

Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

# The Bluest Eye

by Toni Morrison

written by Rhonda Carwell

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ISBN 978-1-935466-29-1  
Reorder No. 307618

# The Bluest Eye

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the style of narration used in the novel
2. trace the development of plot through the novel identifying
  - exposition
  - conflict
  - rising action
  - climax
  - resolution
3. analyze the development and contribution of certain motifs:
  - seasons
  - the Dick and Jane narrative
  - dirtiness and cleanliness
  - self-hatred
4. trace the development of themes:
  - perception based on appearance is not always a true reality
  - racism and prejudice exist within and between races
  - the definitions of beauty and ugliness as set by society, not the individual
  - societal expectations set for members who have no control over setting those expectations
5. analyze the relationship between chapter titles and the development of themes
6. trace the importance of the past on character and situation
7. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam
8. respond to free response items similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam

## Introductory Lecture

### THE GREAT MIGRATION: AFRICAN AMERICAN MIGRATION TO THE NORTH

Between 1916 and 1920, approximately 500,000 African Americans migrated to northern cities from the South. This exodus occurred for many reasons, among them the failure and destruction of the cotton crop causing a fall in prices, an economic depression in the South, and the “Jim Crow” laws, which limited the freedom of black Americans in schools, hotels, restaurants, train cars, hospitals, and government. Most African Americans flocked to larger cities, believing that these northern cities held employment and opportunities for advancement that the South did not. However, this was not always the case, and oftentimes, African Americans found themselves facing hardships they were not prepared for. Many of the prejudices that were held in the South existed in the North as well. African Americans were believed to be lower in intelligence and ability than their white counterparts. African Americans were believed to be less reliable workers than were European immigrants who had also traveled great distances for a chance at better lives. Oftentimes, African Americans found themselves used as “scabs” to replace workers on strike, thus endangering themselves for work and further alienating them from their potential future co-workers.

With the onset of World War I, foreign immigration was limited, and the pool of cheap labor dried up. Factories and businesses turned to African Americans to fill labor vacancies, knowing that blacks, grateful for work, would not demand the high wages and tolerable working conditions demanded by white laborers. World War II again provided more opportunities for employment as white laborers were shipped overseas as soldiers. Word spread quickly in the South that there were more jobs and higher wages in northern cities. Some African Americans sought to escape life in the South, hoping to find material success in the North. Others hoped to earn and save and eventually return to their southern homes and families. Still others were encouraged by family who wanted to remain in the South while they benefited from the “transplant’s” success.

Whatever the reasons for the migration, African Americans found that they were, by and large, no more welcome in the North than they had been in the South, and they faced new sets of challenges as a result. Despite the occasional individual success, the situation for blacks in both the North and the South did not begin to improve significantly until the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s, and the aftermath of a series of Supreme Court decisions and Congressional acts.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES IN THE 1900S

Although the North offered financial opportunities not available in the South, the decision to migrate north was not an easy one for families. White attitudes towards blacks—and often the attitudes of northern blacks as well—created an isolation that was not felt in the South. Social networks were lost in the move, and parents often found themselves without the support, assistance, comfort, and advice that were available from the community in the South. Parents felt that the city had little to offer their children except danger. Urban strangers could not assist them in raising their children the way rural southern neighbors and relatives would. Some families chose to leave their children with family in the South until they were established, but this division of the family was difficult for both spouses, parents, and children. In few cases, women did provide something of a support for each other in northern communities, exchanging child care and household help when needed. These women established an informal cross-cultural network, reaching out to immigrants in their neighborhoods. Despite the disappointments met with in the North, returning South was difficult for transplanted African Americans. Many northern blacks sent their children home to help out on the farm or homestead instead of returning themselves.

Despite the rumors they had heard in the South of an abundance of jobs in northern cities, transplanted African Americans found themselves competing with a growing immigrant population that had also been attracted by rumors of plentiful jobs and better lives. Blacks found themselves competing with immigrants for housing and jobs but were perceived as less worthy than the white immigrants. White landlords often increased the rent of a home sought by a black family, knowing that the African Americans had no choice but to pay or be homeless. To meet the high rents, and to prevent homelessness, black families crowded their families into small homes not really suitable to their needs. An eight-room house with one bath could conceivably become housing for five or six families.

Due to both cultural and social differences, as well as the pressures of trying simply to survive in the hostile North, the roles of children in an African American household were very different from what might be expected today. Adults demanded respect and absolute obedience. Curiosity was not encouraged; questions were punished as impolite or simply remained unanswered. Children were to be “seen and not heard,” like furniture. The behavior of the children was a reflection on the parents and misbehavior was dealt with harshly—perhaps even abusively by today’s standards. Cruelty, however, was seen as an expression of love. Harshness was viewed as protection, an attempt to prepare the children to survive in the unfriendly world they would face as adults.

The challenges facing young black girls were compounded by their gender. Opportunities for African Americans as a whole were limited, for black women before the 1960s even more so. Even literature provided no role models for black girls other than the stereotyped black or the superior white heroine. The few black heroines to be found tended to be lighter skinned. There existed for a young black female no sense of community or shared experience in the books she would read, both in and out of school.

Toni Morrison’s novels serve this purpose of shared experience because they freely and openly explore young black women, their experiences, and feelings.

## GENRE

*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison is a realistic, coming-of-age novel. The characters and events are creations of the author. However, the events, people, and settings actually do or did exist in some cases, and could potentially exist in other situations. The story is depicted as true to life, that which could and probably has happened to someone, somewhere. As a coming-of-age novel, *The Bluest Eye* chronicles the events which lead to the destruction of a girl on the path to adulthood. She loses the innocence and wonder of childhood, mostly from events over which she has no control. Her transition into the knowledge of adulthood is tumultuous and disturbing and ultimately heartbreaking, yet she arrives there nevertheless, though not fully intact in body nor spirit.

## AUTHOR NOTES

“Crude and crass as most of it is, and really, uninformed as almost all of it is, the discourse about race is important,” Toni Morrison has stated. She continues, “But the real conversation should take place among white people. They should talk to each other about that. Not with me. I can’t be the doctor and the patient” (“Toni Morrison,” *Newsmakers*, 1998). With her novels, which address the difficult topics society is unprepared and uncomfortable talking about, Toni Morrison helped open the doors for discussion, hoping that the changes she longed for would eventually occur.

Born in Lorain, Ohio, Toni Morrison was raised in a close family by parents who reared her and her siblings with strong racial pride and self-esteem, giving them the ability to become honorable and principled adults with the ability to distinguish themselves in society. Although her father was more leery of the white people he encountered due to past experiences from his childhood in the South, her mother was more diplomatic, yet convicted in her arguments against whites she came in contact with throughout their lives. Morrison’s parents and grandparents helped develop her racial identity, which allows her to write novels that discuss the difficult topics of race and race relations and the hardships experienced by her race. As a child, she was a victim of institutionalized racism and experienced the Civil Rights movement. In one interview for *Time* magazine, she recounted her reflected on the experiences of white immigrants coming to the United States: “In becoming an American, from Europe, what one has in common with that other immigrant is contempt for me—it’s nothing else but color... Every immigrant knew he would not come at the very bottom. He had to come above at least one group—and that was us.”

Despite the setbacks she faced, Morrison was able to graduate with honors from high school, earn her undergraduate degree from Howard University, complete a graduate program, and eventually write award-winning novels, culminating in her winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. She was the first black woman ever to receive this honor. Yet, Toni Morrison remains humble stating, “Fame is nothing really. I mean, it’s not useful. I suppose fame should be a little more interesting. And though I won a Nobel Prize, it doesn’t help you do anything. I’m immune to adoration. Not for my books—that I love.”

## **Practice Free Response Items**

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 1

In most novels and plays, past events are influential on the characters and the events of the plot as it unfolds. The past serves to explain, foreshadow, or provide knowledge to the reader, which assists in unraveling themes. Using the novel *The Bluest Eye*, by Toni Morrison, analyze the connections between the history of the characters and their current circumstances and explain how these connections contribute to the overall meaning of the novel.

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 2

Regardless of how it is structured, plot is *the* essential element of fiction on which all character development and revelation of meaning depend. In a well-written essay, analyze the plot structure of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and explain how this structure fosters the reader's understanding of the characters and grasp of the overall meaning of the novel.

Do not merely *summarize* the plot.

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 3

Because the title is conventionally the first element of a novel or play the reader will encounter, it must be crafted in such a way that it will suggest information about plot, characters, and theme of the work without giving away too many details. Similarly, chapter titles provide insight into the developing story while also maintaining surprise and suspense. Using Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye*, discuss the relationship between the chapter titles and the development of overall themes.

Avoid plot summary.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 4

Using the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison carefully read the passage from the opening pages of “Autumn” which begins, “She slept in the bed with us. Freida on the outside because she is brave...” and ends “...even as I learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement.” In a well-written essay, analyze the literary techniques used by the author to characterize Claudia.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 5

Carefully read the opening pages of the section entitled “Spring” from Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* beginning, “We walked down tree-lined streets of soft gray houses leaning like tired ladies...” and ending, “... and the honey in her words complemented the sundown spilling on the lake.” Then, in a well organized essay, discuss the author’s use of imagery in the narration to assist in the development of a theme of the novel.

## Practice Multiple Choice Questions

### PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-10

Carefully read the passage from Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye*, from the opening pages of the section entitled "Winter," beginning with "By the time this winter had stiffened itself into a hateful knot that nothing could loosen..." and ends with "The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us." Then select the best answers to the following multiple-choice the questions.

1. The sentence, "A someone who splintered the knot into silver threads that tangle us, netted us, made us long for the dull chafe of the previous boredom," is an example of
  - A. hyperbole.
  - B. irony.
  - C. foreshadowing.
  - D. allusion.
  - E. understatement.
2. Which of the following phrases best illustrates the narrator's underlying jealousy?
  - A. "a high yellow dream child"
  - B. "swaddled in comfort and care"
  - C. "long brown hair braided into lynch ropes"
  - D. "a cheaper version of which we only got at Easter"
  - E. "She was rich, at least by our standards"
3. The line "...hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk," is an example of
  - A. symbol.
  - B. rhetoric.
  - C. paradox.
  - D. alliteration.
  - E. imagery.
4. The phrase, "eyes genuflected under sliding lids," suggests a(n)
  - A. observation of Maureen's beauty.
  - B. admiration of Maureen.
  - C. importance of religion.
  - D. emphasis on perception.
  - E. condemnation of Claudia and Frieda.
5. The shift in tone in the paragraph describing the boys' taunting Pecola can best be described as
  - A. abrasive realism to ironic understatement.
  - B. mild anger to abrasive clarification.
  - C. gentle elucidation to forceful realism.
  - D. soothing explanation to rabid justification.
  - E. belligerent interpretation to cordial rationale.



