

THE BLUEST EYE

TONI MORRISON

LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

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SYNOPSIS

Introduction: The novel opens with a surreal rendering of a "Dick and Jane" reader. In fall 1941, Frieda and Claudia's marigolds fail about the time that Pecola bears a child sired by her father, Cholly Breedlove.

Autumn: At the beginning of the school year, Claudia suffers respiratory infection, which her mother treats with flannel and Vicks. The family acquires a boarder, Henry Washington, and takes in a welfare case, Pecola Breedlove. Her father goes to jail; his wife stays with her employer; the Breedloves' son Sammy boards with another family. Mrs. MacTeer complains that Pecola has drunk three quarts of milk. Since Cholly has been out of jail two days, she wonders why he hasn't checked on his family. When Pecola's first menstrual period begins, Frieda and Claudia care for her. The girls decide that, because Pecola can bear children, someone should love her.

HEREISTHEHOUSE: The Breedloves move into an abandoned store in Lorain, Ohio. Sammy is fourteen; Pecola, eleven. Their furniture is ramshackle; a coal stove furnishes heat.

HEREISTHEFAMILY: On an October Saturday, the family awakens. Cholly, who came home drunk, refuses to buy coal for Polly. The children endure another family row, with Cholly naked and raving. Pecola tries to disappear. For a year, she has prayed for blue eyes. She spends three pennies for Mary Janes at Yacobowski's Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries Store. She prays to disappear.

Pecola visits the three whores who live upstairs—China, Poland, and Miss Marie. Pecola wonders why Miss Marie has so many boyfriends. Marie tells her about Dewey Prince, whom she married at age fourteen. The trio has no respect for women except "good Christian colored women."

Winter: In false spring, Maureen Peel, a light-skinned girl new to school, walks home with the MacTeer sisters. Boys surround Pecola, chanting insults about her father sleeping naked. Frieda smacks Woodrow Cain on the head and black-mails him for wetting his bed. The girls withdraw from the playground. Maureen identifies Pecola as the name of the girl played by Claudette Colbert in the film *Imitation of Life* and treats Pecola to ice cream. Pecola accidentally reveals that the boys' vulgar jingle is true. The quartet breaks up with Claudia hurling invective at Maureen.

When the sisters arrive home, Mrs. MacTeer has gone to her mother's house. Henry Washington offers the girls graham crackers and bribes them a quarter to leave. They buy chips and candy bars from Miss Bertha. When they return, they find Henry with China and Maginot Line. He contends that the women are from his Bible class.

SEETHECAT: Polite women from the South like Geraldine move north and adopt pseudo-refinement. In March, her son Junior invites Pecola to see kittens at his home next to

the playground of Washington Irving School. While she admires the decor, he runs in and throws a cat in her face. He holds her prisoner, murders the cat, and rips her dress. When Geraldine arrives in the midst of the ruckus, she blames Pecola.

Spring: Claudia finds Frieda weeping because her father beat Henry and shot at him for touching her. Miss Dunion fears that Frieda is ruined. The sisters go to Pecola's house to buy whisky. Maginot Line, who sits on the porch, directs them to the house where Polly works. Because they refuse to come to her quarters, she hurls a bottle at them.

At Lake Shore Park, the sisters find Pecola, who identifies Maginot Line as her friend Miss Marie. The girls enter the house where Polly has just baked a blueberry cobbler. Pecola drops the dish and burns herself on pie juice. Polly throws them out and turns to comfort the little Fisher girl.

SEEMOTHERMOTHER: In Alabama, Polly, the ninth of Ada and Fowler Williams's 11 children, injures her foot on a rusty nail. Around 1917, they move to Kentucky, where Polly cares for the house and for the twins Chicken and Pie. At age fifteen in 1919, she meets Cholly Breedlove, who courts her and ignores her crippled foot. They marry and move to the steel mills of Lorain, Ohio, but Polly misses the kind people at home.

Polly gets a good job with Mrs. Fisher, a white woman who urges her to leave Cholly or else lose her job. When Polly gets pregnant, Cholly drinks less. She goes to the movies and falls in love with romance and attractive white screen actors until she loses a tooth. When the second child is born, she goes to a teaching hospital where the instructor informs young residents that black women give birth painlessly like horses. Polly gets a job with the Fisher family and joins a pious church.

SEEFATHERHEISBIG: When Cholly is four days old, his mother abandons him in a trash heap. Great Aunt Jimmy retrieves the child and names him after her dead brother, Charles Breedlove. She later identifies his father as Samson Fuller. Cholly quits school in the sixth grade to work at Tyson's Feed and Grain Store and makes friends with Blue Jack, a kindly elderly man. That spring, Aunt Jimmy falls ill and is attended by a midwife named M'Dear. The aunt dies on a Sunday morning.

At the wake, Cholly learns that Aunt Jimmy's brother is going to take him. Cholly and Jake take Suky and Darlene for a walk. At the dry riverbed, the couples separate. As Cholly has his first sexual experience at Darlene's insistence, two white hunters hold him in their lamplight and force him to continue. The terror causes him to hate Darlene.

Fearful that Darlene is pregnant, Cholly runs away in search of Samson Fuller. In October, he arrives in Macon and locates men shooting dice. Cholly is disappointed to find that his father is a short, foul-mouthed man. Three women take Cholly in. He lives free and loose, goes to jail, serves on

THE BLUEST EYE

a chain gang, and is shot in the leg by a woman. He meets Polly and marries, but tires of the settled life. He returns to the storefront and coerces 11-year-old Pecola into sex. She faints and wakes up to her mother's care.

SEETHEDOGBOWWO: A West Indian misanthrope moves from a career in the priesthood to caseworker and interpreter of dreams. Living celibate, he digs in trash and craves homosexual relationships. He takes an interest in little girls. Although his name is Elihue Micah Whitcomb, people call him Soaphead Church. His wife Velma leaves him. He moves from the Caribbean to America to study psychiatry and sociology.

In 1931, Soaphead settles in Lorain in the guise of a minister. When Pecola asks his help in giving her blue eyes, he has her feed poison to Bob, his landlady's elderly dog. Soaphead writes a letter to God explaining his pedophilia.

Summer: In summer, Frieda and Claudia sell seeds. They piece together the sad story of Pecola's pregnancy. The sisters decide to plant the seeds and bury the two dollars they have earned.

LOOKLOOKHERECOMES: Pecola experiences a psychotic episode of talking to herself in a mirror as she admires her blue eyes. She explains to her other self how she was expelled from school and refutes an accusation of allowing the second seduction by her father. Frieda and Claudia learn that Pecola's premature baby dies. Polly and Pecola move to the edge of town after Cholly dies in the workhouse and Sammy leaves town. Completely insane, Pecola searches trashcans.

Afterword: In 1993, Morrison explains how she met the girl in elementary school and, in 1962, began writing her story. In 1965, it evolved into a book formed of narrative parts that the reader must reassemble to understand female violation. Morrison believes the book was initially "dismissed, trivialized, misread," just like Pecola's life.

