

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: OOHS English Department Grade: 11-12 School: OOHS

Book Title: The Bluest Eye Genre: Contemporary Fiction

Author: Toni Morrison Pages: 224

Publisher: Vintage International Copyright: 1970

In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.

Book Summary and summary citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl, prays every day for beauty. Mocked by other children for the dark skin, curly hair, and brown eyes that set her apart, she yearns for normalcy, for the blond hair and blue eyes that she believes will allow her to finally fit in. Yet as her dream grows more fervent, her life slowly starts to disintegrate in the face of adversity and strife. A powerful examination of our obsession with beauty and conformity, Toni Morrison's virtuosic first novel asks powerful questions about race, class, and gender with the subtlety and grace that have always characterized her writing.

http://www.amazon.com/Bluest-Eye-Vintage-International/dp/0307278441/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1404990600&sr=1-1&keywords=the+bluest+eye

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s): (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

The curricular requirements from the College Board for AP English Literature & Composition includes the following statement: "...by the time the student completes AP English Literature and Composition she or he will have studied literature from both British and American writers, as well as works written in several genres from the sixteenth century to contemporary times. The works selected for the course should require careful, deliberative reading that yields multiple meanings." The Bluest Eye is what many would consider a contemporary classic. Furthermore, texts by Toni Morrison frequently appear on the AP English Literature & Composition Exam's free-response essay question as a suggested text. As such, this contemporary tour-de-force is ideal for study in the AP Literature & Composition course.

This text is one of several options for students to read as a part of their summer reading before entering the AP English Literature & Composition course at OOHS. They read this text in tandem with Thomas Foster's *How to Read Novels Like a Professor*, journaling in response to both texts. The skills of reading, or rather the thinking moves, that Foster outlines in his text are hallmarks of the study of reading novels and plays in the course. Because of its mixture of complexity and accessibility for high school students, *The Bluest Eye* is ideally suited for this pairing. In addition to the summer work, students will have the opportunity to write about the novel multiple times

throughout the year, mostly in timed-writing settings, a practice necessary for success on the AP English Literature & Composition Exam.

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

KIRKUS REVIEW

"This soil," concludes the young narrator of this quiet chronicle of garrotted innocence, "is bad for all kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear." And among the exclusions of white rural Ohio, echoed by black respectability, is ugly, black, loveless, twelve-year-old Pecora. But in a world where blue-eyed gifts are clucked over and admired, and the Pecoras are simply not seen, there is always the possibility of the dream and wish--for blue eyes. Born of a mother who adjusted her life to the clarity and serenity of white households and "acquired virtues that were easy to maintain" and a father, Cholly, stunted by early rejections and humiliations, Pecora just might have been loved--for in raping his daughter Cholly did at least touch her. But "Love is never better than the lover," and with the death of her baby, the child herself, accepting absolutely the gift of blue eyes from a faith healer (whose perverse interest in little girls does not preclude understanding), inches over into madness. A skillful understated tribute to the fall of a sparrow for whose small tragedy there was no watching eye.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/toni-morrison/bluest-eye/>

Review #2

From New York Times on the Web

November 13, 1970

Books of the Times

By John Leonard

Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" is an inquiry into the reasons why beauty gets wasted in this country. The beauty in this case is black; the wasting is done by a cultural engine that seems to have been designed specifically to murder possibilities; the "bluest eye" refers to the blue eyes of the blond American myth, by which standard the black-skinned and brown-eyed always measure up as inadequate. Miss Morrison exposes the negative of the Dick-and-Jane-and-Mother-and-Father-and-Dog-and-Cat photograph that appears in our reading primers, and she does it with a prose so precise, so faithful to speech and so charged with pain and wonder that the novel becomes poetry.

TAKING REFUGE IN 'HOW'

It all takes place in Lorain, Ohio, a sort of black Winesburg. We are told at the outset that Pecola Breedlove, age 11, is impregnated by her own father; Pecola will live and her child will die. "There is really nothing more to say," writes Miss Morrison, "except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how." She proceeds to tell us how, and thus explains why, in a series of portraits of "ideal" domestic servants, high-yellow children, preachers, drunks, whores and those abiding back women who so torment Daniel Moynihans:

"Then they were old. Their bodies honed, their odor sour... They had given over the lives of their own children and tendered their grandchildren. With relief they wrapped their heads in rags, and their breasts in flannel; eased their feet into felt. They were through with lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror. They alone could walk the roads of Mississippi, the lanes of Georgia, the fields of Alabama unmolested. They were old enough to be irritable when and where they chose, tired enough to look forward to death, disinterested enough to accept the idea of pain while ignoring the presence of pain. They were, in fact and at last, free. And the lives of these old black women were synthesized in their eyes -- a puree of tragedy and humor, wickedness and serenity, truth and fantasy."

I have said "poetry." But "The Bluest Eye" is also history, sociology, folklore, nightmare and music. It is one thing to state that we have institutionalized waste, that children suffocate under mountains of merchandised lies. It is another thing to demonstrate that waste, to re-create those children, to live and die by it. Miss Morrison's angry sadness overwhelms.

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/11/home/morrison-bluest.html>

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

Title: Atonement Author: Ian McEwan

Title: The Bean Trees Author: Barbara Kingsolver

Title: Going After Cacciato Author: Tim O'Brien

Title: The Kite Runner Author: Khaled Hosseini

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

Language: Used in exasperation or in derogatory ways; e.g., fuck, shit, bitch, nigger.

Sex: There are several descriptions of sexual encounters, ranging from three girls dealing with a first menstruation to the voyeuristic oversight of two hunters who catch a young couple in the act. Descriptions of lovemaking among married couples serve to distinguish between different types of people and to portray various degrees of intimacy and receptiveness on the part of the women involved, often presented in subjective ways from the perspectives of the women. Furthermore, there are several prostitutes who feature prominently throughout the novel.

Racism: Particularly in the use of the word "nigger"; however, racism is presented not only from whites toward blacks, but also in an internalized form from blacks toward other blacks.

Abuse/Rape: Spousal abuse, child abuse, and rape are all present in this novel. There is a pedophile who expresses exactly why he likes young girls. Additionally, there is the incestuous rape between Cholly and his daughter, Pecola, which comes at the end of a chapter devoted to Cholly's history. The scene itself is readily compared to previous scenes between Cholly and his wife. The resulting pregnancy and eventual loss of the child lead Pecola into madness, emphasizing the waste of life, a waste created by society's influence on blacks' lives in the time period of the novel.

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated ☒ Regular ☒ At Risk ☐

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☐ 11☒ 12☒

Reading level of this title (if applicable): N/A

Date Submitted to Department Chair: Summer 2014

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults