*The Bluest Eye*

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| ***The Bluest Eye*** | |
| [BluestEye.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BluestEye.JPG)  First edition | |
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***The Bluest Eye*** was written by [Toni Morrison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toni_Morrison) in 1970. Morrison, a single mother of two sons, wrote the novel while she taught at [Howard University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard_University).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-wofford-1) 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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression) in [Lorain, Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorain,_Ohio). Because of her dark skin color and harsh characteristics, Pecola is constantly called "ugly". As a result, she develops an [inferiority complex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inferiority_complex), which fuels her desire for the blue eyes she equates with ["whiteness"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definitions_of_whiteness_in_the_United_States). 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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_mode#Third-person_view) narrator with inset narratives in the first person. Due to the controversial topics the book raises such as racism(种族歧视), incest(乱伦), and child molestation(猥亵儿童), there have been numerous attempts to ban it from schools and libraries.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-2)

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Plot summary[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=1" \o "Edit section: Plot summary)]

In [Lorain, Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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 communities. 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. Most chapters' titles are extracts from the [*Dick and Jane*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_divider" \o "Word divider).

The novel, through [flashbacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flashback_(narrative)), 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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-3)

Characters[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=2" \o "Edit section: Characters)]

* **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 can be seen to be an extremely independent and passionate 9 year old.
* **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.
* **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.
* **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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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.
* **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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Jane_(candy)).
* **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 Elihue Micah Whitcomb, he is a light-skinned West Indian [misanthrope](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misanthropy) and self-declared "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams". He hates all kinds of human touch, with the exception of the bodies of young girls. He is a religious hypocrite. 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.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-4)

About the author[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=3" \o "Edit section: About the author)]

Toni Morrison has been one of the most important African American novelists of the 20th century.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:21-5) While Morrison's work has been deemed controversial, it has received a variety of prestigious awards, including the [Nobel Prize](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobel_Prize) and [Pulitzer Prize](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulitzer_Prize).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:20-6) What makes Morrison's writing "authentic" is that it draws upon her experience growing up in a black, working class family in the Midwest during the 1930s.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:21-5) *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature* points to the fact that Morrison's work "blends the realistic detail of black families and neighborhoods in an Ohio town that resembles her birthplace" as a way to convey her encounters with racism, white oppression, "violence within the black community" and "exploitation of blacks by other blacks".[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-7)

Author's intentions[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=4" \o "Edit section: Author's intentions)]

When asked about her motivations for writing *The Bluest Eye* in an interview, Morrison claimed that she wanted to remind readers "how hurtful racism is" and that people are "apologetic about the fact that their skin [is] so dark".[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:16-8) Reminiscing on her own experience, she recalled, "When I was a kid, we called each other names but we didn't think it was serious, that you could take it in."[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:16-8) Expanding on this point of self-esteem, Morrison elaborated that she "wanted to speak on behalf of those who didn't catch that [they were beautiful] right away. [She] was deeply concerned about the feelings of ugliness."[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:16-8) As seen throughout *The Bluest Eye*, this idea of "ugliness" is conveyed through a variety of characters. For example, Pecola, the main character of the book, wishes for blue eyes as a way to escape the oppression that results from her having dark skin. Through Pecola's characterization, Morrison seeks to demonstrate the negative impact racism can have on one's self-confidence and worth. As she concluded in her interview, she "wanted people to understand what it was like to be treated that way."[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:16-8)

Toni Morrison began writing *The Bluest Eye* in a writing group she joined while teaching at Howard University. She said it was "fun with colleagues. But then they stopped letting us bring in 'high school essays,' etc.; so I would[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye" \l "cite_note-:0-9) have to write something new".[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-YouTube-10) There, she wrote a passage that was later incorporated into the novel. When Morrison moved to [Syracuse, New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syracuse,_New_York), she would work on the novel in the evenings.