TIME LINE

- ca. 1900** Cholly Breedlove's mother abandons him in infancy. His Great Aunt Jimmy rears him.
- 1912** Cholly quits school to work at Tyson's Feed and Grain Store.
 - spring** The aunt dies.
 - later** Cholly leaves home.
 - October** Cholly arrives in Macon and finds his father.
- 1915** Polly Williams injures her foot on a rusty nail.
- 1917** Ada and Fowler Williams move their family of eleven to Kentucky.
- 1919** Cholly Breedlove courts Polly. They marry and move to the steel mills of Lorain, Ohio.
- 1931** Soaphead Church, a Caribbean immigrant, settles in Lorain and poses as a minister.
- ca. 1939** Pecola Breedlove begins praying for blue eyes.
- 1940** **fall** The MacTeers take in Pecola while her father is in jail.
- 1941** **spring** Cholly rapes Pecola, who becomes pregnant.
 - fall** Pecola gives birth to a premature baby who dies.

AUTHOR SKETCH

Chloe Anthony "Toni" Morrison received a Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, setting off accolades from around the world. The granddaughter of a Kentucky carpenter and

farmer who resettled in Lorain, Ohio, Morrison, born February 18, 1931, learned both sides of the race issue from her deeply divided parents. Her sharecropper father, George Wofford, located good-paying jobs as a shipyard welder in the North, but never learned to like whites. Unlike her racist husband, Morrison's mother, Ramah Willis Wofford, demonstrated more racial tolerance, perhaps because she was better educated than her husband was.

In an ethnically diverse neighborhood in west Cleveland on Lake Erie, Morrison and her siblings got along well with others, even after a landlord set fire to their apartment when Morrison was two years old. From strong bonds with community women, Morrison valued stories and verses about the Underground Railroad and other episodes from black history. In the style of her idol, ballerina Maria Tallchief, Toni excelled and graduated valedictorian from Lorrain High. At Howard University in Washington, D. C., she studied French, English, and Russian fiction, traveled with a university theater group, and profited from contact with two important mentors—poet Sterling Brown and critic Alain Locke. In 1955, she completed a master's degree in English at Cornell and taught humanities and English at Texas Southern and Howard universities for ten years.

Morrison married Jamaican architect Harold Morrison in 1957 and bore two sons, Harold Ford and Slade Kevin. In the early 1960s, she joined a writer's consortium and, writing while her children slept, completed a story she had begun in high school which became the kernel for *The Bluest Eye*. After a divorce in 1965, Morrison worked as an editor for Random House in Syracuse and New York City, where she developed works by Angela Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, and Muhammad Ali.

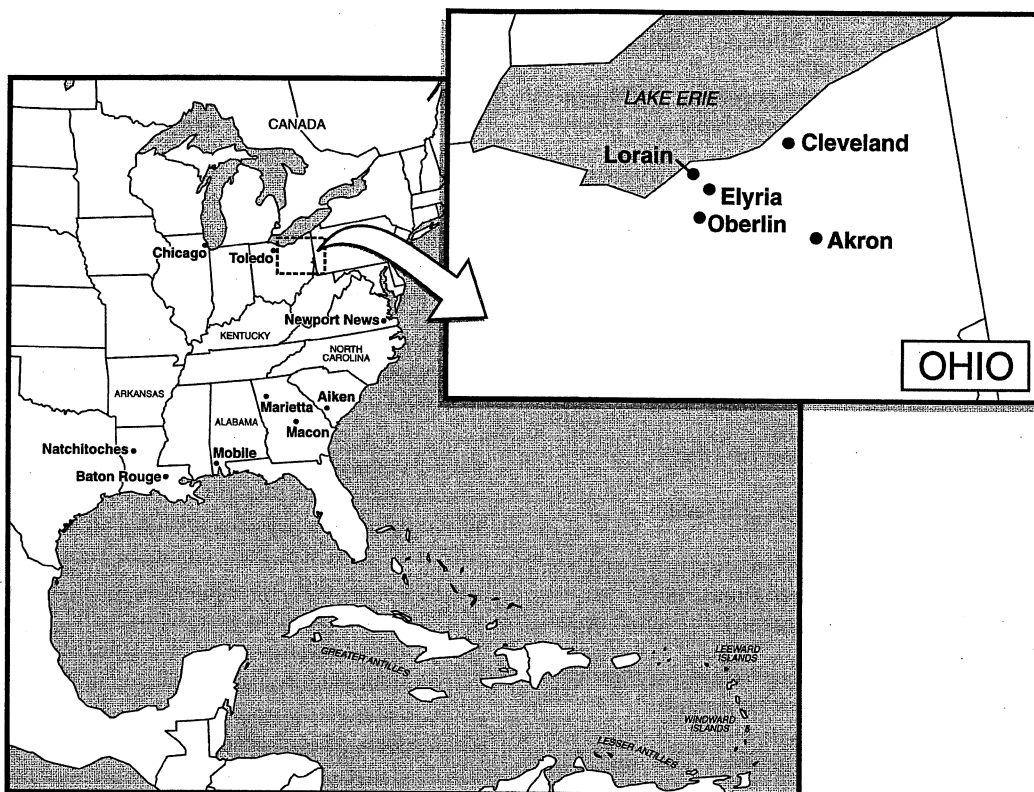
In 1969, Morrison lived outside Nyack, New York, while serving as Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at State University of New York. Four years later, she published *Sula*, followed in 1974 with *The Black Book*, an album of slave biographies, advertising, photos, recipes, patent records and news clippings, one of which evolved into *Beloved*. After teaching at Bard College and Yale University, Morrison published *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and two plays, *Dreaming Emmett* and *Storyville*, a musical. For the publication of *Beloved*, her masterwork, she drew on research from as far away as Brazil and Spain to create the fictional account of Margaret Garner, who, unlike Sethe, was returned to her owner. Subsequent works—*Jazz*, *Playing in the Dark*, and *Paradise*—have settled Toni Morrison more firmly in the cannon of feminist, African-American, and world literature.

CRITIC'S CORNER

From black female author to world-class Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison has earned her way up the literary ladder to world prominence. For *Song of Solomon*, she earned the National Book Award and Ohioana Book Award in 1975 and an appointment to the National Council on the Arts in 1980 by President Jimmy Carter. The first black woman to publish a Book-of-the-Month-Club focal selection, she also won commendation from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the New York State Governor's Arts Council, City College of New York Langston Hughes Festival, the Anisfield Wolf Book award, and three consecutive Public Library's Books for the Teen Age.

In 1981 Morrison addressed the American Writers' Con-

THE BLUEST EYE



gress; the end of the 1980s brought the Ritz-Hemingway, National Book, and National Book Critics Circle award nominations and a Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*, which boasted eighteen weeks as a bestseller. The selection sparked a spate of honoraria: the Melcher Book award, Robert Kennedy Book award, Tanner Lecturer at the University of Michigan, Robert Goheen Professorship in creative writing, women's studies, and African studies at Princeton, Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author award, City of New York Mayor's Award of Honor for Art and Culture, Elmer Holmes Bobst Award in Arts and Letters, and fourteen honorary degrees, including doctorates from Spelman, Oberlin, Dartmouth, Bryn Mawr, Columbia, and Yale, and the MLA Commonwealth Award.