6. The author uses the language of the girls while they talk about boys, babies, and movies to illustrate their
  - A. intelligence.
  - B. knowledge.
  - C. sophistication.
  - D. education.
  - E. immaturity.
7. Which of the following phrases is refuted by Maureen's explanation of her family?
  - A. "as rich as the richest of white girls"
  - B. "swaddled in comfort and care"
  - C. "she was rich, at least by our standards"
  - D. "unearned haughtiness in her eyes"
  - E. "quality of her clothes threatened to derange"
8. The purpose of Maureen's using the same insult that the boys had used can best be explained as
  - A. self-indulgence.
  - B. self-esteem.
  - C. self-preservation.
  - D. self-abnegation.
  - E. self-denial.
9. The author uses the word "*Thing*" in the last paragraph in order to show the
  - A. universality of notions of beauty.
  - B. monstrosity of the prejudice that defines beauty.
  - C. harshness of the insults thrown at the girls.
  - D. ambiguity of social standards of beauty.
  - E. flexibility of the definition of beauty.
10. The author's overall purpose for this passage is most likely to
  - A. demonstrate inter-racial prejudice.
  - B. underscore the cruelty of children.
  - C. emphasize the prevalence of class distinctions.
  - D. illustrate intra-racial prejudice.
  - E. comment on the injustice of prejudice.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 11-20

Carefully read the passage from Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* from the chapter "SEETHECATITGOESMEOWCOMEANDPLAYWITHJANE...", which begins, "One such girl from Mobile, or Meridian, or Aiken who did not..." and ends with, "But she could not hold it low enough to avoid seeing the snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

11. Which of the following sentences best explains Junior's character and actions?
  - A. "Geraldine did not allow her baby, Junior, to cry."
  - B. "He was always brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod."
  - C. "As he grew older, he learned to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat and spent some happy moments watching it suffer."
  - D. "As long as his needs were physical, she could meet them- comfort and satiety."
  - E. "Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw that every other desire was fulfilled."
12. The author's use of sarcasm can best be seen in the phrase
  - A. "subtle telltale signs threatened to erode it and the watch had to be constant."
  - B. "neither Bay Boy nor P.L. was good enough for him."
  - C. "the line between colored and nigger was not always clear."
  - D. "his mother did not like him to play with niggers."
  - E. "hair was cut as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool."
13. The theme of social standards of beauty and ugliness was reinforced by Junior's
  - A. playmate, Ralph Nisensky.
  - B. decision to stay away from groups of black girls.
  - C. choice of Pecola as a victim.
  - D. hatred of his mother.
  - E. behavior towards children on the playground.
14. Pecola's observations about Junior's home and her behavior at the house imply
  - A. the kindness of the family that lives in the home.
  - B. a stark contrast with her own existence.
  - C. the immaturity of her character.
  - D. her realization of social differences.
  - E. her ignorance of how other families live.
15. The author's purpose in describing Pecola's fight with Junior over the safety of the cat is most likely to
  - A. provide resolution to the confrontation.
  - B. victimize Pecola.
  - C. further villainize Junior.
  - D. illustrate Pecola's compassion.
  - E. foreshadow Geraldine's entrance into the confrontation.

16. The author's syntax for the paragraphs beginning, "Geraldine went to the radiator and picked up the cat," and ending, "Up over the hump of the cat's back she looked," illuminates Geraldine's
- A. turmoil.
  - B. disdain.
  - C. empathy.
  - D. compassion.
  - E. rage.
17. The reader's understanding of Geraldine's racial bias is reinforced by her
- A. use of derogatory language to demand that Pecola leave her house.
  - B. ignoring Junior's culpability in the situation.
  - C. memories of black children like Pecola.
  - D. obvious restraint in dealing with the children in her home.
  - E. empathy toward the abused girl.
18. The simile, "Like flies they hovered; like flies they settled" reinforces Geraldine's belief that
- A. class divisions exist even within races.
  - B. Negroes are dirty.
  - C. children are nuisances.
  - D. girls socialize and gossip excessively.
  - E. racial bias is like a disease in society.
19. The importance of the imagery used to describe the picture of Jesus, particularly his eyes as "sad and unsurprised," is the
- A. substantiation that Geraldine will modify her views.
  - B. forgiveness of Junior for his actions.
  - C. validation that Geraldine's behavior was unjustified.
  - D. disillusionment of Pecola's hope of redemption.
  - E. reinforcement of Pecola's view of herself being ugly.
20. In the last sentence of the passage, "But she could not hold it low enough to avoid seeing the snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement," the figurative use of the word *dying* to describe the snowflakes most likely refers to
- A. Pecola.
  - B. Geraldine.
  - C. Junior.
  - D. Pauline.
  - E. Claudia.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 21- 30

Carefully read the passage from *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison from the chapter entitled “SEETHEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICE...” which begins, “In her loneliness, she turned to her husband for reassurance, entertainment, for things to fill the vacant places...” and ends, “They were musings, idle thoughts, full sometimes of the old dreaminess, but not the kind of thing she cared to dwell on.” Then select the best answer to each of the following questions.

21. In the sentence, “The women were amused by her because she did not straighten her hair,” the word *amused*, most likely suggests the women’s
  - A. pleasure at meeting Pauline.
  - B. desire to please Pauline.
  - C. condescension to Pauline.
  - D. social pretensions.
  - E. enjoyment of each others’ company.
22. The primary purpose of the alternating points of view in this chapter is to
  - A. provide additional insight into the facts of the chapter.
  - B. enhance the overall voice, style, tone, and mood of the chapter.
  - C. provide sharper character insight.
  - D. authenticate the events narrated through the first person.
  - E. maintain a consistent style, voice, mood, and tone in the passage.
23. The contrasting points of view are accompanied by which contrast of moods?
  - A. compassionate and provoking
  - B. understanding and sympathetic
  - C. clinical and detached
  - D. biased and reserved
  - E. analytical and unemotional
24. The diction of Pauline’s first-person narrative can best be described as
  - A. literary.
  - B. colloquial.
  - C. old-fashioned.
  - D. abstract.
  - E. euphonious.

25. Which of the following phrases can be used to accurately show the contrast between Pauline at the beginning of the passage with Pauline at the end?
- A. "You'd think with a pretty house and all the money they could hold on to, they would enjoy one another."
  - B. "But later on it didn't seem none too bright for a black woman to leave a black man for a white woman."
  - C. "She just sucked her teeth and made out like what I said was dumb. All the while I was thinking how dumb she was."
  - D. "Nasty white folks is about the nastiest things they is."
  - E. "How you going to answer a woman like that, who don't know what good a man is, and say out of one side of her mouth she's thinking of your future but won't give you your own money so you can buy you something besides baloney to eat?"
26. The line, "Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion," implies the author realizes the
- A. depth of the injustices of prejudice.
  - B. arbitrary and unrealistic nature of standards of beauty.
  - C. intensified social challenges for black Americans.
  - D. cruelty of romantic love.
  - E. equation of romantic love with physical beauty.
27. In the sentence, "There the black-and-white images came together, making a magnificent whole—all projected through the ray of light from above and behind," the *ray of light* alludes to
- A. heaven.
  - B. hell.
  - C. prejudice.
  - D. beauty.
  - E. understanding.
28. Pauline's comparison of white men to her husband reinforces the way perception is corrupted by
- A. prejudice.
  - B. love.
  - C. romance.
  - D. reality.
  - E. fiction.

29. The simile “just like horses” can refer to the development of all of the themes EXCEPT
- A. perception is not always reality.
  - B. prejudice exists both between and within races.
  - C. to be forced to meet social expectations set by others is unjust.
  - D. standards of beauty and ugliness are set by society, not the individual.
  - E. the importance of self-esteem.
30. The tone of the passage becomes increasingly
- A. cognizant.
  - B. skeptical.
  - C. pretentious.
  - D. humble.
  - E. righteous.

### Answers with Explanations

1. Claudia writes, “A someone who splintered the knot into silver threads that tangle us, netted us, made us long for the dull chafe of the previous boredom,” to introduce the character of Maureen Peel to the reader. It is not ironic (B) that Claudia refers to Maureen as the person who unravels the boredom of winter. In fact, she does bring excitement to the girls, who both loathe and admire this black girl unlike anyone they have known, and she does indeed ensnare them with her unusual ways and style. The sentence flows with imagery that cannot be described as understatement (E). In fact, the suggestion that the narrator is exaggerating Maureen’s power might suggest hyperbole (A); however, the sentence implies that Claudia, the narrator, can sense that while freeing them from boredom, Maureen will also trap them (“tangle us”). This is not an exaggeration. Maureen does consume the girls who become obsessed with the girl they admire but want to hate. The sentence itself does not allude (D) to any other point in history or to the story itself. **It is merely a statement of what may come, or foreshadowing (C), and the comparison to a net and a longing for what they already know- boredom- implies that it will not be a pleasant outcome for the girls.**
2. Maureen enters the story, and immediately the MacTeer girls sense the differences between them and her. “She was rich, at least by our standards” (E) serves as a statement of fact. Claudia, the narrator, provides proof of this statement through the rest of the passage. It states the cause of the jealousy, without illustrating the jealousy itself. “Swaddled in comfort and care” (B) might tempt some students, but they would have to interpret Claudia’s choice of the word “swaddling” as sarcastic. In speaking of Maureen’s shoes, Claudia describes “a cheaper version of which we only got at Easter” (D), which implies that she is well aware that her own family does not have the wealth of Maureen’s, yet this is not the best example. The description of “long brown hair braided in lynch ropes” (C) can be seen as a negative descriptor in comparing her hair to an image of death and degradation of the black race—the lynch rope. It serves more to underscore the passion Claudia feels in disliking Maureen by associating her with negative imagery of the black race, rather than jealousy. **The strongest example of jealousy would be the description of “a high yellow dream child” (A). High yellow implies that Maureen has a lighter skin color than Claudia or her sister and the use of the descriptor “dream” indicates that Claudia wishes she could be this child that so many admire, but it is an unattainable object.**
3. The words “hint of spring,” “summery,” and “autumn” contrast with the boredom suggested by “winter” when Claudia first introduces Maureen. The reference to nature and the beauty found in the seasons is, of course, rhetorical (B) but this is far too general a term. Paradox, alliteration, and imagery are, after all, rhetorical devices or conventions, so this choice does not provide a meaningful answer. The description is not alliterative (D). The seasons are not a paradox (C) since the descriptions of the seasons match the words used. And although the use of nature as a symbol (A) may be found in the novel, it is not apparent in the sentence, because the words only provide a description of the character, Maureen. **The words and comparisons of Maureen’s features to that of the seasons is use imagery (E). Specific reference is made to the beauty of her features to that of the beauty of the seasons providing an image that is not made through words alone.**

4. When Claudia describes how the students and teachers react to Maureen Peal, the other black girls move aside for her, and their “eyes genuflect[ed] under sliding lids.” This comment refers exclusively to Maureen, not Claudia and Frieda, so condemnation of them (E) is not appropriate. “Genuflecting” suggests a religious gesture, but within the context of the passage, it is used more to suggest the near reverence the black girls have for Maureen and the power she holds over everyone. It is used to show respect, not the importance of religion (C). Due to the line’s referring to the movement of the girls’ eyes, it may seem that the emphasis is on perception (D), and her beauty (A) could be the underlying reason for the reaction of the girls. However, viewed in context, **this statement is merely a way to demonstrate the black girls’ admiration of Maureen (B). They see the sway she holds over whites and blacks alike and develop a sense of worship towards her power, thus “genuflecting” to show their respect of her.**
5. The opening of the paragraph describes exactly how the boys had developed the verse they used to abuse Pecola as they circled her. It explains that the insults consist of “matters over which the victim had no control” and that these same insults could be applied to Pecola’s abusers. The tone begins calmly, simply explaining the source and derivation of the insults. They were not belligerent interpretations (E) nor abrasive realisms (A), just simply descriptions. Mild could be a term applied to the opening, but the use of anger with mild moving towards abrasive clarification (B) does not apply to the paragraph. Although the opening of the paragraph is calm, particularly in comparison to the ending anger which is apparent, soothing (D) implies that the one would be okay with the circumstances. Although it is an adequate explanation of whence the insults were derived, they were insults nevertheless, and soothing would not be an appropriate term for the idea of multiple children bullying another. **The most appropriate answer would be gentle elucidation (C) to forceful realism.** The event’s origins are gently revealed to the reader by calmly stating the facts of the verse. The paragraph quickly turns angry and forceful when the author describes “contempt for their own blackness,” “cultivated ignorance,” and “exquisitely learned self-hatred,” culminating in a dance of a “macabre ballet.”
6. During the walk home with Maureen, the girls discuss a variety of topics such as movies, school, lawsuits, boys, and babies. Some of the words and phrases that the girls misuse or misconstrue are “beared witness,” “incorrigival,” and “like-lines.” These usages suggest the partial truths the girls are privy to, even though they are not integrated into adult conversations. This is no reflection on their intelligence (A). Their mental capacity, or lack thereof, are not in question. Whether or not they know what they are talking about (B) is evident in the content of what they say, not how they say it. Education (D) is tempting, but is not the best or most-inclusive choice. (C) is eliminated by its ambiguity. The girls’ language does illustrate their lack of sophistication, but this choice does not necessarily demand that interpretation. The girls are children, however. As children, they are still not highly educated, nor have they developed the sophistication of adults. Thus (C) and (D) become less desirable choices than (E). **The use of the words and the incorrect pronunciations are a display of the girls’ immaturity (E).**