Morrison commented on her motivations to write the novel, saying, "I felt compelled to write this mostly because in the 1960s, black male authors published powerful, aggressive, revolutionary fiction or nonfiction, and they had positive racially uplifting rhetoric with them that were stimulating and I thought they would skip over something and thought no one would remember that it wasn't always beautiful."[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-YouTube-10)

Reception[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=5" \o "Edit section: Reception)]

The novel only received a modest amount of attention when first published, often reviewed in popular literary magazines.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:0-9) However, the attention the book did receive praised Morrison's skill. For example, professional critic Haskel Frankel said, "Given a scene that demands a writer's best, Morrison responds with control and talent."[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:0-9) The first major signal that the book would sell was an extremely positive review in *The New York Times* at the start of November in 1970.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:0-9) Morrison was also positively reviewed for her break from the status quo of usual novels from the time period, writing to a wider audience and focusing on black subculture in the forties, rather than the military culture of the time. Notable African American critic Ruby Dee said, "Toni Morrison has not written a story really, but a series of painfully accurate impressions."[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:1-11) Morrison was additionally often praised for her wide coverage of emotion in the novel, extending from Pecola Breedlove's quiet descent into madness to Cholly Breedlove's skewed mindsets. Morrison's focus on race was also said to be a strong point of the novel.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:1-11)

Critics picked up on Morrison's shortcomings as a first time published author. The most critiqued aspect of her writing was her language in the novel, as it was often viewed as being made too simple for the reader.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:1-11) Early critics were also seen being ambivalent about Morrison's portrayal of the black woman as an object in society rather than a person, only ever going so far as to bring this fact to light and rarely commenting past it.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:1-11) It was only as feminist critique of the novel began that more in-depth analysis was given on this subject.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:0-9)There was also a difference to be seen in Afro-American critics (who often identified more with the characters of the novel) and Euro-American critics (who often only focused on the actual writing of the novel).[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:0-9)

As time passed, more reviews and analyses were written in praise of Morrison's writing of the "colonization of the mind," her critique of white versus black beauty standards, and even began to analyze her use of simplistic language, calling it a stylistic choice rather than a pitfall of the novel.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:1-11) Popular 1990s critiques focused on her breakdown of classism in race, and often had good things to say about it.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:1-11)

Controversy[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=6" \o "Edit section: Controversy)]

*The Bluest Eye* landed the fifth spot on the [American Library Association](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Library_Association)'s list of most challenged books in 2006. It was the second most challenged book of 2013 and the fourth most challenged book of 2014. According to the ALA, the reasons reported for challenges are "offensive language, sexually explicit, unsuited to age group, violence".[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:8-12)

[**Montgomery County, Maryland**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery_County,_Maryland)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=7)]

*The Bluest Eye* was challenged on February 10, 1998 by a mother named Christine Schwalm. She brought *The Bluest Eye* and four other books to the attention of the Montgomery County school board, describing *The Bluest Eye* and others as "lewd, adult books".[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:7-13) The book was not removed from the curriculum.

[**Baker City, Oregon**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baker_City,_Oregon)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=8)]

In March 1999, *The Bluest Eye* was successfully banned from Baker City, Oregon after multiple complaints from parents about the content of the book. The decision was made by Baker City school superintendent Arnold Coe, and was supported by the school board.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:7-13)

[**Claremont, New Hampshire**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claremont,_New_Hampshire)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=9)]

Due to its controversial nature, *The Bluest Eye* has brought about disputes as to whether or not the book should be restricted in schools. One example took place at Stevens High School in Claremont, New Hampshire in 1999.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-14) The case started when parents complained to the school that they thought the book contained inappropriate sexual content. As a result, the school decided to remove the book from freshmen and sophomore reading lists, and deemed that it was only "suitable" for juniors and seniors to read the book.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:19-15) In addition, the school also ruled that teachers must send reading lists to parents early on in the year to get their approval as to which books their children could read and discuss in class.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:19-15) While some parents would have preferred heavier restrictions against the book at Stevens High School, they were glad that action was taken, as they viewed *The Bluest Eye* to be an "adult book".[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-16)

