himself completely. It was after this point that Cholly realized he was free to come and go as he pleased and do whatever he wanted, whether that meant having a job or not, being kind, mean, gentle, or loving, or being drunk.

Cholly met Pauline Williams in this "godlike" state. When he met her, he was in love with her, but this wore off and all Cholly began to care about was drinking. Soon, they had



two children, Sammy and Pecola. Cholly never had any type of parental relationship with his parents, so he could not even begin to know how to raise his own children. He was not prepared for the responsibility of married life, which included having children.

One Saturday afternoon in the spring, Cholly came home drunk and saw Pecola standing at the sink, looking helpless. He instantly felt an attraction and repulsion towards her. She reminded him of the first time he met Pauline, when she was itching her foot with her toe. And at the same time, she repulsed him for making him feel so worthless and unable to do or provide anything for her. Cholly raped Pecola that day on the kitchen floor, and in the midst, he felt overwhelmed with guilt that he had to stop. He covered her with a quilt and left her fainted on the floor. Pecola awoke to her mother staring over at her.



Spring: See the dog...

See the dog . . .

There is an excerpt from a first grade reading book. It describes the little girl, Jane, playing with her dog. They run and play together and have fun. This dog contrasts the dog about to be described in this section.

A man by the name of Elihue Micah Whitcomb (Soaphead Church) is described. He comes from a racially-mixed family background. His father was part white and part black and his mother was half-Chinese. His mother died shortly after childbirth, and so he was raised primarily by his father, a strict schoolmaster. Elihue grew up well educated, something that was stressed in his family, both immediate and extended. His ancestors always thought that if one was educated, then they were a step closer to being white, and a step farther away from their African roots.

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 8

He went through a series of jobs, before settling into a permanent career. He was a priest, a caseworker, and then finally became a "Reader, Advisor, and Interpreter of Dreams." Elihue was the kind of person that detested humanity. He literally did not like people, nor did he like to be around them. He was repulsed by the markings that stood for being alive and human, such as scars, cuts, pimples, eye crust, and moles. And because of this, he became obsessed with things, inanimate objects that lacked the dirtiness and squalor of the human condition, but still withheld some aspect of having once been owned and worn in by a human, such as a broken in door mat where he once lived, or a coffee pot that had been his mother's. He tried marriage, but could not put himself out enough to sustain it. Along with his hatred of people, he also hates dogs, especially the mangy old dog of the woman with whom he lives. He even buys poison and toys with the idea of killing the dog himself.

People came to visit Soaphead seeking three main things: love, health, and money. One hot, lazy afternoon, Pecola visits Soaphead. When he sees her, he thinks she is very unattractive. She asks him if he can give her blue eyes. He wishes he could fulfill her request but knows he cannot. He feels sympathy for Pecola, but at the same time, anger, for she reminds him of his true powerlessness.

"Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty. A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. Of all the wishes people had brought him - money, love, revenge - this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment. A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes." pg. 174

Topic Tracking: Beauty 8



Soaphead gives Pecola some meat sprinkled with poison on it. He tells her to feed it to the dog, and if the dog behaves strangely, then her wish to have blue eyes will come true on the next day. Pecola takes the foul smelling meat and feeds it to the dog. When the dog starts to choke and move funny, and finally fall to the floor, Pecola runs out of the house and down the road. Soaphead, meanwhile, sits down at his desk and writes a letter to God. He tells God about his troubles and his adoration for little girls, and specifically, his love of their developing breasts. Then, he explains to God about how Pecola came to visit him that day. He says that he gave her the blue eyes she had wanted for so long, because God would not give them to her. Now, Soaphead assumes, God is jealous of him. He seals the letter and goes into the other room, where he finds the dead dog.



Summer: I have only to break...

I have only to break into the tightness of a strawberry, and I see summer...

Claudia remembers summer days and what happened during the summer of 1941. She and her sister, Frieda were going to sell the seeds of marigolds and save the money to buy a bicycle. However, from going house to house, the girls overheard gossip going around the town. It was there that they learned that their best friend, Pecola was raped by her father, Cholly, and that she was pregnant. Claudia and Frieda are overwhelmed with pity and grief for Pecola and want to do something to ensure the health of both Pecola and her baby. Claudia especially wants the baby to be healthy because she needs this baby to counteract the opinion that black people are ugly.

"I thought about the baby that everyone wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin. No synthetic yellow bangs suspended over marble-blue eyes, no pinched nose and bowline mouth. More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live - just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals." pg. 190

Topic Tracking: Beauty 9

Topic Tracking: Culture 9

Claudia and Frieda decided that they would bury the money they had earned so far from the sale of the seeds, and also bury the remainder of the seeds. They prayed and promised they would be good for a month. And finally, they said that if the seeds came up and bloomed, then that was a sign that everything would be all right for Pecola and her baby.



Summer: Look, Look...

Look, Look . . .

There is an excerpt from a first grade reading book. It tells about the perfect little white girl, Jane, and how she has a friend that will come and play with her. They will play a good game together. This parallels the imaginary friend of Pecola's described in this section.

Pecola and her imaginary friend have a discussion about Pecola's new blue eyes. Pecola truly believes that her eyes are now blue, and she only cares that they are the bluest eyes in the entire world. She even hopes that everyone is jealous of her new eyes. She has, in a sense, driven herself mad because of these blue eyes. Now that she has these nice, pretty blue eyes, maybe she will be accepted as she always has wanted to be, and not seen as the ugly little brown-eyed black girl she has always wanted to get away from.

Topic Tracking: Self-Hatred 9

While talking with her friend, they discuss how Cholly and Sammy are both now gone. They also discuss how Pecola was raped a second time by her father. However, she never told anyone about it because she knew that no one would believe her, and that she wouldn't be seen as the victim. So, she keeps it inside, along with all of her other hopes and fears and develops this imaginary friend to talk to about her problems.

Summer: So it was.

So it was.

Claudia and Frieda remember what things were like after Pecola had her baby. The baby was born prematurely and died. Everyone talked about Pecola; some even laughed at her. Pecola was completely damaged, and spent her days walking up and down the street, pretending to be a bird, but unable to fly and reach the blue sky she has always dreamed of reaching. It says she "[beat] the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach - could not even see - but which filled the valleys of the mind." pg. 204

Topic Tracking: Culture 10

Claudia and Frieda have stopped talking to Pecola, Sammy left town, Cholly died in the workhouse, and Mrs. Breedlove still works for rich, white folks. Pecola still lives in the little brown house at the edge of town with her mother. Claudia comes to the revelation that Cholly was the only person who truly loved Pecola. She justifies this by saying that he loved Pecola because he could understand and relate to her feelings of inferiority placed on her by white society. Claudia finally observes that it was not her fault that the marigolds did not blossom that fall. Some soil is just not meant for certain seeds. "This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers." pg. 206 She realizes the sadness of the fact that some flowers are not meant to blossom and bear fruit. It is not their fault; it is just the way things are.