7. As the girls walk, Maureen explains that her uncle sued an ice cream chain named Isaley's and won. She further reports that her family believes in "suits" and that they "do it all the time." This would be an indication that they are wealthier than anyone Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia know (C) and that she may be as rich as the richest of white girls (A). The quality of her clothes is supported throughout the passage with mention of her "velvet-sleeved arm" and knee socks. These qualities continue to spark envy and jealousy within Claudia and thus is not refuted by the conversation about Maureen's family (E). The use of her "fur muff" for the cold and the money she was able to produce for ice cream is an indication of her being "swaddled in comfort and care" (B). **Previously, Claudia had stated that she was angry at the "unearned haughtiness in her eyes." (D). At the time, nothing was known of Maureen's background or where her money came from. With the explanation about her family and the lawsuits, the haughtiness that Maureen exhibits begins to make sense. Her family has fought societal prejudice and won, giving her the right to be haughty in front of her friends. Thus (D) is the best answer.**
8. As Maureen runs to escape the MacTeer girls' growing hostility, she flings the insult back, "I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos," at them. "Black e mo" was the insult the boys hurled at Pecola. Maureen uses the term to separate herself from the others. She uses social norms against the girls and declares that she is aware of the color and the social/economic status differences between them. Maureen's attitude may be interpreted as self-indulgent (A), but there is a deeper motivation for her to articulate this attitude. Just as when the boys insulted Pecola's blackness, there is an ironic self-abnegation (D) or self-denial (E) in the epithet, but again, this is part of the result, not the motivation. Certainly Maureen's insistence, "I am cute," might illustrate self-esteem (B), but she does not shout the insult in order to assert her self image. The fact is, Maureen is black, and, when faced with this issue, her need to preserve her privileged self image motivates her insistence that there is a real difference between her and the other girls. **Thus, (C) is the best answer.**
9. The last paragraph describes in depth Claudia's realization that Maureen is indeed cute, and she and Frieda are not. While "thing" itself is a vague word, and the standards of beauty that conflict with Claudia's image of herself are societal, they can hardly be considered "universal" (A). Maureen relies on social standards of beauty to frame her insults, and it is clear what that social standard is—she is cute, and the others are ugly. This does not suggest a flexibility (E) or ambiguity (D) in society's standards. The insults thrown at the girls are indeed harsh, (C) but in the context of the sentence, the "Thing" is something that allows the insult to be framed, not anything to do with the insult itself. **The use of the word "Thing" in capitals and italics, however, gives it an indefinable, monster-like quality, something that cannot be conquered easily, if at all, making the monstrosity of the prejudice that dictates beauty (B) the logical choice.**

10. The passage as a whole is about prejudice in varying degrees, but (E) is far too general to be the best answer. The issue is the exact nature of the prejudice being examined. As only one race is represented in the passage, (A) is eliminated. The cruelty of children (B) is apparent, but the cruelty ultimately serves to illustrate a deeper, more dangerous social phenomenon. The fact of Maureen's apparent wealth contrasted with Claudia and Frieda's relative poverty (C) is an element of the passage, but the climactic insult is not about social class. Ultimately, the attitude at the root of Claudia's dislike of Maureen, her envy of Maureen's beauty, and the essence of Maureen's insult is that, even within a single race, there exists prejudice (D). **All of the characters involved in the passage are black, and their own color is used to make distinctions among them.**
11. Junior is taught early on to respect himself more than other members of his race based solely on the color of his skin and the appearance he must maintain. His early childhood is described in the opening paragraphs of the passage. "Geraldine did not allow her baby to cry," (A) explains Geraldine and her actions, not Junior. "He was always brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod" (B) indicates Geraldine's meticulous care of her son. However, this again is a reflection of her behavior, not Junior's. "As long as his needs were physical, she could meet them" (D) is another indicator of Geraldine's care of Junior, not an explanation of his behavior. "As he grew older, he learned to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat and spent happy moments watching it suffer" (C) is a direct description of Junior's behavior. It tells us explicitly that he does hate his mother and explains why. This quotation also provides the reader with one of Junior's outlets for anger. **However, the fact that "Geraldine did not talk to him, soothe him, indulge him in kissing bouts" (E) explains a reason for Junior's hatred of her and provides a basis for his future cruelty toward others.** His hatred of his mother and abuse of the cat were the symptoms, not the causes. His needs were greater than physical and his mother did nothing to develop his emotional needs. This is reflected in his behavior towards Pecola and the bullying he engages in on the playground. He has no connection with other humans and how he makes them feel, perhaps a direct result of Geraldine's emotional neglect of her son.

12. The distinctions that Geraldine uses to differentiate between “colored” and “nigger” are almost indistinguishable and resonate with the author’s mockery of basing racial distinctions on details like clothes and skin. Stating that Bay Boy and P.L. were not good enough for him (B) could be somewhat sarcastic; however, the reader knows that Geraldine did not want Junior playing with “niggers” so this could explain how the two boys would be considered not good enough. It is an explanation, a direction a mother gives, telling Junior whom he is allowed to play with (D). These statements are establishment of expectation, not sarcasm. “The line between colored and nigger was not always clear” (C) and “hair cut close as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool” (E) explain the methods with which Geraldine used to keep Junior from being categorized in the wrong racial group. The line that expresses the sarcasm of the author is best seen in the phrase **“subtle telltale signs threatened to erode it and the watch had to be constant” (A), with “it” referring to the line that was hard to see between the two groups.** In the passage, the author provides further details of the methods that Geraldine employs to keep that line in check- lotion, haircuts, etc. These tools are an ends to a means. Prior knowledge allows the reader to realize that Geraldine’s belief that she can fix Junior purely through appearance is false. The distinction held about the two groups is based on the perceiver, whose judgment may be colored by years of prejudice and not by the physical appearance of the black person being judged.
13. Junior observes Pecola walking through the playground by herself. He describes her as “very black” and recalls that she was always alone. He determines that this is because she is ugly. Ralph Nisensky (A) is an approved friend for Junior, but he supports the theme of racial prejudice, not beauty or ugliness. A group of black girls (B) beat Junior up, and Junior decides to stay away from them because of fear, not definitions of beauty. His hatred of his mother (D) his behavior towards other children (E) are signs of his anger over the neglect he suffered, not definitions of beauty. **Choosing his victim, Pecola, (C) is based on his definitions of beauty and ugliness, as formed by society. By determining that Pecola is ugly, he then infers that she would not have the strength or inclination to fight him, so he is safe to do as he pleases.**
14. Pecola’s observations are made about the objects she sees, but they do not imply anything about the family that owns the objects (A). (C) is tempting, but Pecola’s first exposure to a clean and orderly house is a result of lack of experience, not necessarily immaturity (C). (D) is also tempting but is too broad to be the best answer. Likewise, (E) is true, but does not really explain the character behind the observations. **(B) is the clearest, most specific answer. Pecola, without judging the family or making any social observations, is aware of the stark contrast between how Junior’s family must live and how her family lives.**

15. Pecola is portrayed as weak. She cries when Junior tries to lock her in the room. She is shocked by the cat and tries to escape, but her attempts are feeble. Eventually she resorts to covering her face until the cat approaches her for attention. The cat “loves” Pecola because of the attention she pays to it. When Junior abuses the cat, her attempt to rescue it is actually an attempt to rescue the one bit of love she has found in her life. The attempt is not a resolution (A). Pecola is attempting to defend the cat, so in this instance, she is not being further victimized (B). Although the building tension through the passage does lead to subsequent events, and Geraldine’s attachment to the cat might lead the reader to assume she will enter soon, the issue with the cat does not lead directly to Geraldine’s entrance. Rather, it serves to further explain Junior and Pecola, not Geraldine, eliminating (E) as a choice. Throughout the passage, Junior is portrayed as the villain by choosing Pecola, setting the stage for bullying and tormenting her, then tormenting the cat. **The cat is one more bit of evidence that Junior is a “bad boy,” but Pecola’s defense of the cat is so out of character for her that the more important purpose to be found is in displaying her compassion (D).**
16. Geraldine enters her home, unaware of the events which have transpired, only the end result: a strange, dirty black girl in her home and her beloved cat lying on the radiator, not moving. The tension builds as Geraldine recalls people from her past, mostly children, whom she dismisses as “niggers.” The words used to describe Geraldine and her thoughts cannot be interpreted to suggest compassion (D) or empathy (C). Geraldine’s disdain (B) for those people and things she considers dirty becomes apparent, as does her inner turmoil (A) in remembering these events. However, these two words better describe the people and events, not Geraldine herself. **Geraldine’s building rage (E) towards Pecola is the result of her association of Pecola with the squalor Geraldine has striven her entire life to escape.**
17. When Geraldine enters her home and sees Pecola, Junior, and the hurt cat, her mind leaps to memories of other children and people, squalid in appearance and behavior. The derogatory language she uses to demand that Pecola leave (A) is more likely a display of her anger, not necessarily evidence of bias. During the course of the passage, she does ignore Junior’s culpability (B), but again, this does not necessarily constitute prejudice. “Obvious restraint” (D) and “empathy” (E) are not adequate descriptions of Geraldine’s behavior, thus eliminating both (D) and (E). **The obvious basis for her opinion of Pecola are her memories of the black children from where she came, answer choice (C).**
18. Geraldine remembers the little black girls who helped define her views of her race and the placement of people within two distinct groups based on their appearance and actions. Thus, (A) is tempting, but too general to be the best answer. (C) might also tempt some, as Geraldine does not love children, but the simile in question does not establish a comparison between flies and children. (D) and (E) are the least likely choices, as Geraldine has not demonstrated any particular distaste for girls, nor is she overly aware or concerned with social prejudice and racial bias. (B), however, is more specific than (A), and thoroughly consistent with Geraldine’s character. **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**