[**Littleton, Colorado**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Littleton,_Colorado)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=10)]

In August 2005 in [Littleton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Littleton,_Colorado), Colorado, the Littleton school board voted to ban *The Bluest Eye* from reading lists, where it was listed as optional, and remove it from the libraries of the Heritage and Arapahoe high schools, despite the recommendation of a committee that the book be restricted to juniors and seniors. The ban was enacted in response to a complaint received by the board from the parent of a ninth-grade student who took issue with the novel's sexual content, specifically the scene of Pecola's rape. During a meeting to discuss the decision, some parents agreed that the book was not age-appropriate and would be better suited for college students.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:15-17) However, other parents, teachers, and students expressed their opposition to the ban, including English teacher Amanda Hurley who stated that the novel is "painful, difficult to read", but "We have to discuss it, we have to learn from it."[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-18)Students also protested the ban by reading passages from the book in their school libraries. In response to the ban, Camille Okoren, a student attending the sit-in acknowledged that "students hear about rape and incest in the news media. It's better to learn about those subjects from a Nobel Prize winner...and to discuss it with a teacher in class."[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:15-17) Ultimately, the book was reinstated after English teacher Judy Vlasin filed an application to the board.[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-19)

[**Howell, Michigan**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howell,_Michigan)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=11)]

In February 2007, a group called LOVE (the Livingston Organization for Values in Education) challenged four books in the [Howell High School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howell_High_School_(Howell,_Michigan)) curriculum, including *The Bluest Eye*. [*Black Boy*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Boy) by Richard Wright, [*Slaughterhouse Five*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slaughterhouse-Five) by Kurt Vonnegut, and [*The Freedom Writers Diary*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Freedom_Writers_Diary) were also challenged. Vicki Fyke, the founder of LOVE, challenged the books due to their images of sex, rape, and incest, claiming that inclusion of these books in a high school curriculum did not comply with federal child pornography and obscenity laws, and was against Michigan's sexual education laws.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:02-20)[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:12-21) In addition to Fyke, some members of the school board and parents were against the curriculum, one arguing, "At the end of the day, they're my kids. I don't want my kids to read [these books]. I don't let them eat just anything...I want you to respect that".[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:02-20) The school board Vice President also argued that parents should receive warnings of the type of material that is discussed in their children's curricula, and that students should have the option to avoid a particular book based on content.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:02-20) The [National Coalition Against Censorship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Coalition_Against_Censorship) published a letter in response to the criticism, claiming that scenes involving sex "represent small but essential parts of the novels, consistent with the kind of material that high school students frequently read".[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:6-22) Their letter also argued that the books in question "are widely recognized as works of significant literary and artistic merit", and "are widely taught in high schools and colleges around the country".[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:6-22)

Despite controversy, the curriculum was approved in a 5 to 2 decision by the Howell school board.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:02-20) In response to legal concerns raised by LOVE, Livingston Prosecutor David Morse, the Michigan Attorney General [Mike Cox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Cox_(U.S._politician)), and the U.S. Attorney confirmed that no laws, state or federal, had been broken by including the selected books in the curriculum. In a statement, Cox addressed LOVE to say that, in order for the curriculum to change, LOVE "must either take appropriate civil legal action or use the electoral process to change the members of the board".[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:12-21) The books have since been included in an 11th grade advanced English curriculum.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:12-21)

[**Adams County, Colorado**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adams_County,_Colorado)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=12)]