The 1990s, her best decade, showered Morrison with the Chianti Ruffino Antico Fattore International Literary Prize and her starring moment as the eighth woman to receive a Nobel prize, which carried a purse of \$825,000. The first American to receive the award since John Steinbeck in 1962, Morrison wowed the selection committee, who noted her debt to Faulkner and the African-American canon and concluded: "The lasting impression is, nevertheless, sympathy, humanity, of the kind that is always based on profound humor." With typical humility, Morrison thanked the public for their love and support and promised a sequel to *Beloved*. The 1998 film version, starring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover, brought rave reviews for its verisimilitude and faithfulness to the novel.

OTHER WORKS BY TONI MORRISON

Beloved (1987)
The Big Box (1999)
The Black Book (1974)

The Dancing Mind (1997)
Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, and Conversations (1999)
Dreaming Emmett (1986)
Jazz (1992)
Paradise (1997)
Racing Justice (1992)
Song of Solomon (1977)
Sula (1973)
Tar Baby (1981)

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THE BLUEST EYE

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the impact of menace and neglect on impressionable children
2. To account for rejection of infants and children
3. To interpret social and community customs
4. To contrast the morality and stability of family members
5. To discuss the themes of longing and wishing
6. To explain the main events in time order
7. To analyze choices that children make
8. To describe attitudes toward female beauty
9. To describe elements of atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze the effectiveness of blended narratives

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain how alcoholism and violence destroy the Breedlove home
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title
3. To account for Pecola's predatory peers
4. To account for her father's alcohol abuse and evil intent
5. To justify the removal of Pecola to the MacTeer household
6. To predict how Pecola's tragedy will affect Frieda and Claudia
7. To summarize the childhood of Cholly Breedlove
8. To discuss the implications of Polly's love of movies
9. To summarize the roles of Mrs. Fisher, Geraldine, and Aunt Jimmy
10. To list events caused by suspicion, cruelty, and exploitation
11. To characterize Soaphead Church's role in Pecola's decline
12. To analyze details, particularly the mirror, seeds, and Shirley Temple mug

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Toni Morrison's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

round character a realistic being that possesses a complex or multifaceted array of traits. Cholly Breedlove, the villainous father and pedophile, lives a pathetic existence after abandonment. Reared by an elderly aunt, he loses her and flees to his father, whom he knows only by name. The trauma that turns Cholly into an abuser of women occurs during his first sexual experience, when two white hunters spear him

THE BLUEST EYE

with lamp light and force him to perform for their entertainment. These incidents help the reader sympathize with Cholly, who briefly enjoys marriage to Polly and the birth of a son and daughter. He turns into a fractious ne'er-do-well and from there declines into a drunk, batterer, and child rapist. His death in a workhouse ends the slide into ignominy.

sociological novel reform literature, also called roman à thèse, which has much in common with the protest novel. The genre uses character and action to delineate a social problem, such as oppression, economic exploitation, racial discrimination, or unemployment. In the case of the Breedlove family, the narrative accounts for the loss of Polly and Cholly from faulty upbringing—Polly as a drudge in a family of eleven children and Cholly from abandonment. From their union come two more children who are unable to cope with the world and who flee their twisted parents—Sammy in multiple episodes of running away from home and Pecola into madness.

symbol a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship and implies more than the literal meaning of the word or words, such as the sofa with the split cover, Mary Janes, watermelon heart, muscadines, and the Shirley Temple cup. The seeds that Frieda and Claudia plant represent childhood's frail hopes of a miracle. Similarly, the human seeds that conceive a child in Pecola produce misery and madness. The tentative growth of womanhood is lost forever in a mind that has retreated into a fantasy of beauty and acceptance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is home territory to the author, who grew up among steel mill workers on Lake Erie west of Cleveland, Ohio. Her depiction of place stresses psychological and sociological isolation of black and poor residents, who flee share-cropping in the South in search of dignified work with equitable pay for whites and blacks. Among the upwardly mobile, women like Geraldine who have come north to better themselves choose surroundings that identify them as middle class. Conversely, people like Pecola and Sammy live in makeshift arrangements because that is all that is available at their economic level.

The house in which the Breedloves begin to fall apart is a cold, unpleasant abandoned storefront. There, two adults and two teenagers live in grime and squalid furnishings and cluster around a coal stove, which is the center of the home in winter. For love and attention, Pecola departs the screaming and fighting of her dissolute parents and flees to the upstairs quarters of three prostitutes, whose hospitality gives her some source of self-esteem and an introduction to womanhood. The temporary placement with the MacTeers introduces Pecola to a higher standard of home life. She becomes so enamored of the girls' Shirley Temple cup that she downs three quarts of milk, a symbol of the nurturance lacking at home.

As peers begin their merciless assault on Pecola, she finds no haven in the Washington Irving School playground. At school, boys encircle and chant insults about Pecola's father sleeping naked. Junior's enticement into the nicest black home she has seen momentarily raises her hopes of a treat—a glimpse at kittens. The assault of a black cat in the face and a brusque shove back to the cold outside assures Pecola that she has no place with upwardly mobile people like Geraldine in the pretentious "better" homes of Lorain.

Even more degrading is the venture toward Lake Erie and the Fisher home in Lake Shore Park to ferry laundry in a little red wagon. In front of Frieda and Claudia, Pecola violates the pristine home that Polly provides the demanding Fishers by dropping a blueberry cobbler and splattering herself and the surroundings with a hot, gooey stain. Her skin burned and her feelings crushed, she endures Polly's ejection. Even worse is her mother's embrace of a small white girl, who receives the affection and acceptance that Polly denies Pecola. In the final view, she wanders alleyways searching through trash, her mind no longer at home in her own body.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

Novels

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*
William Armstrong, *Sounder*
Avi, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*
Forrest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*
Brock Cole, *The Facts Speak for Themselves*
Carolyn Coman, *Bee and Jacky*
Pat Conroy, *The Prince of Tides*
Chris Crutcher, *Chinese Handcuffs*
Karen Cushman, *The Midwife's Apprentice* and *Catherine, Called Birdy*
Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*
Sharon M. Draper, *Forged by Fire*
Jean Craighead George, *Julie of the Wolves*
Kaye Gibbons, *Ellen Foster*
Felice Holman, *Slake's Limbo*
Lois Lowry, *The Giver*
Robert Newton Peck, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*
Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*
Marilyn Reynolds, *Telling*
S. L. Rottman, *Hero*
Cynthia Rylant, *Missing May*
Cynthia Voigt, *When She Hollers*
Maureen Wartski, *Dark Silence*
Ruth White, *Belle Prater's Boy* and *Weeping Willow*
Jacqueline Woodson, *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*
Plays
Jane Wagner, *J. T.*
Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*

Short Stories

Toni Cade Bambara, "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird"
Carson McCullers, "Sucker"

Nonfiction

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
Judith Berck, *No Place to Be: Voices of Homeless Children*
Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*
Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

CD-ROM

American Journey: The African-American Experience
(Primary Source Media)

Internet

"Sexual Assault Information Page,"
<www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/sainfoPage.html>
"Children and Grief,"
<www.psych.med.umich.edu/web/aacap/factsFam/grief.htm>
"Counseling Services for Families,"
<www.nire.org/famcou63.htm>
"Crisis, Grief, and Healing," <www.webhealing.com>.

THE BLUEST EYE

"National Center for Missing and Exploited Children,"
<www.missingkids.com/>.