19. Pecola leaves the house with a glance at the picture of Jesus she had previously viewed as beautiful. She now realizes that his eyes appear “sad and unsurprised.” The ending paragraphs concern Pecola and her retreat from the house. Once Geraldine utters the demand for Pecola to leave, no other reference is made to her, eliminating choice (A) as an answer. There is no evidence that Geraldine will change her views. Any mention of Junior has long since been abandoned with all of the focus on Geraldine and her prejudice against members of her own race, so again, no evidence of Junior’s forgiveness (B) can be substantiated. There is a sense that Pecola is disillusioned in her hopes of being redeemed (D), and Jesus would be the most reasonable source of this redemption. However, “sad and unsurprised” tend to provoke feelings that Pecola would be redeemed and that she is not disillusioned because Jesus feels compassion for her. This refutes answer (D). The descriptor of Jesus being sad and unsurprised could be applied to Geraldine’s behavior (C) and can be viewed as support that Jesus was not in agreement with Geraldine’s behavior. However, in this context, Pecola sees him looking at her in particular and the tone of the words used suggests that Jesus himself is unsurprised by events because Pecola is ugly. **Pecola realizes by seeing the picture that even Jesus sees it, so her view of herself as ugly is reinforced (E).**
20. As Pecola leaves Geraldine and Junior’s house, the idea that she is ugly has been reinforced once again. Snowflakes cannot *die* because they are not living. The personification would not be referring to Geraldine (B) because she is satisfied in ridding her house and family of the filth of Pecola and does not indicate a change in her way of thinking. Dying does not refer to Junior (C) because he too is satisfied that his needs were served with the abuse of Pecola. The incident does not change either of the two characters, but serves to reinforce their negative views of members of their own race. Claudia (E) and Pauline (D) are two characters who have a strength that Pecola does not find anywhere; thus, they would not be viewed as “dying”. **It is Pecola who is experiencing the breaking of her character and psyche, figuratively dying a piece at a time, making (A) the logical choice.**
21. The sentence “The women were amused by her...” appears in the paragraph in which Pauline’s experiences with the black women in her new northern neighborhood are described. She does not feel comfortable around the women and they engage in “private snickers” over her speech, her clothing, her makeup and hair. The women have a new subject of gossip—the outsider, Pauline. *Amused*, in this context, does not suggest that they are pleased to meet Pauline (A), nor do “snickers” suggest they want to please her (B) or even that they enjoy one another’s company (E). (D) is tempting, but too general to be the best answer. (C), however, expresses the sentiment connoted by the “private snickers,” and describes the women’s attitude toward Pauline. **Thus, (C) is the best answer.**

22. (A) is tempting but ultimately too broad and general to be the best answer. (B) is unlikely. (D) is eliminated by the fact that the two points of view do not provide accounts of the same facts. (E), of course, is eliminated by the fact that a change in point of view would produce the *opposite* of “consistent style” etc. **(C) is clearly the best answer, as the purpose of the first-person narration is to allow the author to help the reader develop an intimate understanding of Pauline and her life.**
23. The first-person narration provides emotional insight into Pauline’s development because of her reactions to the events of her life. In contrast, the third person narration provides a different mood. Although the descriptions of Pauline’s life may encourage empathy for Pauline (A), the words are too concrete to inspire compassion. The descriptions are of emotions as observed, but not felt. The descriptions in third person provide some understanding and the reader may feel sympathetic (B) but again, the details are provided as steps—first this, then this, then this, to explain Pauline’s new life. The details provided are about Pauline and Cholly and the their lives, making the details in third person more unbiased, rather than biased (D). And although the details could be considered analytical in a sense, they are not purely without emotion, eliminating choice (E). **The details are provided by the narrator in a way that explains how Pauline got from one place in her life to another, but the narration is more clinical and detached (C), explaining the sequential nature of her life, but relying on the first person narration for the emotion.** Even when the emotions spill into the narration, they are explained in a more clinical light rather than focusing on what Pauline feels and how she is affected. The third person point-of-view provides the rationale behind her true personal emotions.
24. The diction of the narrator is formal. Pauline’s narrative diction personalizes her character for the reader. Pauline’s colloquial or dialectic diction cannot really be considered “literary” (A), as “literary” connotes more use of figurative devices, imagery, etc. Pauline’s ideas are concrete and factual, not abstract (D). Some of the words and phrases that she uses may seem old-fashioned (C) to the reader’s ear, but more likely they are phrases and vocabulary from her Southern upbringing. Her narrative is hard to comprehend at times as well as jarring to the ear, thus eliminating (E). **Pauline’s diction can best be described as colloquial (B), given the broken nature of her words, leaving off of consonant and vowels to indicate a conversation rather than a formal insight into herself.** Her narrative is interspersed with slang and terms that were distinctive to her Southern roots and culture.



25. All of the quoted phrases are taken from the first-person narrative explaining Pauline's first work experience with a white family in the North. Although she needed the job, she could not bring herself to like the situation or the family she worked for. By the end of the passage, Pauline has become an embittered woman, resigned to her circumstances, no longer believing in dreams. She finds satisfaction with the white family she ends up working for and is determined to maintain what happiness she can gather from them. (A) indicates that the family she worked for had money, and in Pauline's eyes had everything they needed. This view of wealth does not change for Pauline as the years pass. Pauline feels that the woman she works for is stupid and silly, in a way, relying on Pauline for advice, yet treating her as if she were stupid (C) when she did not like Pauline's advice. The white family that Pauline works for in the end does not rely on her opinions, but they do respect her. The contrast can be seen between the families, between Pauline and anything or anyone else. White folks being unclean (D) indicates Pauline's feelings towards this family she does not like. At the end, Pauline finds the family she works for to be clean, which she enjoys. Again, it is a contrast between the two families, not Pauline. (E) explains Pauline's feelings towards a white woman who cannot possibly understand her and stands in contrast to the reliance she places on the white family at the end. (B) identifies the starkest contrast between the young Pauline and the older Pauline. By the end of the passage, Pauline has accepted her role and assumed her own power in the white household in which she works. Even though by this time she has developed an unhealthy co-dependence on Cholly, it is obvious that she has created an alternate life for herself within the Fisher household. Because of her established place in this family who cannot do without her, it is easy to see that Pauline would be capable of leaving her family for a white one, and in a sense she already has.
26. The notions of romantic love and physical beauty that Pauline learned at the movies may have suggested white prejudice but were not really unjust (A). Even though the standards of beauty Pauline internalizes are white standards, there is no sense that they create "intensified social challenges" (C) for her because of her race. (D) might be tempting to some students, but it represents too broad an interpretation of the description. (E) might also tempt some, as it certainly is included in the broader context of the passage, but it is not suggested by the sentence quoted. **However, the use of the words, "envy," "insecurity," and "disillusion" establishes the arbitrary and unrealistic nature of the standards of beauty Pauline is internalizing and will never be able to achieve (B).**
27. Pauline's belief in the "truth" she finds in the beauty of the movie stars and their fictional lives provides her with a model to follow and adapt her life to. This reference to the movie projector as a ray of light would not indicate hell (B), a place that is not considered beautiful and inspiring. "Light" evokes a positive feeling which would dispute the choice of prejudice (C), a hurtful, unpleasant word. Beauty (D) and understanding (E) are both positive ideas that Pauline does seem to encounter in the movies. But these ideas are developed from the movies on the screen, not from the source of the movie showing (the projector). **The ray of light, which is shining from above and brings peace and enlightenment to Pauline, misguided though it may be, would most likely reference the idea of heaven (A).**

28. Pauline's comparison of the men she sees in the movies to Cholly might be considered unfair given that he is black and the movie actors are white with greater freedoms and prospects than Cholly will ever have given his education, limited contacts, and income. Her views are not based on prejudice (A) because she sees no reason why Cholly should not be like the men in the movies; she supposes that he is. Her views are not based on love (B) because if she loved Cholly, she would accept him as he was, not as she wanted him to be. Reality (D) causes Pauline to search for alternative answers and happiness, but this does not cause her flawed perceptions (D). And although she has a flawed perception of romance (C) and believes that Cholly should be more like the men in the movies, **the flawed perceptions themselves are based on the fiction (E) she views in the movies. She is judging Cholly against fictional criteria which would be difficult for any man, but especially a black man in the 1930s.**
29. Pauline suggests that she will try to begin anew and accept that the life seen in the movies will not be hers. One of the steps towards this reformation is deciding to go to the hospital for the birth of her second child in an attempt to make it more pleasurable for her and, as a result, more beneficial to her relationship with this child. However, at the hospital, faces the doctors' racism (B). They will not look at her face. They do not speak to her or ask how she is, but they do speak to the white women. The doctors' expectations are that black women are "just like horses," feeling no pain when they give birth. These expectations (C) are set by society and Pauline is unable to speak the truth. The appearance is that Pauline, and other black women, do not feel pain because they do not react as white women do. The pain, however, is very real, simply expressed in a different way. This supports the theme expressed in (A). Although, at first appearance the quotation does not seem to support the idea of standards of beauty and ugliness (D), the passage as a whole emphasizes the relationship between people's physical attractiveness and the treatment they receive from others. White women are considered beautiful and are, therefore, treated with more compassion and understanding. Black women are ugly, much like animals, and therefore cannot feel the same way other women do, thus supporting the theme described in (D). **The importance of self-esteem (E) is the only theme not illustrated or advanced by the experience with the doctors.**
30. At the opening of the passage, Pauline is hopeful but begins to feel lonely, hurt, confused, and unaccepted by both her neighbors and her husband. Pauline does become cognizant (A) of the realities of the society in which she lives, but this does not indicate the conviction that begins to rule her life and her family. She is not humble (D). Pauline uses her family's inadequacies as a weapon and a justification for her own harsh behavior. Pauline does not see herself as pretentious (C). She knows her status and tries to adapt her life and behavior to become accepted by her peers, not rise above them. The tone is not skeptical (B). In fact, Pauline believes in her ideas of the burdens she must bear and the wrath with which she must deal with her husband and children. **Rather, the tone of the passage seems righteous (E). Pauline believes that she is right in the eyes of the lord in dealing with her children and husband in an abusive manner. She has the Lord's permission and the support of the church women and that is all she needs.**



# The Bluest Eye

## Prologue

1. How do the narration and the increasing lack of coherence of the Dick and Jane story foreshadow what is to come?

*The opening pages of the novel begin with a retelling of the story of Dick and Jane, two children from basal readers that were introduced in the 1930s to instruct children how to read. These characters were two white children who set the standard for normalcy for families across the country, regardless of race or social status. At first, the story is comprehensible, but it eventually deteriorates into one long sentence with words that are run together and difficult to read. The style of this narrative predicts that the coming story is about family, but it will not be a polite, happy story, with a happily-ever-after ending. The run-together, rushed nature of the end of the Dick and Jane narrative suggests, perhaps, a type of insanity, that perverts the traditional story and conventional idea of the happy family in a green and white house with a brother, sister, mother, and father and pets who play together. This does not bode well for the coming story.*

2. What do the narrator's opening words serve to demonstrate about the girls?

*The opening words—telling about Pecola, pregnant with her father's baby, and their concern for the child and her, and their hopeful attempt to help by planting flowers that did not bloom—set the basic characters and story arc for the rest of the novel. The girls' attempts to help Pecola and her unborn child, illustrate their compassion and innocence. They do not understand the reality of Pecola's situation. Thinking that flowers would help in this situation demonstrates their naivety of the world and their immaturity in believing that magic does exist, if one says the right things and believe passionately enough.*

3. "It never occurred to us that the earth itself might have been too unyielding." The narrator attempts to understand the events that are to come, and how she played a role in them. What connection is she trying to create?

*The narrator and her sister believe that only their belief, passion, and skills can produce the results they desire. If the flowers do not grow, it could not possibly be for any other reason than what they had done. It is not until later that they realize that something greater than themselves, something they have no control over, might share the blame. This is a comparison to Pecola. Perhaps it is not any one thing that caused her destruction. There was so much more involved that fault and blame could not be placed on one event or person.*

4. How can the description "unyielding earth" be applied to society?

*Society, or rather the people in a society, sets the standards for behavior, expectations, and beliefs. It can be unforgiving and rigid in its expectations and the rules it sets. Society, too, can be "unyielding" and unwilling to compromise.*

5. “But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.” What does this line tell the reader about the events to come?