In 2013, a group of parents challenged *The Bluest Eye's* inclusion in [Legacy High School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legacy_High_School_(Broomfield,_Colorado))'s AP English curriculum due to the book's sexual content and "subject matter" of a girl getting raped by her father.[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:03-23) In their petition launched through *Change.org*, the parents argued that they "did not want developmentally inappropriate and graphic books used for classroom instruction".[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:03-23) In a formal petition submitted to the superintendent, parent Janela Karlson claimed that scientific research supported this notion that the introduction of sexually graphic material including rape, incest, and pedophilia could be developmentally harmful to minors. Expanding on this point, she argued that high school English teachers are not professional mental health counselors and would not be able to adequately "...help students psychologically process and debrief sexually explicit content of an abusive and degrading nature".[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:9-24) Other reasons cited for the ban included the book's "pornographic content", which could promote sexually explicit behavior, and its lack of "educational value".[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:10-25)

In response to the challenge, Legacy High School student, Bailey Cross, created a petition to maintain the book in the curriculum, which amassed over 1,200 signatures. She expressed the importance of retaining the book, stating, "Banning and censoring this tells students that ... racism, incest, rape, abuse, are taboo subjects that should not be mentioned."[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:03-23) Numerous teachers also spoke out against the ban, stating that the book was used to analyze Morrison's writing style and that banning this book could set a precedent for censorship in the district.[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:13-26) Ultimately, the Adams County School Board voted to retain the Superintendent's original ruling of the 2010 challenge, which not only restricted the book to AP curriculum but also required teachers to notify parents before their child read the book, explaining that an option for an alternative book would be available.[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:13-26) In addition, only one of the three sections of the AP class would teach the novel moving forward.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:11-27)

[**State of Ohio**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohio)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=13)]

In September, 2013, *The Bluest Eye* was challenged by Ohio Board of Education President Debe Terhar as a recommended reading for 11th graders statewide in Ohio for being "pornographic".[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:14-28) The book was listed as recommended reading in the state's Common Core standards, but was challenged at the state's Board of Education, with some teachers pushing to ban it from the classroom. Although not seen commenting on previous challenges to her books, Morrison specifically commented on this particular incident: "I mean if it's Texas or North Carolina as it has been in all sorts of states. But to be a girl from Ohio, writing about Ohio having been born in Lorain, Ohio. And actually relating as an Ohio person, to have the Ohio, what—Board of Education?—is ironic at the least."[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:14-28)

The American Civil Liberties Union sent a letter to Debe Terhar, saying that it is her personal opinion that is novel is "pornographic". In the letter it was suggested that Ohio schools "use controversial literature as an opportunity to improve students' critical thinking skills and to create open dialogue between students and the community".[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:14-28) This received major pushback, with Mark Smith, Ohio Christian University president, saying, "I see an underlying socialist-communist agenda ... that is anti what this nation is about."[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-29) However, the book still remains on the recommended reading list, with the Board of Education stating that local school districts can make changes if they desire.[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:14-28)

[**Northville, Michigan**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northville,_Michigan)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=14)]

In 2016, *The Bluest Eye* was challenged in the [Northville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northville,_Michigan), Michigan school district after a parent filed a complaint petitioning for the removal of the book from the AP Literature and Composition curriculum, stating the book's portrayal of sexual assault was not age-appropriate.[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:22-30) A committee, consisting of a school administrator and other educators, evaluated the book and recommended that the board vote to maintain the book in the AP curriculum and allow students the option to choose an alternative book.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:3-31) The committee announced their decision explaining that removing the book "would eliminate the opportunity for deep study by our student[s] on critical themes in our society".[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:22-30) At a Northville Board of Education meeting, some parents in favor of the ban argued that the book was "pornographic".[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:4-32) Others cited the potential for "deviant behavior" after reading the novel and the "negative references within the text against the Christian faith" as reasons for the ban.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:3-31) Despite some support for the ban, many parents and students objected to it, with one student stating, "The purpose of AP literature as a class is to expand our understanding and enlarge our world, not make us more comfortable inside boxes of ignorance."[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:5-33) Parents and students opposed to the ban were also supported by national organizations including the [National Council of Teachers of English](http://www.ncte.org/), [NCAC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Coalition_Against_Censorship), and ALA.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:4-32) After voting, the board ultimately sided with the evaluation of the committee and retained the book in the AP curriculum.[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:5-33)