Videos/DVDs

Daughters of the Dust
The Education of Little Tree
Ordinary People
Queen
Souder

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Bluest Eye* should include these aspects:

Themes

- poverty
- family
- loss
- survival
- racism
- self-esteem
- exploitation
- pedophilia
- escapism
- insanity

Motifs

- coping with an alcoholic parent
- seeking comfort in fantasy
- comprehending the decline of a family
- losing innocence

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the novel. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Here is the house. (Introduction, p. 3)
(Morrison parodies the mindless primers of the 1950s that described a sterile, middle-class domestic scene in which a mother, father, son, and daughter live in comfort with a dog and cat. Their lives, unlike those of real people, are a constant series of joyful activities.)
2. I could not join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. (Autumn, p. 19)
*(In her long movie career beginning at age three in 1931, child star Shirley Temple paired with white actors James Dunn, Randolph Scott, Joseph Cotten, Cary Grant, Buddy Ebsen, and Ronald Reagan. She danced with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who played the stereotypical black butler in *The Littlest Colonel*, *The Littlest Rebel*, and *In Old Kentucky*, all released in 1935. Claudia later remarks, "It was a small step to Shirley Temple. I learned much later to worship her.")*
3. She's makin' like she's the Lady in Red that told on Dillinger. (HEREISTHEFAMILY, p. 54)
(Bank robber and murderer John Dillinger ended his notorious career in July 1934, when a woman conspired with the FBI to bring him to a Chicago movie house. By wearing red, she identified herself and her escort to agents, who gunned him down.)
4. One was China, and the other was called the Maginot Line (Winter, p. 77)

(Miss Marie appears under a nickname, a reference to the fortified defense system of concrete and heavy artillery that guarded France from German invasion in the 1930s. Named for its creator, French Foreign Minister André Maginot, the line held until May 1940, when Nazi forces bypassed it by sweeping northwest through Belgium.)

5. They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work, with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. (SEETHECAT, p. 83)
(Passed into law by Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862, the U. S. system of land-grant colleges took shape under the provisions of the Morrill Act, which granted individual states 30,000 acres of federal land to endow colleges teaching science, agriculture, home economics, classics, technology, and military tactics. The purpose of such land-grant schools as Iowa State, Kansas State, Michigan State, MIT, Rutgers, and Pennsylvania State and the universities of Minnesota, Missouri, Vermont and Wisconsin was to promote middle class professions, industry, and commerce.)
6. The orange-patched sky of the steel-mill section never reached this part of town. This sky was always blue. (Spring, p. 105)
(Morrison refers to the pollution that mars the atmosphere over the factories of the Ohio Valley. Orange patches and orange snow result from the oxidation of iron particles in the air into rust.)
7. China gone take me to Cleveland to see the square, and Poland gone take me to Chicago to see the Loop. (Spring, p. 107)
(In her exaggeration of friendship with three prostitutes, Pecola claims that three adult friends are going to introduce her to travel. The Loop in Chicago names the heart of the commercial district, which was once circled by elevated trains. When this outmoded system of travel gave place to the subway and autos, "the Loop" applied to the district itself.)
8. The songs caressed her, and while she tried to hold her mind on the wages of sin, her body trembled for redemption, salvation, a mysterious rebirth that would simply happen, with no effort on her part. (SEEMOTHER-MOTHER, p. 113)
(Morris characterizes Polly's immersion in a fundamentalist reverie on Jesus as a thin veil for carnal fantasy in a romantic locale where "a someone appeared, with gentle and penetrating eyes, who—with no exchange of words—understood; and before whose glance her foot straightened and her eyes dropped." She sees this faceless, formless, silent person as rescuer: "a simple Presence, an all-embracing tenderness with strength and a promise of rest.")
9. Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. (SEEMOTHERMOTHER, p. 117)
(An element of the Harlem intellectuals was a race consciousness that influenced black social climbers like Madame Sarah Walker and her entourage to imitate the clothing, mannerisms, and speech of sophisticated

THE BLUEST EYE

whites. These snobs earned the named of "dicty niggers." Polly comments, "They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them.")

10. I 'member one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. (SEEMOTHERMOTHER, p. 123)
(Polly's infatuation with movie stars reaches its height in the glorification of a glamour couple, the dark-haired Clark Gable and the blond Jean Harlow, both epitomes of an exotic screen glamour cultivated by fans.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

Motivation

1. What causes Pecola to long for blue eyes?

(Throughout the novel, Pecola fights rejection from her parents, peers, and strangers in an era that admires the white beauties of the movie screen and impels unattractive women to adopt Hollywood standards of loveliness found in Shirley Temple and other film stars. Pecola's lack of physical beauty renders her a victim of chanting school boys, a pawn in the hands of Maureen Peal, and a silent customer to Mr. Yacobowski, who reviles her. To overcome a natural fault, for a year, Pecola prays for blue eyes. While lodging temporarily with the MacTeer family, she clings to the Shirley Temple cup and drinks three quarts of milk.)

The suppression of natural pride causes Pecola to form no normal self-confidence. She seeks supernatural aid from Soaphead Church, a transplanted Caribbean pedophile who offers voodoo cures to people in trouble. His trickery causes Pecola more pain when she follows his instructions and innocently poisons Bob, the landlady's elderly dog. These incidents force Pecola farther toward the fringe of society and normal behaviors.

The act of pedophilia occurs through no fault of the child. As Pecola stands at a dishpan of cold water, her father victimizes her by raping her eleven-year-old body. A second coupling while she lies on the couch haunts her crazed mind, which supplants a normal ego with a dissociated self that stares at a mirror. Morrison uses the term "bluest eye" to double purpose—to characterize society's discounting of black women with Negroid features and to describe the sadness and dolor that consume Pecola Breedlove.)

Setting

2. Describe the Breedlove home.

(Morrison goes to great lengths to describe the nondescript abandoned storefront that serves the dissolute Breedlove family as a home. Symbolically, the residence does nothing to "breed love." The grayness of its beaverboard walls and ramshackle furnishings suits the lackluster family, who fight and quarrel through days marred by Cholly's drunkenness and Polly's evil temper. Central to the divided rooms is a sofa ruined by split upholstery since its arrival from the store. The gap prefigures the theft of Pecola's virginity in one of two acts of pedophilia inflicted by her father.)

The coal stove, the only furnishing that unites the family, sits cold and fuelless on the morning of the great

brawl. Sammy and Pecola endure an October chill as Cholly, naked and vicious, attacks Polly. A symbol of off-again, on-again passion, the stove produces heat only when Cholly buys coal. On the day of Pecola's rape her cold dishwasher suggests Cholly's failure to shoulder a fatherly responsibility to keep his two children warm and safe.

Escapism is the only hope for the Breedlove children. Sammy avoids the misery of home by fleeing 27 times. Upstairs, his sister basks in a human warmth generated by the three prostitutes who room in the building. Without socks on a cold morning, she appears uninvited, but finds a standard welcome, complete with sympathy for her cold feet and jolly stories of Miss Marie's love of her first husband, Dewey Prince. Looking out from the window to the bleak view below, Pecola thinks over the violent scenes of hateful passions in her family's quarters below and wonders what kind of love Marie and Dewey once knew.)