*This line explains that trying to understand the reasons that something happens or doesn't happen may be too upsetting and painful. In discovering reasons, one must examine them and ultimately assign blame to someone. Instead, it is easier to explain the steps taken to get to a certain result. Understanding the process is more academic and less painful.*

### Autumn

1. The opening pages of this section are narrated in the first person by Claudia, the youngest MacTeer girl. What is the purpose of these pages?

*The opening pages of “Autumn” help to move the plot into motion. Claudia introduces the participants in the story through her words. In using her immature perception, she gives the reader insight that she does not possess herself as she shares details of her own family, their boarders, and the adults who contribute to her knowledge base. The reader is allowed a sense of their neighborhood and parenting styles and information about their lives with the purpose of providing entry into a world that the reader may not have experience with.*

2. Claudia observes, “Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration.” What do Claudia's words imply about her understanding of adults?

*Claudia's words imply that adults do not seem to care for the feelings of their children and do not wish to understand what the child may be going through. She believes that children's feelings are inconsequential to adults.*

3. Although Claudia's mother is guilty of the adult behavior Claudia criticizes, in what ways does she redeem herself?

*Claudia is the one who catches the cold and becomes feverish, eventually throwing up in the middle of the night. Her mother tends to her by rubbing Vicks on her chest and covering her with flannel to make her warm. Although Claudia remembers these actions as rough and her mother as angry, she eventually comes to terms with the treatment as a sign that her mother loves her enough to protect her from the danger of having a cold. And along with this understanding, she remembers her mother entering her room quietly and gently replacing her flannel and touching her forehead to soothe her in the middle of the night. All of these actions redeem her mother.*

4. What does the conversation between Mrs. MacTeer and her friends concerning Della Jones and Mr. Henry establish?

*Mrs. MacTeer and her friends are gossiping about the circumstances that led the new boarder, Mr. Henry, to their home. The idea is established, through the course of the conversation, the obvious disgust at what is considered "dirty." Della Jones's husband does not want her to use "violet water" because he "wanted a woman to smell like a woman" and thinks she is too "clean" for his tastes. The women respond to this information with the idea that he is nasty. Dirtiness becomes equated with undesirable behavior and traits that are not socially acceptable. Cleanliness is equated to the ideals that society would uphold and respect.*

5. Carefully read the paragraph that begins with the words, "Their conversation is like a gently wicked dance..." and ends with "So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timbre." What devices does Morrison employ to convey meaning to the conversation overheard by the girls?

*Morrison uses a simile to compare the women's conversation to a "wicked dance" suggesting that gossiping itself is wicked behavior. The conversation is fluid and continuous and the girls are able to discern between the good and the bad, the truth and the falsehood, by watching how the women use their bodies in the conversation to get the message across. The passage illustrates that conversation is more than mere words, and the young girls benefit more from watching the action of the conversation than in attempting to decipher the actual words that are used.*

6. At this time period, what place did children hold in the household?

*Children were little more than objects in the household. They were pointed to and explained in the same manner as were the rooms of the house and the things to look out for. They were not "spoken" to and were not expected to speak.*

7. Why is the girls' love for the new boarder, Mr. Henry, instantaneous?

*Mr. Henry arrives at the house and accepts the explanations, even those concerning the children. As Frieda and Claudia stand there politely, he does the unthinkable and acknowledges them with words rather than just the customary nod. He compares them to beautiful, white movie stars and gives them a penny. From the start, he is unlike any adult they have yet encountered.*

8. On what misconception is Claudia's fear of the outdoors based?

*Claudia spends some time explaining the difference between being put out and being outdoors and the various examples of how one may end up outdoors. In her world, being outdoors is associated with misdeeds that render the abuser helpless in his or her circumstances with nowhere to go. Claudia fears being outdoors because it is associated with an idea that further threatens the already low status of her race. It is the utter bottom to which someone can sink.*

9. Why was the owning property so important?

*For Claudia, being outdoors is the lowest situation to which one can fall—there was nowhere left to go once one had been driven outdoors. The fear of being “put out” drives the desire to own property and to make one’s own home.*

10. Pecola appears at the MacTeer home with no possessions, not even something to sleep in for the night. What does this knowledge imply about her?

*Claudia is amazed that Pecola just “appeared” with nothing, not even a small paper bag with a few personal effects. This implies that Pecola is either very poor or very neglected, or both. She brought nothing because she had nothing to bring.*

11. Why does Claudia profess to hate Shirley Temple, other little white girls, and white baby dolls?

*Claudia is given white baby dolls, which she destroys, and she refuses to admire Shirley Temple, even though her peers idolize her. Claudia hates that Shirley Temple interacts with Claudia’s hero, Bojangles. Because she, too, is black, Claudia believes the honor of working with Bojangles should be hers. To her horror, she realizes that this hate and desire to destroy could easily be transferred to white girls. Shirley Temple represents all little white girls—their cuteness, their popularity, their ability to please everyone with little effort. Claudia cannot fathom what this one little girl possesses that she does not, and she desires to find that one thing that makes white dolls and white little girls so special to everyone, so accepted when she is not.*

12. What does Claudia learn as a result of her destruction of the dolls?

*Claudia learns quickly not to destroy the dolls. It is frowned upon by the adults and will earn her the label of a “bad” child who does not know how to care for anything. When she destroys the doll, the adults believe her to be ungrateful for the gift. She realizes that she cannot find the answers to her questions about black girls and white girls. Moreover, her torture of the dolls is not rewarding and causes real pain. She, therefore, Claudia decides to hide her questions and frustrations and behave as others expect her to.*

13. How is the idea that “every little girl wanted a white baby doll” established?

*The idea that every little girl wanted a doll is established simply by social gender expectations. That it has to be a white doll is established by white society who establish and maintain social and cultural standards of beauty. Therefore, the only choice little black girls have is to adore a white doll with blond hair and blue eyes, the general standard for beauty set in society.*

14. What, ultimately, is communicated to Claudia by the adults' reaction to her destruction of the dolls?

*Because the adults themselves, when they were children, longed for such a treasure, they do not understand Claudia's actions. The way they speak of the doll reinforces what Claudia has been learning about beauty—that white standards define beauty even for her.*

15. What do the white baby dolls represent and in what way does it help Claudia?

*The white baby dolls represent the injustice that Claudia witnesses because of race. Although she is young and does not necessarily understand what is happening, she does understand that white baby dolls and white girls have something that she does not. Her youth enables her to believe that it is possible to attain this "something" if only she can find it. Destroying the dolls is symbolic of fighting against circumstances she does not fully understand and expressing anger she cannot articulate.*

16. Why are Mama's "fussing soliloquies" hurtful and depressing?

*Mama MacTeer becomes upset for some insult or misdeed and rants, at times for hours. She does not lay direct blame, but it is obvious to the girls about whom she is talking. Each rant is linked to another and another and continues for an interminable amount of time. Since the children are not expected to speak out or defend themselves, they have to endure the soliloquy until Mama's fury is spent. It is difficult for the girls to sit and listen when they are not able to speak out to defend themselves or others.*

17. What is ironic about Claudia's loving her mother's songs?

*Claudia loves her mother's singing when she is in the mood to sing. Claudia feels her mother's voice is "sweet" and she has "singing-eyes." The songs she sings are about hard and bad times and times when people left. But Claudia loves the sound and begins to long for all the bad and hurt because it is associated with the sweet sound of her mother's voice.*

18. What keeps the girls from going right away to Mama to help with Pecola and her first menstruation?

*Frieda, Claudia, and Pecola have fled the house to escape Mama's tirade over the milk and the injustices of the world. They do not wish to return and anger her further by reporting the mess Pecola has on herself and the front steps, especially when they do not fully understand themselves what is happening.*

19. Why is Mama so angered by the idea of her daughters “playing nasty” and reluctant to hear what they have to say?

*Mama has already established that she is angry and has no desire to hear what the girls have to say. She spies them from the window, and the fact that they are behind the bushes and Pecola has her dress up strongly suggests that they are doing something wrong. Mama's conclusion that the girls are doing something “nasty” is consistent with her character.*

20. Pecola asks the question, “How do you do that? I mean how do you get somebody to love you?” What does this question tell the reader?

*Pecola's question gives insight into the pain she must have felt at home with her parents before arriving at the MacTeers'. She desires love above anything and does not understand what she must do to attain it.*

### **HEREISTHEHOUSEITSISGREENANDWHITE...**

1. What is the purpose of describing the history of the house?

*Morrison describes the house that once held the Breedlove family with the purpose of establishing that one never knows what lies hidden beneath appearances. A house holds many memories, but the cruel and painful events that occur inside do not damage the place itself. It is possible to change and cover what has come before, and history does not have to repeat itself.*

2. In describing the Breedloves' furnishings and the layout of the house, what does Morrison achieve?

*Morrison describes that the place where the Breedloves live is small and inhabitable, but not loved and lived in. It is a place where the Breedloves exist day to day, but do not live a life worth remembering. From the sofas, one with the tear, and the old Christmas tree remaining in the corner, one senses that the family has not been able to be a family, with fond memories of the pieces and places within their home. The description of the Breedlove home sets the scene for tumultuous events to come and perhaps provides more explanation of the “how” rather than the “why.”*

### **HEREISTHEFAMILYMOTHERFATHERDICKANDJANE...**

1. What does the title of the chapter explain and why is it used the way it is?

*The title of the chapter is from the Dick and Jane narrative used to teach reading and defined social expectations of family and the proper way of behaving in a family. The run-together capitals suggest some distortion to the that in this chapter; the family that will be described is not the idyllic Dick and Jane family, rather a perverted version of it.*



2. The Breedloves' reasons for remaining in the storefront provide what insight?

*The chapter opens with the information that the Breedloves remained in the storefront by choice because they were black, poor, and ugly. It provides insight into a society in which being black is equated with poverty and ugliness. These characteristics cause a hopelessness from which it is nearly impossible to escape. Opportunities that may have been are gone and there is no hope for anything better now that they are deemed ugly.*

3. "...you looked at them closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction." What is the real issue of the Breedloves' ugliness?

*The Breedloves' faces are not pretty, but really there was no reason in particular to deem the Breedloves ugly. Yet, they are ugly because they use the idea that they were ugly as an escape, a scapegoat to blame for what is wrong with their life. By blaming their poverty, non-acceptance, and anger on their ugliness, they do not have to seek a different cause that they may have been able to fix by action.*

4. Mrs. Breedlove wakes on a Saturday morning and begins to rattle about the kitchen making noise. What do the noises and their description foreshadow about events to come?

*Pecola actually hears the noises in the kitchen because they wake her. She listens as the normal sounds become more directed and louder, and she remains as still as possible. The noises foreshadow a confrontation to come. They are sounds of misdirected anger.*

5. "An escapade of drunkenness, no matter how routine, had its own ceremonial close." What does this line explain about the Breedloves?