Themes[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=15" \o "Edit section: Themes)]

**Breakage and separation**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=16" \o "Edit section: Breakage and separation)]

Author Phillip Page focuses on the importance of duality in *The Bluest Eye*. He claims that Morrison prevents an "inverted world", entirely opposite from the Dick and Jane story that is at the beginning of the novel.[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:52-34) The idea of breaks and splitting is common, as seen in the context of the war occurring in the time period of the story, the split nature of Pecola's family, and the watermelon that Cholly observes break open during a [flashback](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flashback_(narrative)).[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:52-34) Page argues that breaks symbolize the challenges of African American life, as seen in the rip in the Breedloves' couch that symbolizes poverty, or the break in Pauline's tooth that ruins her marriage and family. He goes on to identify how each of the characters are broken personally, since Cholly's former and present life is described as chaotic and jumbled, and Pauline both is responsible for her biological family as well as the white family she works for. The epitome of this, Page argues, is seen in Pecola at the end of the novel. The events of her life, having broken parents in a broken family, have resulted in a totally fractured personality which drives Pecola into madness.[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:52-34)

**Effects of white beauty standards**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=17" \o "Edit section: Effects of white beauty standards)]

Literary critic Lynn Scott contends that the constant images of whiteness in *The Bluest Eye* serve to represent society's perception of beauty, but the idealization of white beauty standards ultimately proves to have destructive consequences which lead to Pecola's demise. Scott explains that superiority, power, and virtue are associated with beauty, which is inherent in whiteness in the novel. She further asserts that white beauty standards are perpetuated by visual images in the media as well as attitudes of the family. When Pauline first arrives in Lorain, she feels pressure to conform to white beauty standards and begins to develop a construct of femininity based on the actresses she watches in the movies. For example, she begins to model her hairstyle after [Jean Harlow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Harlow). Pecola is also surrounded by constant images of whiteness that perpetuate white beauty standards, including references to [Shirley Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shirley_Temple) and an image of [Mary Jane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Jane_(candy)) that appears on her candy wrappers. Scott claims that Pecola, "...is the victim of a power that values and classifies bodies according to norms established and disseminated by visual images".[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:62-35) These images become a constant reminder of her inability to attain these white beauty standards.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:72-36) Pecola attempts to seek the power associated with whiteness, and in her attempt to conform to these cultural ideals, she develops a destructive desire for blue eyes.[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:62-35) In addition to the white beauty standards promoted by the media, Harihar Kulkarni, an author of a book on African American feminist fiction literature,[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye" \l "cite_note-:122-37) recognizes that these ideals are often transferred generationally. Kulkarni asserts that Pecola's feelings of inferiority are linked to Pauline's own diminished sense of self-worth which she has acquired due to her obsession with white beauty standards. This acceptance of inferiority and ugliness, which has been passed on generationally, makes Pauline complicit in Pecola's descent into madness and the psychological damage she experiences. In contrast, Claudia has maintained her self-esteem due to Mrs. MacTeer's refusal to surrender her sense of identity to white cultural standards.[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:122-37) Ultimately, Pauline and Pecola develop a sense of shame and internalized self-hatred since they cannot achieve the beauty ideals that exist in society.[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:62-35) This shame is particularly damaging for Pecola, because as Pecola strives to attain these unobtainable white beauty standards, she is consumed by her own destructive self-hatred,[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye" \l "cite_note-:72-36) resulting in irreversible psychological damage.[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:132-38)