Character Development

3. How does Elihue Micah Whitcomb develop into Soaphead Church?

(The scion of a mulatto family line sired by an Englishman, Elihue Micah Whitcomb lives in the Greater Antilles and replicates his degenerate family traits after migrating from the Caribbean at a new home and more opportunity in Lorain, Ohio. A failure as husband, caseworker, and Anglican priest, he has attempted numerous posts as a human resources aid before lapsing into a dissolute life as scouter of alley trash cans and occasional metaphysical counselor to the desperate.)

Out of direct view of the public, Elihue lodges at Bertha Reese's back-room apartment. Still plagued by loss of Velma, his first wife, who fled his peculiar notions, he lives a celibate life and suppresses a homosexual urge. In place of carnal embrace with adults, he retreats from contact with mature bodies and lures young girls to his lair for fondling. For his doctrinal weirdness and close-napped hairstyle, local people dub him "Soaphead Church.")

Historical Milieu

4. How does Morrison incorporate historical detail?

(It is important to the story to understand the early twentieth-century flight of agrarian blacks from the post-plantation South to industrial cities in the North. Morrison, who grew up on the southern shore of Lake Erie in Lorain west of Cleveland, Ohio, draws on years of observation of Southern mannerisms and adaptation to the North. She scorns overly fastidious women like Geraldine, Junior's mother, who surrounds herself with symbols of gentility and enforces a snobbery against the trashy blacks like Cholly Breedlove's family.)

Before they meet, Cholly and Polly, both offspring of the deep South, migrate to Kentucky, the threshold of the industrial Ohio Valley. Polly is in her mid-teens when Cholly sweeps her away with a tickle on the foot. Hungry for romance and acceptance, the one kindness that had been lacking in her girlhood since she injured her foot on a rusty nail, Polly accepts. In Ohio, Cholly finds work, but Polly nets only solitude and ostracism from the inhospitable blacks around her. Low self-esteem forces her into the dark dreamworld of Hollywood movies until she

THE BLUEST EYE

loses a tooth on candy and gives up trying to imitate white standards of feminine beauty.

After bearing two children, Polly recoils from a doctor's callous remark that black women give birth painlessly, like horses. She returns to work at Lake Shore Park, an affluent white neighborhood that maintains its distance from blacks except for those who can be domesticated into house service. Under the domination of Mrs. Fisher, Polly attempts to maintain her place in a pristine white house while surviving the penury and violence of her home with Cholly and the children. Mrs. Fisher's fastidiousness forces Polly to distance herself from Cholly and the children and to accept as the norm the sweet white child that she serves as nanny. Displaced and rootless, her birth children, Sammy and Pecola, choose escapism as the only means of surviving a loveless Ohio environment.)

Theme

5. What does the author reveal about black color prejudice?

(Morrison ventures into black standards of beauty by displaying black-on-black prejudice concerning skin color and hair. In "Winter," she introduces Maureen Peal, the new girl at school, "A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back." Unlike Pecola, whose black traits are hideous even to her mother, Maureen is the local heart-throb. Rich, "swaddled in comfort and care," and spoiled, she thoughtlessly summarizes the racist film *Imitation of Life*, "where this mulatto girl hates her mother cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral."

When the jolly foursome breaks up, Claudia swings at Maureen and offers the supreme insult, "You think you so cute!" The smack with the notebook only grazes its target, but Claudia strikes her adversary in the right place. Safely fled to the other side of the street, Maureen screams, "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black mos. I am cute!" The insult hits the MacTeer girl a few seconds later: "The weight of her remark stunned us." They chant their litany of ugliness, "Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie!"

In retrospect, Claudia admits, "We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser." She searches deeper for the draw of "the Maureen Peals of this world," who enchant parents, aunts, peers, and teachers. Claudia cannily deduces that Maureen is not the enemy and "not worthy of such intense hatred." Claudia tentatively identifies her foe as "the Thing that made her beautiful, and not us.")

Interpretation

6. What does Morrison's epilog explain about the novel? (In an afterword added in November 1993, Morrison, writing from her university job at Princeton, New Jersey, explains how she encountered the prototype of the Pecola character in grade school. Beginning the book in 1962, Morrison develops the story into novel form by focusing "on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female." Stating her case with the controlled anger of a sympathetic black woman, the author expands on a "woundability . . . lodged in all young girls."

She delineates types of rejection, "some routine, some exceptional, some monstrous," and separates the narrative into episodes laced with "racial self-contempt" and revulsion.

Morrison discloses society's horrendous secret—a duality of treatment for girls of varying shades of skin and Negroid features. She admits that her book is "a terrible story about things one would rather not know anything about." At the brink of World War II, when the whole world seems vulnerable, Pecola's "story of female violation" takes a tragic turn as the child studies herself only after divorcing her mind from sanity. In retrospect of three decades, Morrison summarizes the reception of her novel as "dismissed, trivialized, misread," just like Pecola's undeserved fate.)

Conflict

7. Why does Cholly hate women?

(Like Pecola, Cholly, in boyhood, is vulnerable. A foundling that his mother abandons in a trash heap four days after giving him life, he falls into the right hands. He manages to grow up in Aunt Jimmy's care and learns fragments of details about his past, including the name of an absent father, Samson Fuller. Plunged once more into vulnerability at the death of his aunt, Cholly, named for his dead uncle Charles Breedlove, reaches again into the past to locate a new home with another relative.

The emerging libido that leads Cholly from a wake to sexual awakening with Darlene is a normal grasp on life. By exerting manhood toward a first coital act, he acquiesces to a precocious young siren and reaches the point of liberation from childhood when he is violated in his most private urgency. The beams of light from two white hunters' spirit lamp skewer and wound him; their snickers and gun-backed command force him to complete the act to their satisfaction. From this complex experience, Cholly breeds not love, as his name states, but displaces anger as contempt for Darlene.

Having given up on his father, whom he locates in a back-alley dice game in Macon, Cholly flourishes in the freedom of choices, which net him jail time and thirty days on a chain gang. Joyful on the surface, he moves north to Kentucky and liberates Polly from a life of handicap, both physical and emotional. They form a new family. The broken egos of two untried youngsters produce a flawed circle of four with the addition of Sammy and Pecola. In Cholly's consummate act of deflowering his daughter, he expresses a conflicted desire to love and overpower women, even his own child.)

Atmosphere

8. How do the MacTeer girls change?

(At the core of the novel are two young viewers, eleven-year-old Frieda and nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer. Lovingly disciplined by their mother and sheltered by their father, they enjoy the curiosities of the neighborhood and taunt an envious spy, Rosemary Villanucci, who observes them from a 1939 Buick. The MacTeers live well enough at their social level to feel charitable toward Pecola, who comes to live with them in 1941, when the Breedloves begin the final phase of an inevitable downward spiral. Lacking life experiences, the girls give what comfort and redress they can to Pecola, who is terror-stricken at the gush of blood that announces menarche.