*The line explains that one of the problems of the family is alcohol. The use of the word "ceremonial" indicates that the argument that is brewing has happened before and will most likely happen again.*

6. Why is Mrs. Breedlove spoiling for a fight?

*Mrs. Breedlove lives a monotonous life, moving from day to day holding in all of her emotions simply to continue to live. When she fights with her husband, she is able to release pent up anger and hostility. In fighting, she is free to be the person she feels she truly is.*

7. Why does Mrs. Breedlove want Cholly to continue drinking as he does?

*Cholly's drinking allows her to maintain her role as martyr. Mrs. Breedlove relishes Cholly and his ways as the cross she must bear in order to maintain her status as an "upright and Christian woman." In her eyes, if Cholly were no longer a drunk abuser, she would have nothing for others to take notice of.*

8. What is ironic about Mrs. Breedlove's using Jesus as a defense for her actions towards Cholly?

*Mrs. Breedlove believes that she is working for Jesus, teaching Cholly the error of his ways. She does not wish for Jesus to forgive Cholly or help him change his behavior in order to be a better person, she wants Jesus to strike him down. She wants Jesus to judge him and decide that his punishment is death. She justifies her violence towards Cholly by claiming that she is the vehicle of Jesus's judgment. The irony, of course, is that Jesus's teachings focus on forgiveness and healing, not on physical retribution and death.*

9. Why does Cholly react to Mrs. Breedlove as violently as he does?

*As a child, Cholly was humiliated by white men. The narrative hints at his past with the idea that he suffered many humiliations and emasculations throughout his life. It is natural to assume that Cholly also has years of pent up rage. Since Mrs. Breedlove and Cholly have an apparent understanding that they can spend their rage on one another, he unleashes his anger on Mrs. Breedlove when given the opportunity.*

10. How do Sammy and Pecola react to the violence they give witness to and why do they act in this way?

*Each of the Breedlove children has adapted to their dysfunctional home in his or her own way. Sammy's reactions vary, depending on the situation. Sometimes, he runs far from home; others he simply leaves the house for a while. At other times, he actually intervenes in an attempt to stop the violence he is witnessing. As a young man, he is trying to reconcile what he feels and what he sees in order to become a man himself from the model of his parents.*

*Pecola is younger and feels helpless. She does not have the freedom to just run away from home. Sammy does not provide her with alternatives for protecting herself. So, she protects herself by wishing herself away, even if that means dying.*

11. What is significant about the fact that Pecola is not able to wish her eyes away?

*Pecola wishes each piece of her body away when she responds to her parents' violence. But her eyes just will not disappear as the rest of body does. Pecola is trying to deaden her emotions by pretending they are not real. She wishes away her body so it will no longer be able to feel pain—emotional or physical. Her eyes, however, have witnessed—and continue to witness—this violence. The eyes link directly to her memories and feelings, which at this point, she has not yet been able to develop the defenses to make disappear. Being unable to wish her eyes away, Pecola is ultimately unable to defend herself from emotional and psychological trauma.*



12. What do blue eyes symbolize for Pecola?

*Pecola has been taught to consider herself ugly. She notices that the “beautiful” children are treated better by the teachers and other students, while she herself is often treated harshly. She even finds herself the basis of other people’s insults. Since she can discern no real difference between her appearance and “beautiful” students’—nose, teeth, etc.—the key difference, the trait that makes them beautiful and her ugly, must be the eyes. Blue eyes are culturally considered a standard of beauty, so they come to represent for Pecola the key to the beauty that she longs for but does not have.*

13. How does Mr. Yacobowski reinforce Pecola’s notion about Blue Eyes?

*Mr. Yacobowski owns the shop where Pecola goes to find her piece of happiness—Mary Jane candies. Pecola, who watches the eyes of others for suggestions for her behavior, sees in Mr. Yacobowski’s eyes irritability, some anger, and prejudice. He shows no real desire to serve her, and his distaste for her is obvious. Pecola assumes that Mr. Yacobowski sees her as ugly, and his treatment of her is motivated by this ugliness. If she had the one key trait—blue eyes—Yacobowski’s treatment would be very different.*

14. How does Mr. Yacobowski provoke the very behavior he is angry over?

*Mr. Yacobowski has no wish to interact with the little black girl who stands at his counter. He is annoyed at the expectation that he should give her anything from his store. His distaste is so evident that Pecola hides herself so as not to incur his anger. This, however, simply exacerbates the problem, as he grows impatient with her hesitance.*

15. What does the encounter with Mr. Yacobowski reinforce in Pecola?

*As Pecola walks to the store, she sees some dandelions which, to her, are beautiful. Pecola accepts Yacobowski’s hatred because she believes herself to be ugly. On the way home, Pecola no longer sees the beauty in the dandelions, viewing them as ugly weeds, just how the rest of society views them. The dandelions have not changed, but Pecola’s perception has.*

16. Why are the Mary Janes so important to Pecola?

*Pecola’s most fervent wish is to have blue eyes and thus be “beautiful.” She prays for a miracle, but it does not happen. The sweet and delicious candy, however, gives her a happiness she does not find often in her life. The candy wrapper pictures a traditionally pretty little girl, so Pecola’s happiness while eating the candy comes also from an innocent belief that she is taking the good of Mary Jane herself into her body, at least for a little while.*

17. How do the whores who live above the Breedloves treat Pecola? What does her treatment of them suggest about her character?

*Pecola is one of the few people who accept the whores as she would any other person. She treats them with a respect they do not often receive. The women are described as harsh and unforgiving, violent and temperamental. Yet towards Pecola they are kind and loving, teaching her when it seems no one else does. Pecola's behavior toward the whores reflects her following her own observations and feelings rather than acquiescing to society's.*

18. How is it suggested that Pecola does not truly understand the three women who live above her?

*Pecola asks Marie about her "boyfriends," thus indicating that Pecola sees no difference between these women and any others. These women simply go on dates as single, adult women are likely to do. Pecola has no real knowledge of what the women do with the men on these "dates."*

19. What makes the three whores unique in their circumstances? How does this difference help to illustrate Pecola's predominant character trait?

*In the eyes of society, Poland, China, and Marie are uglier than Pecola and her family. Yet, these three women do not simply accept society's unkind and unjust dismissal as truth. They have found the freedom in deciding their own fate and creating their own definitions of beauty. They have taken control of what Pecola is unable to control.*

20. What are the whores trying to do for Pecola?

*The whores are trying to give Pecola her "blue eyes" by teaching her to think and behave for herself, not strive to meet the expectations of others.*

### Winter

1. What are the standards by which Claudia and Frieda evaluate Maureen Peel?

*When Maureen comes to Claudia and Frieda's school, the girls recognize the differences between her and them right away. Maureen's clothes are better, her hair straighter, her lunches more appetizing. Everyone in the school flocks to her, yet Claudia and Frieda try to find reasons to dislike her. Their desire to dislike her is the result of their comparing Maureen's circumstances to their own, yet her popularity and their envy are based on the extent to which Maureen more closely meets (white) society's standards for beauty and social acceptability.*

2. Claudia's hatred of Maureen seems more intense than Frieda's. Why is this less surprising than it would have been if Frieda's dislike were worse?

*We have already learned about Claudia's attitude toward white girls and baby dolls; she has declared an intense dislike for "white" anything. She feels that whatever is wrong with, or missing from, her life is due to her blackness—even though she cannot isolate exactly what it is that white girls have that she lacks. She recognizes this same something in Maureen because of her lighter skin and "whiter" behavior. Frieda does not harbor this same resentment toward whites. Her maturity allows her to restrain her behavior and keep jealously more hidden.*

3. As the boys surround Pecola, insulting her, what does her behavior imply about her character?

*Pecola is surrounded by a circle of boys who shout insults at her. She responds by edging around the circle, looking for escape, but ultimately breaks down by crying and bearing the humiliation. This reveals that Pecola has no "fight" in her. She does not have the self-esteem and preservation skills to stand up for herself.*

4. Why do the boys halt their teasing when Maureen is a witness but not when Claudia or Frieda threaten them?

*Claudia and Frieda happen upon the abuse and immediately come to the defense of their friend. The boys turn their attention to the sisters, threatening them with violence. They are willing and able to engage in a physical altercation until they spy Maureen watching. Maureen holds sway over the boys because of her beauty and their budding interest in girls. Also, she is closer to white girls in her skin coloring and behavior, so the boys respond to her as they would the white girls they encounter.*

5. What does Maureen share about her family? What insight does it provide?

*Maureen explains that her uncle has sued the ice cream company, so she knows she will have no problem being served. It is obvious that she does not truly know about the court cases she speaks of. She knows only that the "suits" give her a power that other families do not have. She further explains that her family has engaged in many such suits, reinforcing the power she feels her family has. This information helps to explain Maureen's haughtiness and sense of entitlement.*

6. Why does the descriptor of "black" hold such power as an insult to Claudia and Frieda?

*Maureen continues her fight by saying she does not care about Pecola's black daddy. She uses the term "black" in a derogatory manner and flings it at the girls as she runs from their attack. She uses the idea that black equals ugly against the girls and places herself on the opposite side by stating she is cute. If the girls are black and ugly, then Maureen is white—or whiter—implying she is beautiful in the eyes of society and Claudia and Frieda are not.*

7. Why is fear of the “Thing” greater than the jealousy of Maureen?

*Claudia and Frieda are faced with the knowledge that Maureen is right saying she is cute and they are not. They know firsthand the effect Maureen has on others, yet they do not know why. Claudia and Frieda are still young enough to enjoy themselves and be comfortable in their skins, not understanding the great differences that separated them from others, black or white. They have not yet discovered what it is that allows Maureen to be treated better than they are. By not knowing the “thing” Claudia and Frieda have no real hope to change because they do not know what it is they lack. They understand that Maureen is not really the problem. The problem is greater than Maureen.*

### **SEETHECATITGOESMEOWCOMEANDPLAY...**

1. What is the purpose of the opening paragraphs of this chapter?

*The opening paragraphs provide a description of women from the South who have families and raise them in a respectable manner, despite the fact they are black. This manner could be seen as consistent with the values established by white society. The paragraphs help to contrast the women who exist in Pecola's life with other women of the same race, establishing the idea that racism can exist within race as well.*

2. In what way was Junior, as a baby, neglected?

*Geraldine provided for baby Junior in every way that would keep him a healthy baby. He was well-clothed, fed, “oiled and bathed,” but all of these things were physical needs, not emotional. Geraldine did not hug or kiss or love Junior as most mothers do. She met his physical needs, but neglected him emotionally.*

3. Which theme is supported by Geraldine's explanation of “colored people” and “niggers”?

*Geraldine teaches Junior there are two groups of people within their race: colored people and niggers. Geraldine uses that particular word to explain the undesirable characteristics of members of their race. “Niggers” are loud and dirty and do not care for themselves in a way that made them socially acceptable to others. “Colored people” are respectable, neat, and quiet. They care for their skin and appearance in order to make themselves “acceptable.” She raises Junior to be “colored” and warns him of the dangers of crossing the line, which is easy to cross just by looking a certain way or behaving in a certain manner.*

4. What is Junior's main impetus for bullying?

*Junior's only friendship with children is with a white boy, who is younger than he is, wears glasses, and does nothing fun. Still, Geraldine approves of this boy and his friendship with her son. At home, Junior is stifled and emotionally neglected. Children on the playground give him an outlet for his pent up energy and anger. Girls are easier to bully than boys. They do not fight back and their reaction is satisfying to him.*

5. Why does Junior target Pecola when he typically stays away from black girls?

*Junior had attempted to bully a group of black girls and as a result was beat up and forced to lie to his parents. He found that black girls were typically not afraid to stand up for themselves, especially when they traveled in packs. Junior had observed Pecola on other occasions and found her alone every time. He decides that the cause for Pecola's isolation must be her ugliness. He chooses Pecola because of her visible lack of self-esteem and disassociation with other children, feeling that he will be safe attacking her.*

6. How does the incident between Pecola and Junior become ironic?

*Junior chooses Pecola because she is always alone and he can sense her lack of self esteem. When she comes into his home, he is able to use his hatred of the cat to attack Pecola to relieve his own pain. Pecola is frightened when Junior throws the cat at her and the cat scratches her on her face. When Junior continues to abuse Pecola by keeping her prisoner in a room, Pecola at first continues to be afraid, as Junior desires. Eventually, however, she is distracted by the cat that doles out affection indiscriminately on Pecola. She responds by soothing the cat. The irony is that that an incident that was intended to hurt Pecola, actually results in her finding peace and acceptance. She also finds beauty in the cat's blackness even though she does not see the beauty of her own color.*

7. Why is Junior so angry about Pecola's reaction to the cat?

*Junior becomes angry when he realizes that Pecola is not going to break down as he had expected. He becomes even more jealous that the cat is once again receiving attention that should be his.*

8. How is Pecola's behavior atypical for her?

*When Junior begins to terrorize the cat, Pecola, who has shown herself unable or unwilling to stand up for herself, fights verbally and physically to protect the animal.*

9. In remembering her past and judging Pecola, what does Geraldine do to her race?

*Geraldine remembers poor girls from her childhood whom she dismissed as unworthy. They represented everything Geraldine has striven to escape. Geraldine takes her knowledge of these few and globalizes her feelings to black people as a whole, thus judging Pecola against the deeds of the few rather than the majority. Her attitude advances the theme that prejudice exists within race as much as it does between races.*

10. What is so detrimental in the interaction between Geraldine and Pecola?

*Geraldine's words make the hate she feels apparent. Geraldine calls Pecola "a nasty little black bitch," reinforcing Pecola's already-damaged self-perception as ugly and unacceptable. Pecola has faced prejudice from the whites in her community and dealt with it in her own way. With Geraldine's reaction to her, Pecola is made to feel that she is not good enough even for her own race.*

11. "She could not hold it low enough to avoid seeing the snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement." What does this line illustrate?

