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The Bluest Eye
BY TONI MORRISON



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ISBN 978-1-60389-202-5
Item No. 302905

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Questionnaire****Objective:** Preparing for a close reading of the text**Activity**

In her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison deals with a variety of difficult and controversial subjects. Such topics include racism, poverty, child abuse, rape, and incest. To better understand and appreciate the novel, think about the following questions. Write a short answer for each question, containing at least two or three sentences.

1. Do you believe that racism is prevalent in American society today? Give examples to support your point.
2. The setting of the novel is Ohio in the early 1940s. Do you think racism was more of a problem in 1940s America than it is today? What things may have been different for black people back then, as opposed to today? Give reasons to support your answers.
3. Have you ever felt that you didn't quite measure up to a standard of beauty? In other words, did you ever wish that your hair was different, or that you were taller, or that you looked like a movie star, etc.? If so, how did you deal with those feelings? If not, what advice would you give to someone who is unhappy with the way he or she looks?
4. Have you ever been bullied at school? If so, describe the experience and how it made you feel. If not, how would you imagine a bullied person might feel?
5. The novel takes place during the Great Depression, a time in which America experienced extremely high levels of poverty and unemployment. What do you think it might have been like to a child growing up in such a time?
6. What do you think should happen to someone who abuses a child?
7. If someone is brought up in an abusive environment, do you think that person is more likely to become an abuser as well? If so, how can such a cycle be stopped, in your opinion?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Autumn**Letter****Objective:** Writing in a character's voice**Activity**

Pecola and her brother Sammy deal with their violent and dysfunctional home life in very different ways. While Pecola tries to disappear into herself, Sammy constantly runs away from home. Pecola wishes herself (or her parents) dead during a fight, but Sammy beats and insults Cholly. According to the novel, "He was known, by the time he was fourteen, to have run away from home no less than twenty-seven times. Once he got to Buffalo and stayed three months."

Imagine that you are Sammy. Write a letter home to Pecola. Be very descriptive in your letter about where you are staying, how you got there, the people you have met, etc. Write about your feelings and your reasons for running away. Explain to Pecola why you cannot stand to stay at home. Try to write in the way that Sammy might speak, incorporating dialect and slang. Use your imagination and descriptive skills to create an interesting letter. Try to make your letter long enough to convey the emotions Sammy might be feeling.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Autumn – Summer**Theme Chart****Objective:** Understanding and recognizing theme**Activity**

A theme is a broad, overarching idea in a literary work. Themes usually consist of fundamental and universal ideas about human nature or society. *The Bluest Eye* contains several themes, and some of them are listed for you in the first column of the chart that follows. Your job is to look out for passages in the book that support each theme. Keep adding to this chart every time you encounter a passage or event that supports any of the themes. When you are finished reading the novel, you should have a completed theme chart. The first example for each theme is done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Winter

Writing a Play

Objective: Rewriting a scene as a play

Activity

Claudia and Frieda MacTeer have a conversation with Mr. Henry in the kitchen of their home. Re-read this scene, imagining the characters on a stage; then rewrite it as a scene in a play. Make sure you include stage directions. Here are some things to remember:

- Use italics when describing a scene and when writing stage directions.
- Use brackets for stage directions.

Begin with the line, "The house was quiet when we opened the door." The scene has been started for you.

[Claudia and Frieda enter the house. Everything is quiet. The smell of cooking turnips fills the scene.]

Claudia: Mama!

Mr. Henry *[shuffling down the stairs in his bathrobe]*: Hello there, Greta Garbo; hello, Ginger Rogers.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Autumn – Winter

Quotations

Objective: Identifying quotes from the text and understanding their importance

Activity

Many important quotes from the chapters *Autumn* and *Winter* are included in this activity. For each of the following, your job is to determine:

- Who is speaking?
- About what is he or she speaking?
- What importance does the quote have in the novel? For example, what do you learn about a character, the plot, or a theme?

The first quote has been completed for you.

1. “Hello there. You must be Greta Garbo, and you must be Ginger Rogers.”

Henry Washington is speaking to Claudia and Frieda. He has just moved in as the MacTeers’ new boarder. He believes he is flattering Claudia and Frieda by comparing them to two beautiful and famous white actresses.

2. “Three quarts of milk. That’s what was *in* that icebox yesterday. Three whole quarts. Now they ain’t none. Not a drop. I don’t mind folks coming in and getting what they want, but three quarts of milk!

3. “Is it true that I can have a baby now?”

Name: _____

Date: _____

Winter**Obituary****Objective:** Writing an obituary for Aunt Jimmy**Activity**

Write an obituary for Cholly's Great Aunt Jimmy. Use any information you find in *Spring*. Make sure you describe Aunt Jimmy's character, explain the circumstances of her death, and list her surviving relatives. Feel free to fill in information gaps with your own details, but try to make those details realistic. For example, we do not know Jimmy's real name or age, but she must have died sometime around 1925, when Cholly would have been a young teenager. We know she was very old, so we can imagine that she may have been born in the mid-1800s. Look at an obituary notice in your local newspaper and emulate the style. Your piece should be at least two paragraphs long.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Poem

Objectives: Understanding character motivation
Synthesizing character traits

Activity

Write an "I am" poem for any character in the novel. Draw your information from the character's words and actions. You may choose to use direct quotations where appropriate.

- Line 1: Begin with the words "I am."
Line 2: Write three nouns about which your character has strong feelings.
Line 3: Write a complete sentence about two things your character likes.
Line 4: Begin with three nouns that describe qualities your character appreciates in other people. End the sentence with the words "are important to me."
Line 5: Write a sentence explaining something positive your character likes about himself or herself.
Lines 6 - 7: Begin a sentence in line 6 in which you show something negative your character sees in himself or herself or in others; finish the sentence in line 7 by showing that out of something bad can come good. Use the word "but" or "however" to link the two ideas.
Lines 8 - 10: Write three short sentences explaining things about which your character has strong feelings. These can be likes or dislikes. They do not have to relate to each other or to the previous lines you have written.
Line 11: End the poem with the words, "I am _." (Fill in the name of the character you have chosen.)

Example:

1. I am
2. Rain, Forests, and Sunsets.
3. I like long walks and quiet times.
4. Honesty, Humor, and Peace are important to me.
5. I find satisfaction in a job well done.
6. I can be fearsome when my ideas are challenged,
7. But I thrive on intelligent conversation.
8. I love nature and animals.
9. I can be counted on to help.
10. I have strong feelings when a life is threatened.
11. I am _____.