**Media and culture**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=18" \o "Edit section: Media and culture)]

Jane Kuenz, Professor of English at the [University of Southern Maine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Southern_Maine), states that *The Bluest Eye* reveals the role of mass media in shaping society.[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-39) She argues that evidence of this is seen immediately, as the book opens with a story in the style of [Dick and Jane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_and_Jane), an example of a white family that is looked up to and aspired to be. Evidence of white-run culture is pervasive, especially "in the seemingly endless reproduction of images of feminine beauty in everyday objects and consumer goods", which Kuenz points out are representative of exclusively white beauty.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:18-40) Kuenz shows that, as the novel progresses, Claudia becomes more and more similar to what white society expects of her, learning to "adore" Shirley Temple and other manifestations of whiteness, proving the power of mass media.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:18-40) Kuenz argues that *The Bluest Eye* shows the effects of mass produced images in a white-run society.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:18-40)

**Religion**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=19" \o "Edit section: Religion)]

Critic Allen Alexander argues that religion is an important symbol and theme in *The Bluest Eye*, especially in how the God of Morrison's works possesses a "fourth face" outside of the Christian [Trinity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity), and this explains and represents "the existence of evil, the suffering of the innocent and just--that seem so inexplicable in the face of a religious tradition that preaches the omnipotence of a benevolent God".[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:2-41) Alexander claims that much of the tragedy of Pecola's character stems from her attempts to rationalize her misfortune with the notion of an all-loving, all-powerful God. He further argues that, for Pecola, much of the story is about "discovering the inadequacy of Western theological models for those who have been marginalized by the dominant white culture".[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:2-41) While this ideology has negative effects on Pecola's sense of self worth, it also negatively impacts her mother Pauline, who fully accepts Christianity and in doing so spends most of her time away from her own family and caring for a white household. Alexander suggests that the image of a more human God, rather than a purely morally upstanding one, is a more traditional African view of deities and that this model is better suited to the lives of the African American characters in *The Bluest Eye*.[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:2-41)

**Shame**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=20" \o "Edit section: Shame)]

J. Brooks Bouson, English professor and assistant chair of the English department at [Loyola University Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loyola_University_Chicago), claims that *The Bluest Eye* is a "shame drama and trauma narrative", that uses Pecola and its other characters to examine how people respond to shame.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:17-42)[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-43) Bouson argues that some characters, like Claudia, show how people can respond violently to shame: Claudia does this by rejecting the racist system she lives in and destroying the white dolls she is given. However, most characters in the novel pass on their shame to someone below them on the social and racial ladder.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:17-42) For example, Soaphead Church comes from a family obsessed with lightening their skin tone, and passes on the shame of his African American heritage by molesting young girls. Bouson suggests that all of the African American characters in *The Bluest Eye* exhibit shame, and eventually much of this shame is passed onto Pecola, who is at the bottom of the racial and social ladder.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-:17-42)

Adaptations[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bluest_Eye&action=edit&section=21" \o "Edit section: Adaptations)]

* The [Steppenwolf Theatre Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steppenwolf_Theatre_Company) in [Chicago, Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago,_Illinois) commissioned [Lydia R. Diamond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lydia_R._Diamond) to adapt the novel into a full-length stage production. This play was developed through the Steppenwolf for Young Adults and the New Plays Initiative, where it received its world premiere in February 2005. The play was reprised in Chicago at the Steppenwolf Theatre in October 2006. *The Bluest Eye* received its [off-Broadway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Off-Broadway) premiere at the [New Victory Theater](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Victory_Theater) in New York in November 2006.
* In 2010, Phantom Projects Educational Theatre Group presented the [Lydia R. Diamond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lydia_R._Diamond) adaptation at the La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts in [La Mirada, California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Mirada,_California).
* Rapper [Talib Kweli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talib_Kweli" \o "Talib Kweli) used the book as an inspiration for his song "Thieves in the Night" with [Mos Def](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mos_Def" \o "Mos Def) on the [Blackstar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mos_Def_%26_Talib_Kweli_Are_Black_Star" \o "Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star) album.[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bluest_Eye#cite_note-44)

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