*Pecola is slowly losing herself. She is being deconstructed by words and ideas about her which she has no ability to control. This line illustrates this destruction, the dying that Pecola faces, and her tacit acceptance of others' judgments of her.*

### Spring

1. In what way are the tender spring branches much like Claudia and Frieda?

*Claudia describes the new branches as strong, but supple. They can be bent and stretched without breaking. Their buds are a sign of hope, the beauty to come later. Claudia and Frieda are like this as well. They are young and resilient. They face the adversities of growing up as black girls and survive the onslaught of the world by remaining supple and bouncing back. They too are filled with the hope for beauty to come.*

2. Why is it not surprising that Mr. Henry abuses Frieda?

*Mr. Henry behaves differently from every other adult the MacTeer girls have ever encountered. He interacts with them and does not treat them like furniture. He compares them to movie stars and gives them money. Yet, he also brings prostitutes into the house and elicits the girls' help in keeping his actions secret. Their trust gives him the freedom to act as he chooses.*

3. In what way do Claudia and Frieda reveal their immaturity as Frieda revisits the encounter with Mr. Henry?

*Frieda is crying when Claudia goes to her room to find out what is going on, after witnessing her mother behaving so strangely. Frieda shares with her sister the details of Mr. Henry's touching her budding breasts. The abuse goes no further because Frieda ran to her parents, and Mr. Henry was put out. The girls' immaturity becomes apparent when Claudia asks, "How did it feel?" and becomes jealous that she was not the first to have something happen to her. Likewise, Frieda's emotional turmoil is not from being the victim of Mr. Henry's deviant behavior, but rather from the idea that now she is ruined like the women who live above Pecola. Even that fear is based on supposition. Frieda and Claudia are too young to understand sexuality and the differences between appropriate and inappropriate expressions of sexuality. They know that something has happened to Frieda, and that that something is bad, but they do not understand exactly why or how it is bad.*

4. How does the neighborhood where Mrs. Breedlove works reinforce the notion that "white" equals "beauty"?

*As Frieda and Claudia walk to the house of Mrs. Breedlove's employer, they see the clean houses and immaculate yards. Everything is clean, white, and shiny and the sky is always blue. This setting, so different from their own surroundings, reinforces the idea that the girls are black and ugly and therefore not beautiful enough to have the clean homes with bright paint and manicured lawns.*

5. How is the notion that white is beautiful further reinforced by the Fisher home?

*Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda follow Mrs. Breedlove into the house and notice the gleam they see everywhere, in the white porcelain, white woodwork, and the white of Mrs. Breedlove's uniform. It is clean, orderly, and smells nice—a place very different from —and in some ways preferable to—their own homes.*

6. How does Mrs. Breedlove abuse Pecola's already damaged self-esteem?

*When Pecola spills the hot juice from the simmering cobbler on her legs, Mrs. Breedlove responds to her daughter's pain, not with tenderness, but abuse, slapping at her and yelling about the mess. Mrs. Breedlove is sweet and kind to her charge however, soothing the little white girl with kind words and obvious affection, even though the little girl has not been hurt. Pecola is again reminded that she is not loved, even by her own mother.*

7. What does the appearance of the Fisher girl echo?

*Claudia is offended for Pecola because the little girl refers to Mrs. Breedlove as "Polly," a nickname not used in the Breedlove household. Even Pecola calls her mother "Mrs. Breedlove." Calling the woman by a nickname implies an intimacy that angers Claudia. Her anger at the little white Fisher girl echoes her earlier hatred of the white dolls.*



8. What does the incident in the Fisher home reveal about Mrs. Breedlove's character?

*Mrs. Breedlove's apparent belief that whites are beautiful and superior to blacks is revealed. She dismisses her own daughter without a second thought to her feelings in order to soothe the little white girl in her care. Her sympathy for the white girl, who was hurt neither physically nor emotionally, is genuine. Likewise, her disregard for her own daughter is apparent.*

### **SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICE...**

1. How does Pauline use her bad foot to her own benefit?

*Pauline uses her foot as the scapegoat, blaming it, rather than anything she can control, for her feelings of isolation and alienation.*

2. What does the idea of the "stranger" in Pauline's life represent? What does this imply about Pauline?

*The "stranger" is Pauline's idea of Prince Charming, who would come into her life, loving her unconditionally, and sweep her away to a better life than she could imagine. It implies that Pauline, from an early age, has relied on fantasy and false perceptions about the world.*

3. What is ironic about the analogy of Cholly as Prince Charming?

*Cholly does, essentially, take Pauline away from the world she knows and, at first, gives her the happiness she feels will lead to her "happily-ever-after" ideal. They are happy, in love, and are working for a better life in the North, where dreams can come true. As Cholly's interest in marriage and family wanes, however, he is largely to blame for the hardened woman Pauline becomes.*

4. What does Pauline's rotten tooth symbolize for her?

*Pauline's marriage to Cholly is a chance for her to start over, having found the love she craved. The rotten tooth that leaves the brown stump in its place when it falls out symbolizes the life she will endure with Cholly. There are no visible signs of decay, perhaps just a hint that something is wrong. Eventually, however, the tooth proves unable to handle the pressure of the disease coursing through it and snaps. So too did Pauline's marriage to Cholly, decay until she, like the tooth snapped.*

5. How has Pauline changed as a result of the life with Cholly in the North?

*Pauline becomes dependent on Cholly to alleviate the loneliness and homesickness she feels. Pauline tries to assimilate to the ways of the northern black women, but she cannot entirely rid herself of her country speech. Pauline develops a strong need to be accepted and a desire to please others. She internalizes their disdain for her and fights to change herself. In short, she develops the self-hatred that will affect her throughout her life and the life of her daughter.*

6. Why can't Pauline leave Cholly even as she realizes that he is not a good man for her?

*By the time her employer has insisted Pauline can remain in her employ only if she gets rid of Cholly, Pauline has developed her co-dependence on Cholly and is attached in ways the employer cannot begin to understand. Pauline understands that although Cholly is not a good man—far from the Prince Charming of her dreams—he is all she has. Her own damaged self-esteem leads her to believe that she has no option other than to stay with Cholly.*

7. Why does the narrator describe the damaging effects of the movies with which Pauline becomes obsessed? What is ironic about Pauline's obsession with the movies?

*Pauline turns to the movies for relief from the loneliness she faces when Cholly is off drinking for long periods of time. The movies, however, reinforce in her the standards of beauty established by white society. She tries to achieve this beauty by changing her appearance and emulating the stars she sees onscreen. Her inevitable failure reinforces in her mind that black is ugly; therefore she is ugly. Thus, ironically, Pauline is further damaged by the very films she has fled to for relief.*

8. How is Pecola's birth a foreshadowing of events to come?

*Pauline has decided to accept her lot in life and deal with her perceived ugliness and the resultant pain. She does manage, however, to develop a bond with her unborn child and decides that she will love the baby no matter how it looks. At the hospital, she once again is faced with prejudice that reinforces the idea that black is ugly. The head doctor equates her delivery to that of a horse. She receives no care or sympathy or compassion from the hospital staff. Hurt and frightened, Pauline transfers the indifference with which she was treated to her newborn daughter.*

9. What prevents Pauline from viewing her daughter as beautiful?

*Pauline's experience at the hospital, coupled with the infant's utter need, make everything ugly in Pauline's eyes. All she sees is the blackness of her child's skin. She finds nothing but ugliness in her.*

10. Why does Pauline change so drastically following the birth of her second child?

*With the birth of her second child, Pauline has accepted that the dreams she once had for a better life will not be realized. She develops a resentment towards everything—her husband, her children—that waylaid her from what she perceives as the path that would have led to a happy life..*

11. What role do Cholly and the children serve in Pauline's "new life"? Why is this ironic?

*Cholly becomes the "cross" that Pauline must bear in order to make her own "Christian virtue" shine. By villainizing her family as that which must be overcome, she finally finds acceptance from the women around. Ironically, she is accepted by disowning the very things she had desired.*

12. What do the alternating points-of-view in this chapter accomplish?

*Pauline's story is told both by a third-person narrator and her own words—in italics. The dual points of view provide readers the evidence to substantiate their developing opinion of Pauline, while the first-person narration provides a real intimacy with Pauline herself.*

### **SEE FATHER HE IS BIG AND STRONG...**

1. What does the story of Cholly's birth and the information about his mother help to explain about him?

*Cholly's mother was crazy and left him on a junk heap wrapped in blankets and a newspaper. He was rescued by his Aunt Jimmy who did her best to raise him. Because she was an older woman, however, she was unable to provide adequate role models for Cholly to grow up a well-adjusted and functioning participant of society. As he never receives the maternal love he craves, his adult distaste for women is shown to be almost inevitable.*

2. Why is Blue Jack not a healthy role model for Cholly?

*Blue Jack is an old man who works with Cholly at the feed and grain store. Cholly is able to talk to Blue Jack, and Blue Jack tells him ghost stories and stories about their common heritage. Blue Jack, however, does not provide any real model of appropriate behavior. All of Cholly's knowledge of women comes from Blue Jack's colorful stories that make the older man's experiences seem like adventures. In reality, Blue Jack has led a hard life, barely surviving, and living on the fringe of society. Yet, he is the only person Cholly has to teach him about being a black male in society.*

3. What is Jake's role in Cholly's development as a character?

*Jake provides the first appropriate male role model for a boy Cholly's age. He provides Cholly with the opportunity to have some normal childhood experiences.*

4. What does the account of Cholly's first sexual experience contribute to his character development?

*Cholly's first experience is perverted by the white men who happen upon him and Darlene and humiliate him in a way from which he is never able to recover. This experience colors all the experiences of Cholly's life and gives him a reason to act with hatred and callousness. It further suggests that the hatred he cultivates for Darlene is truly a hatred for himself and his inadequacies.*

5. How is Cholly's interaction with his father Cholly's breaking point?

*Cholly has no real knowledge of his father or of his father's relationship with his mother, but he naively believes his "father" will be his salvation, the person who can help him decipher the world and give him the emotional and psychological tools to deal with the hardships he will face as a black man. When he does find the person he believes to be his father, that person has no interest in him and dismisses him with a curse, forcing Cholly to realize that no one can save him. He will be better off surviving by his own means, even if those means are brutal.*