THE BLUEST EYE

The MacTeer girls continue sheltering a lesser being by fighting off the ring of four jeering boys at the school playground. They defeat momentarily the haughty Maureen Peal, whose charity toward Pecola smacks of self-congratulation at being a high-yellow among darker, less favored blacks. In the final phase of Pecola's decline, the sisters, who are engaged in selling seeds, decide to work a miracle. To rescue Pecola from ignominy, they bury the proceeds from selling seeds and plant their unsold stock. Neither concealment can save Cholly's daughter from the shame and mental torment of giving birth to the child of incest. The infant quickly dies, leaving Pecola childless and burdened with a hand mirror, into which she pours her mad daydreams of blue eyes. For the MacTeer girls, Pecola is a walking monument to tragedy, a town horror story that thrives by rummaging in alley trash cans.)

Author Purpose

9. Why does Morrison choose Pecola's story as a topic? (From her own upbringing, Morrison knows Pecola personally and recalls from elementary school days the grievous wrong that a father and society as a whole inflicts on an ill-favored and ill-fated black girl. Morrison develops the story as an exercise in revelation of prejudice within prejudice. She admits that black people, like racist whites, are also at fault for setting up unachievable standards of female beauty that condemn girls at birth for their genetic makeup.)

By returning to Pecola's story in 1993, Morrison draws on her emergence as a major American novelist and Nobelist for the authority to condemn acts of cruelty to children. She speaks for all girls who grow up in a society obsessed with moviedom, particularly her own generation, who came of age under the pall cast by fans of the impossibly cute Shirley Temple, the epitome of whiteness. The purpose of Morrison's chastising tone and grim atmosphere is a reminder to the reader that attitudes are powerful cripples.)

Structure

10. Why does Morrison vary point of view? (Morrison goes to great lengths to account for the incest that topples Pecola and casts her irretrievably into madness. The author must present both Cholly and Polly in childhood to demonstrate how the violation of innocence begins a chain of cruelties that culminate in a monstrous deflowering and impregnation of a girl child obediently standing at the kitchen sink washing dishes. By moving back to Alabama, the author recaptures the hardships of a crippled girl born ninth of eleven children who turns into a drudge while her mother goes to work.)

The rescue of Polly comes in the form of Cholly Breedlove, an ostensibly happy-go-lucky flirt from Georgia on his way north to liberation through a steel mill job in Ohio. By diverting to Cholly's point of view, Morrison introduces the rejection and sexual assault that twists him into a woman-hater. By bringing Cholly and Polly together, she re-creates the dysfunctional pairing that is doomed to replicate itself in two rootless, displaced children.

As the final fillip of perversity, Morrison retreats to the Antilles to the dissolute scion of the Whitcomb family, whose miscegenation produces an abnormal taste for

light skin and degenerate ways. The transformation of Elihue Micah Whitcomb into Soaphead Church amplifies the socially induced perversity that preys on innocence. Unable to accept his homosexual urges or to consort with adults, he prefers untouched children like Pecola, who relieve his sexual tensions without placing undue burdens on celibacy and solitude. From this peripheral life story, Morrison accounts for an act of cruelty to Pecola that further degrades and mystifies her.

In the final shift, Morrison moves into Pecola's fragmented mind. Between reflection and mirror, the girl locates a tether to a wayward mind. Through hallucination, she is able to chastise herself and to probe as far as she is able the two incidents of rape that complete her ruination. Unlike Frieda, who is temporarily soiled by Mr. Henry's touch, Pecola is permanently marred by the very man who should have been her rescuer. With neither loving mother nor strong, responsible father to call on, Pecola flees reality and spends her days wandering the refuse of the alleyways in search of an acceptable self.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The novel varies black against white, middle class against underclass, and child against adult to express the overlays of miscommunication and callousness that condemn Pecola and her parents.

1. As counterpoint to a biting reality, Morrison opens the novel with the sing-song smiley-face story of the first-grade primer: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family." After moving through the family's adventures to an endless scenario of play, Morrison reiterates, "Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family," a robotic backlash at an insidious school lesson that condemns the Pecolas of the world from the moment they learn to read.
2. In a generalized complaint against abuse and sagging family finances, Mrs. MacTeer mumbles to nobody in particular, but expressly for her daughters and foster child: "I don't know what I'm suppose to be running here, a charity ward, I guess. Time for me to get out of the giving line and get in the getting line. I guess I ain't supposed to have nothing. I'm supposed to end up in the poorhouse."
3. The sleazy good-timing of Lorain prostitutes bubbles to the surface in Pecola's relationship with the shady trio who live upstairs. The razor-edged jokes and put-downs of China, Poland, and Miss Marie suggests the coping mechanisms by which whores countenance their own moral choices. To the romantic Miss Marie, China hoots, "She' makin' like she's the Lady in Red that told on Dillinger. Dillinger wouldn't have come near you lessen he was going hunting in Africa and shoot you for a hippo."
4. As Frieda and Claudia teeter on the edge of disclosure of Henry's sexual delights, they come closer to perversity than they realize. In light chatter, they propose: "Then let's go to Miss Bertha's. . . ."
"And then that crazy old Soaphead Church lives there."
"So what? We're together. We'll run if he does anything at us."

THE BLUEST EYE

5. In his own escapist dream world, Soaphead composes a diatribe to God that explains a yearning for young flesh: "Salt-sweet. Like not quite ripe strawberries covered with the light salt sweat of running days and hopping, skipping, jumping hours."
6. The final mad repartee between Pecola and self displays a conscience beset by guilt and an ego incapable of restoring order:
He made you, didn't he?
Shut up!
I was only teasing.
Shut up!
O.K. O. K.
He just tried, see. He didn't do anything. You hear me?
I said I'm shutting up.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Business and Economics

Describe the products of Lorain and the job opportunities for skilled and unskilled blacks and white immigrants like Yacoblowski, particularly in commerce and factory labor. Explain why women like Polly Breedlove thrive as housemaids and why China, Poland, and Miss Marie flourish as prostitutes.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of Pecola's interest in the Shirley Temple cup, Maureen's visit to Isaley's ice cream parlor, Pecola's purchase of Mary Janes from Mr. Yacobowski, the abandonment of Cholly in a trash heap, the dice game in Macon, Polly's infatuation with movies, and Geraldine's migration north. Supply sketches of costumes and props.
2. Create a storyboard account of the dissolution of the Breedlove family. Stress the instability and violence that threaten their home.

Geography

1. Use topographical maps to describe the terrain the story covers, particularly cities in Ohio, Alabama, Kentucky, Georgia, Louisiana, Canada, and the Antilles.
2. Draw a map of Lorain. Note the location of steel mills and of Lake Shore Park on the Erie and the homes of people of lower classes.

History and Social Studies

1. Compose an extended definition of social isolation. Explain why the term describes Soaphead Church and each of the Breedloves.
2. Contrast female characters and their attitudes toward self, family, and compassion.
3. Explain why the community of women is important to Pecola. Discuss her need for female companionship with peers and with the generous trio of prostitutes who live upstairs.
4. Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of abuse, alcoholism, imprisonment, poverty, perversion, seduction, and violence on family life. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and health surveys.

Language Arts

1. List phrases that underscore the significance of the themes of womanhood, acceptance, physical beauty,

and family unity.

2. Compose an extended definition of blended narrative. In what ways do all people collect information about the past in a ragged, out-of-time-order fashion? Why do people make mistakes in drawing conclusions, especially from deranged speakers like Soaphead Church?
3. Record aloud descriptive passages from *The Bluest Eye*. Consider the shattered blueberry pie, Pecola's mirror, the three quarts of milk, the failed marigold seeds, Aunt Jimmy's decline, Mrs. Fisher's refusal to pay Polly's wages, and Polly's love of Cholly.
4. Pantomime symbolic or significant episodes, for instance, Frieda and Claudia welcoming Pecola to their house.
5. List sense impressions from the novel that give immediacy and force to characterization. Name graphic details such as the smell of Fels Naphtha or the cold dishwater on Pecola's hands.
6. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe racism, child abuse, neglect, and poverty, such as Terry McMillan's *Mama* and Ruth White's *Belle Prater's Boy*.

Law

1. Read aloud state laws governing crimes committed in the novel, especially pedophilia, child abuse, neglect, prostitution, animal poisoning, and battery. Determine whether a workhouse is the best place to rehabilitate a chronic offender like Cholly Breedlove.
2. Make a chart of advice to Pecola about demanding a stable home, clothing, nourishment, guidance, and medical attention. Suggest how she can avoid neglecting or abusing her own children by avoiding the mistakes of her parents.

Psychology and Health

1. Explain with diagrams the pressures that destroy the Breedlove family. Why are Sammy, Pecola, and her infant innocent victims?
2. Explain how the popularity of Shirley Temple impacts women who came of age in the 1930s. Contrast her importance to girls with that of Jane Withers, Ginger Rogers, Hedy Lamarr, Betty Grable, Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, and Claudette Colbert.
3. Discuss with a group how Cholly's experience with Darlene and the two white hunters causes him to hate women.
4. Lead a debate concerning the best methods of treating Pecola's severe, life-threatening emotional trauma. Consider the use of group therapy, massage, shared activities, and cooking.
5. Explain why Soaphead Church's consultations constitute a false science.
6. Compose a lecture on emotional trauma. List causes, symptoms, and treatment for people like Pecola who have suffered abandonment, a family death, child abuse, rape, and neglect. Account for rejection from peers, Mr. Yacobowski, and self.

Religion

1. Compose a graveside service for Aunt Jimmy or Cholly. Indicate how neighbors can ease the suffering of the families and comfort the orphaned child.

THE BLUEST EYE

2. Describe the role of religion in Polly Breedlove's life after her marriage sours. Explain why the savior of her dreams takes on the form of a rescuing lover.

Speech

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle identifiable groups, especially abused or unattractive children, the handicapped, and members of a minority race? How does alcoholism cause tense situations? How do speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, and other forms of creativity help quell ridicule, hatred, segregation, and prejudice?
2. Compose a presentation to potential foster parents. Prepare them for parenting troubled children like Pecola and Sammy by listing positive steps toward adjustment, for example, supplying adequate clothing and toiletries, balancing family time with work and activities, counseling children whom others ridicule, setting an example of emotional and physical stability, and providing nourishing meals.

Cinema

View films with troubled or outcast characters, such as *The Education of Little Tree* and *The Cider House Rules*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *The Bluest Eye*. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, and religious backgrounds.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of cruelty in various characters, for example, Rosemary Villanucci's selfish taunts.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate callousness at school, in Mr. Yacobowski's store, among relatives, from hunters at the dry riverbed, at the dice game in Macon, at Bertha Reese's back-room apartment, and among neighbors.
3. Compose a scene in which Frieda and Claudia visit Polly to offer their concern and love for Pecola.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, for example, Soaphead Church's fraud.
5. Account for the recurrence of the motif of displacement among people who come north from Alabama, the Caribbean, Kentucky, and Georgia to settle in Lorain, Ohio.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. schemata | 9. revulsion |
| 2. shotgun | 10. caressed, redemption |
| 3. riffs | 11. Semiprecious |
| 4. emancipation | 12. Sorghum |
| 5. chasm, beaverboard | 13. Retina |
| 6. Commissary, truck | 14. Plurality, gradations |
| 7. hypothesis, industrious | 15. Pretentious |
| 8. aboriginal | |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. K | 6. L | 11. B |
| 2. G | 7. D | 12. M |
| 3. C | 8. O | 13. J |
| 4. E | 9. I | 14. F |
| 5. A | 10. N | 15. H |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. workhouse, Sammy
2. Pecola, love
3. Pecola, blue eyes
4. Mr. MacTeer, ruined
5. Kentucky, Chicken and Pie

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. C |
| 2. B | 7. C |
| 3. D | 8. D |
| 4. A | 9. A |
| 5. C | 10. D |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. H | 11. I |
| 2. G | 7. M | 12. J |
| 3. A | 8. B | 13. C |
| 4. L | 9. D | 14. O |
| 5. E | 10. K | 15. N |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. coal | 6. little Fisher girl |
| 2. Frieda and Claudia | 7. Soaphead Church |
| 3. pie | 8. Mrs. Fisher |
| 4. Shirley Temple cup | 9. Maginot Line |
| 5. Samson Fuller | 10. wash |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

THE BLUEST EYE

VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate word from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided.

aboriginal	chuckling	meringue	refinement	shotgun
adoration	commissary	mulatto	retina	sorghum
beaverboard	emancipation	penetrating	revulsion	swaddled
blunted	gradations	plurality	riffs	trivialized
caressed	hypothesis	pretentious	schemata	truck
chasm	industrious	redemption	semiprecious	woundability

1. The fire seemed to live, go down, or die according to its own _____.
2. Hanging out of windows over saloons in Mobile, crawling over the porches of _____ houses on the edge of town, sitting in bus stations holding paper bags and crying to mothers who kept saying "Shet up!"
3. One of these rapid, high-note _____ that black boys make up as they go while sweeping, shoveling, or just walking along.
4. Blue used to tell him old-timey stories about how it was when the _____ Proclamation came.
5. The stink of it kept you from painting the _____ walls; from getting a matching piece of material for the chair; even from sewing up the split, which became a gash, which became a gaping _____ that exposed the cheap frame and cheaper upholstery.
6. I mean, we didn't have too much _____ with them. Just now and then in the fields, or at the _____.
7. They were, _____, orderly, and energetic, hoping to prove beyond a doubt De Gobineau's _____ that "all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it."
8. I, too, have created. Not _____, like you, but creation is a heady wine, more for the taster than the brewer.
9. His _____ was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence.
10. The songs _____ her, and while she tried to hold her mind on the wages of sin, her body trembled for _____, salvation, a mysterious rebirth that would simply happen, with no effort on her part.
11. Bay boy, Woodrow Cain, Buddy Wilson, Junie Bug—like a necklace of _____ stones they surrounded her.
12. His smile is _____ syrup drippin' slow-sweet to the last.
13. Somewhere between _____ and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover.
14. Whatever portable _____ she found, she organized into neat lines, according to their size, shape, or _____ of color.
15. After several months of doing day work, she took a steady job in the home of a family of slender means and nervous, _____ ways.

THE BLUEST EYE

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions from the novel with a character name. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| _____ 1. claims to be meeting with members of a Bible class | A. Bay Boy |
| _____ 2. weeps because of a father's reaction to an inappropriate touch | B. Mr. Yacobowski |
| _____ 3. grieves over an assault on a black cat | C. Geraldine |
| _____ 4. is born of snobbish British lineage | D. Darlene |
| _____ 5. torments Pecola on the playground | E. Elihue Micah Whitcomb |
| _____ 6. watches the MacTeer girls enjoying snacks | F. Cholly |
| _____ 7. freezes at the sight of white hunters | G. Frieda |
| _____ 8. complains about the consumption of three quarts of milk | H. Maginot Line |
| _____ 9. embraces the Fisher girl and soothes her fears | I. Polly |
| _____ 10. treats Cholly to watermelon heart | J. Aunt Jimmy |
| _____ 11. derides Pecola for silently selecting Mary Janes | K. Henry Washington |
| _____ 12. plays dice in an alley in Macon | L. Rosemary Villanucci |
| _____ 13. takes in an abandoned infant | M. Samson Fuller |
| _____ 14. serves on a chain gang | N. Blue Jack |
| _____ 15. tosses a bottle at children | O. Mrs. MacTeer |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Frieda and Claudia decide that it is better to plant seeds than to sell them.
- _____ 2. Although Cholly wounds and abuses Polly, she still loves him.
- _____ 3. Pecola maintains to her inner self that the two incestuous experiences with Cholly were against her will.
- _____ 4. Because Pecola becomes pregnant, she is dismissed from school.
- _____ 5. Mrs. Fisher insists that Polly leave her husband.
- _____ 6. Maureen attacks Bay Boy and Woodrow Cain for chanting that Pecola's father sleeps naked.
- _____ 7. Sammy and Pecola come to the MacTeer house to stay temporarily.
- _____ 8. The sexual experience with Darlene causes Cholly to flee toward his absent father.
- _____ 9. Pecola reaps Geraldine's anger for Junior's cruel deception.
- _____ 10. Pecola knows Maginot Line as Miss Marie, a friend and confidante.

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Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase that completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

1. Polly and Pecola move to the edge of town after Cholly dies in the _____ and _____ leaves town.
2. When her menstrual period begins, Frieda and Claudia care for _____ and determine that someone should _____ her.
3. As the Breedlove children endure another family row, _____ tries to disappear and prays for _____.
4. After Claudia finds Frieda weeping because _____ beat up Henry, Miss Dunion fears that Frieda is _____.
5. When the Williams family moves to _____ around 1917, Polly cares for the house and for the twins _____.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe how the town and its residents treat Pecola.
2. Explain what Frieda and Claudia think about physical beauty.
3. Discuss Mrs. Fisher's influence on Polly.
4. Account for the value of sophistication and refinement to Geraldine.
5. Summarize events that acquaint Pecola with cruelty, rape, and loss.

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COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. When Frieda and Claudia offer Pecola clean clothes,
 - A. Maureen volunteers to buy ice cream.
 - B. Mrs. MacTeer fears they are playing "nasty."
 - C. Bay Boy and Woodrow Cain intimidate her with ridicule.
 - D. she talks to herself in the mirror.

- _____ 2. Henry angers Mr. MacTeer by
 - A. neglecting Della Jones.
 - B. touching Frieda.
 - C. letting the turnips burn.
 - D. counseling troubled people.

- _____ 3. The three prostitutes
 - A. confuse Pecola with stories of Dewey Prince.
 - B. introduce Pecola to prostitution.
 - C. direct Frieda and Claudia to Lake Shore Park.
 - D. welcome Pecola and tell her amusing anecdotes.

- _____ 4. Polly gets her name from
 - A. an intrusive white couple.
 - B. a sweet-talking man from Georgia.
 - C. the Williams family.
 - D. local people who jeer at Cholly and Pecola.

- _____ 5. In America, Elihue Micah Whitcomb
 - A. finds his Velma.
 - B. poisons Bob.
 - C. earns the name "Soaphead Church."
 - D. writes letters to God and sends them to Anglicans in the Greater Antilles.

- _____ 6. Polly ruins her looks
 - A. from two closely spaced pregnancies.
 - B. in a fight with Cholly over coal.
 - C. at the movies.
 - D. by dressing and posing like whites

- _____ 7. The older doctor assures students that
 - A. Pecola will always be ugly.
 - B. Elihue is dangerous around little girls.
 - C. black women feel no pain while giving birth.
 - D. Aunt Jimmy cannot be saved by an ignorant herbalist.

- _____ 8. Henry delights the MacTeer girls by
 - A. calling them Jane Withers and Shirley Temple.
 - B. buying marigold seeds from them.
 - C. offering them potato chips and Powerhouse candy bars.
 - D. making a penny disappear.

- _____ 9. The two hunters terrorize Cholly
 - A. by forcing him to continue intercourse with Darlene.
 - B. at the wake for Aunt Jimmy.
 - C. by forcing him to accept O. V. as a foster parent.
 - D. with information about Samson Fuller.

- _____ 10. Cholly discovers
 - A. that the funeral will cost \$85.
 - B. the money that his aunt hid for the insurance payments.
 - C. how to intimidate guards on the chain gang.
 - D. the corpse of Aunt Jimmy.

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Part II: Matching (30 points)

Match the following actions with places from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| _____ 1. Cholly and Jake escort two girls from the wake. | A. storefront porch |
| _____ 2. Samson's infant son lies abandoned. | B. Fisher kitchen |
| _____ 3. Maginot Line hurls a bottle at the MacTeer girls. | C. Aunt Jimmy's house |
| _____ 4. Maureen treats Pecola to ice cream. | D. MacTeer kitchen |
| _____ 5. Boys chant that Pecola's father sleeps naked. | E. playground |
| _____ 6. Blue Jack shares watermelon heart. | F. dry riverbed |
| _____ 7. Polly keeps house for the Williams family. | G. tire |
| _____ 8. Pecola suffers a burn. | H. Georgia |
| _____ 9. Frieda and Claudia allow turnips to scorch. | I. Alabama |
| _____ 10. Elihue Micah Whitcomb enters the Anglican priesthood. | J. Yacoblowski's store |
| _____ 11. The ninth of eleven children injures a foot on a rusty nail. | K. Antilles |
| _____ 12. A child points toward Mary Janes. | L. Isaley's |
| _____ 13. M'Dear diagnoses serious illness. | M. Kentucky |
| _____ 14. Pecola poisons a cat. | N. 1939 Buick |
| _____ 15. Rosemary Villanucci spies on Frieda and Claudia. | O. Bertha's porch |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. In October, what does Polly demand that Cholly buy for the family?
- _____ 2. Who learns about the pregnancy from shreds of town gossip?
- _____ 3. What food do neighbors blame for killing Aunt Jimmy?
- _____ 4. What dish beguiles Pecola at the MacTeer house?
- _____ 5. Who seems short to Cholly?
- _____ 6. Whom does Polly bathe in a porcelain tub with silvery taps?
- _____ 7. Who is not courageous enough to be a homosexual?
- _____ 8. Whom does Polly beg for a loan?
- _____ 9. Whom does Mrs. MacTeer forbid to eat out of her plates?
- _____ 10. What is Pecola going to put in the little red wagon?

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Pecola retreats into madness.
2. Contrast Pecola's relationships with Maureen, Junior, Polly, and Miss Marie.
3. Account for Cholly's decline and death.
4. Summarize the MacTeer girls' anticipation of a miracle.
5. Describe the causes of Pecola's ostracism.



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