6. In what way is Cholly "free."

*Having no one to whom he is accountable or who cares for him, Cholly can do as he pleases. He lives in a tiny sphere in which he faces no consequences for his actions*

7. What is Cholly's relationship with his children?

*Having never had a model for how to be a parent, Cholly simply reacts as he sees fit at the moment.*

8. What is Cholly's misguided reason for raping his daughter? What is the actual result?

*Cholly sees a weakness in Pecola that he does not like. He knows she will be unable to survive the horrors of life if she is not given the strength to do so. He sees in Pecola what he saw in himself as a child, an inability to protect himself and control the situations in which he found himself. Being raped by her father, however, destroys Pecola's last bit of self esteem, the last ray of hope that she will be able to find beauty in her life or her self.*

9. What can be inferred by Cholly's action of covering Pecola after his abuse?

*Cholly's covering Pecola's nakedness after the rape clearly suggests some level of remorse and concern .*

**SEETHEDOGBOWWOWGOESTHEDOG...**

1. Soaphead Church labeled himself a “misanthrope.” What does this allow him to do?

*By calling himself a misanthrope, Soaphead Church is able to justify his actions toward others. He avoids self-hatred and recrimination for his beliefs by relating his actions to those of misanthropic people in history and determines that if their actions were noble, so are his.*

2. Why is “Soaphead” an appropriate name?

*Soaphead Church detests all things dirty. He avoids things that deal with the body, if he can, finding the natural excretions made by the body abhorrent.*

3. What is ironic about the “white strain” that is cultivated throughout Soaphead Church’s family?

*Soaphead’s family takes pride in their white heritage, striving to assume the habits and beliefs of the white people from whom they are descended—yet it is obvious that Soaphead’s family has chosen the worst characteristics of white society to imitate.*

*The narrator describes Soaphead’s family as “lecherous and lascivious” and reports that they suffered from alcoholism and eccentricity. It is ironic that, in copying the “superior” race, they actually debase themselves.*

4. How do Soaphead’s education and celibacy serve him in life?

*Soaphead Church is an educated man and is thus able to present himself as an expert. His celibacy provides him with a supernatural, Godlike quality that makes his claims even more credible to the community.*

5. In what ways does Soaphead equate himself with God? How does he use God as a scapegoat?

*Soaphead insists that, if he had created the world, he would have done a better job, creating a world without ugliness or dirtiness. He uses God as a scapegoat, blaming God for all of the evil, ugliness, and dirtiness that does exist in the world.*

6. Why does Pecola evoke Soaphead’s sympathy?

*Because of his own family’s pride in its “whiteness,” Soaphead completely understands Pecola’s desire for blue eyes—an element of the white standard of beauty.*

7. How does Soaphead “give” Pecola her blue eyes? What earlier episode does this echo?

*He uses Pecola’s desperate desire to kill the dog he hates. Of course, when the dog dies in the process of “granting” Pecola’s wish, she believes that she is to blame. This echoes the earlier scene in which Junior’s mistreatment of the cat was the first and only time Pecola had the strength to stand up to someone.*

8. How is Soaphead’s analogy of a hotel room to people appropriate?

*Soaphead describes a hotel room as simply functional and necessary—useful while it is necessary then left without remorse. Soaphead uses people similarly.*

9. What theme is emphasized by Soaphead’s rationalization for “granting” Pecola’s wish?

*Soaphead is convinced that, even though Pecola will not really have blue eyes, she will believe she does, and that is somehow just as good. This emphasizes the theme that beauty and ugliness, worth and worthlessness, acceptability and unacceptability are all a matter of attitude. The Breedloves are ugly because they believe themselves to be ugly. Pecola will have her wish granted if she believes she has green eyes.*

10. Why does Soaphead believe that he was within his rights to treat Pecola as he did?

*Soaphead Church has already developed the idea that he is superior to God and thus justified to behave in a manner that supports the beliefs that he holds. He believes that he has helped Pecola by granting her wish. It is of no consequence that his granting her desire destroys her in the process.*

### Summer

1. How do the girls learn about their friend Pecola? What earlier social attitudes does this episode echo?

*Claudia and Frieda learn about Pecola as they do most things in their lives: by overhearing adult conversation. Even though the situation concerns one of their friends, because they are mere children, they are ignored. Even from the beginning of the novel, children have held no status in their society.*

2. What is significant about the fact that the neighbors blame Pecola for her rape as well as Cholly?

*Throughout her life, Pecola has been treated like a worthless thing. Cholly’s rape is the near-climactic moment of this objectification. The neighbors’ reaction to the rape and Pecola’s conceiving, however, is the true climax. The victim is condemned almost as strongly as the perpetrator. She cannot be innocent, there can be no sympathy for her.*

3. Why do the neighbors all wish for the baby's death?

*The neighbors see the unborn child as ugly, the product of two uglies. Because they cannot overcome their own prejudice, they believe it would be best for the "ugly" simply to die.*

4. What is significant about the fact that Claudia and Frieda feel sympathy for Pecola while everyone else shuns her and wishes the baby would die?

*In Claudia and Frieda's innocence, they have not yet developed the self-hatred that the adults in their society have. While the adults may condemn Pecola's baby as ugly because of the circumstances of its conception, the girls can only see the potential beauty in the new life.*

5. Why does Claudia wish so fervently for Pecola's baby to live?

*In Claudia's child's mind, the survival of Pecola's baby would be a repudiation of everyone else's love of white baby dolls and the whiteness that made Maureen cute while the other girls were ugly. Everyone else seems to think it would be "best" if the baby were dead, and Claudia equates this with everyone else adhering to white standards of beauty and acceptability. Thus, for Claudia, if this baby lived—contrary to everyone else's desire—something in the prevailing injustice would be undone.*

6. What evidence of the MacTeer girls' naïve innocence is provided in this chapter?

*While praying for Pecola's baby to live, Frieda and Claudia demonstrate that they still innocently believe in the type of miracle in which events can actually be undone if those who ask for it really mean it.*

### **LOOKLOOKHERECOMESA FRIENDTHE FRIENDWILLPLAYWITHJANE...**

1. To whom is Pecola talking in this chapter?

*Pecola is discussing the beauty of her eyes with someone who is obviously not there. Her conversation is with an imaginary friend, a creation in her own disturbed and broken mind.*

2. Why does Pecola truly believe in her blue eyes?

*Pecola has gone insane. All of her experiences, the indifference, outright cruelty, and ultimate betrayal by those who should most love and protect her, have led her to the point of embracing a delusion.*

3. What does Pecola's conversation with her "friend" illustrate for the reader?

*Pecola's conversation with her "friend" illustrates the madness into which she has descended.*



4. Why is Frieda's and Claudia's treatment of Pecola different from everyone else's?

*Claudia and Frieda do avoid Pecola, but not for the same reasons as the other people in their community. They are not repulsed or frightened of her; they are ashamed of themselves, believing that they have failed her by not convincing God that he should change his mind. Their avoidance is out of their perceived failure to their friend, not out of their friend's changed circumstance.*

5. In what way does Pecola become "the waste and the beauty of the world?"

*Pecola was never allowed to believe that she could be anything different, anything better than she perceived herself to be. She was judged based on preconceived notions of her race. She was taunted for circumstances beyond her control, such as the poverty into which she was born. From every external, objective measure, Pecola was as beautiful and worthwhile as any other human being, but her inability to develop a sense of her own worth ultimately wasted her potential.*

6. "The soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers." How is this line a metaphor for the society in which Pecola lives?

*In this line, Pecola is clearly the flower, and the unhealthy, prejudiced society in which she lives is the soil. While some people, stronger people, or members of the dominant culture are able to survive in such "soil," people with the damaged self-esteem and the utter sense of worthlessness of Pecola have no hope of surviving.*

7. How did society fail Pecola?

*Society failed Pecola in a number of ways—in its unquestioning adherence to an arbitrary standard of beauty and goodness, a standard that was utterly unattainable by many, and in its essential indifference to the pain of many of its members.*

# The Bluest Eye

## Prologue

1. How do the narration and the increasing lack of coherence of the Dick and Jane story foreshadow what is to come?

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2. What do the narrator's opening words serve to demonstrate about the girls?

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3. "It never occurred to us that the earth itself might have been too unyielding." The narrator attempts to understand the events that are to come, and how she played a role in them. What connection is she trying to create?

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4. How can the description "unyielding earth" be applied to society?

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5. "*But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.*" What does this line tell the reader about the events to come?

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### Autumn

1. The opening pages of this section are narrated in the first person by Claudia, the youngest MacTeer girl. What is the purpose of these pages?  
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2. Claudia observes, “Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration.” What do Claudia’s words imply about her understanding of adults?  
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3. Although Claudia’s mother is guilty of the adult behavior Claudia criticizes, in what ways does she redeem herself?  
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4. What does the conversation between Mrs. MacTeer and her friends concerning Della Jones and Mr. Henry establish?  
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5. Carefully read the paragraph that begins with the words, “Their conversation is like a gently wicked dance....” and ends with “So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timbre.” What devices does Morrison employ to convey meaning to the conversation overheard by the girls?  
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6. At this time period, what place did children hold in the household?  
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7. Why is the girls' love for the new boarder, Mr. Henry, instantaneous?

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8. On what misconception is Claudia's fear of the outdoors based?

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9. Why was the owning property so important?

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10. Pecola appears at the MacTeer home with no possessions, not even something to sleep in for the night. What does this knowledge imply about her?

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11. Why does Claudia profess to hate Shirley Temple, other little white girls, and white baby dolls?

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12. What does Claudia learn as a result of her destruction of the dolls?

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13. How is the idea that "every little girl wanted a white baby doll" established?

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14. What, ultimately, is communicated to Claudia by the adults' reaction to her destruction of the dolls?

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15. What do the white baby dolls represent and in what way does it help Claudia?

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16. Why are Mama's "fussing soliloquies" hurtful and depressing?

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17. What is ironic about Claudia's loving her mother's songs?

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18. What keeps the girls from going right away to Mama to help with Pecola and her first menstruation?

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19. Why is Mama so angered by the idea of her daughters "playing nasty" and reluctant to hear what they have to say?

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20. Pecola asks the question, "How do you do that? I mean how do you get somebody to love you?" What does this question tell the reader?

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**HERE IS THE HOUSE IT IS GREEN AND WHITE...**

1. What is the purpose of describing the history of the house?

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2. In describing the Breedloves' furnishings and the layout of the house, what does Morrison achieve?

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**HERE IS THE FAMILY MOTHER FATHER DICK AND JANE...**

1. What does the title of the chapter explain and why is it used the way it is?  
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2. The Breedloves' reasons for remaining in the storefront provide what insight?  
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3. "...you looked at them closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction." What is the real issue of the Breedloves' ugliness?  
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4. Mrs. Breedlove wakes on a Saturday morning and begins to rattle about the kitchen making noise. What do the noises and their description foreshadow about events to come?  
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5. "An escapade of drunkenness, no matter how routine, had its own ceremonial close." What does this line explain about the Breedloves?  
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6. Why is Mrs. Breedlove spoiling for a fight?  
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7. Why does Mrs. Breedlove want Cholly to continue drinking as he does?

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8. What is ironic about Mrs. Breedlove's using Jesus as a defense for her actions towards Cholly?

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9. Why does Cholly react to Mrs. Breedlove as violently as he does?

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10. How do Sammy and Pecola react to the violence they give witness to and why do they act in this way?

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11. What is significant about the fact that Pecola is not able to wish her eyes away?

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12. What do blue eyes symbolize for Pecola?

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13. How does Mr. Yacobowski reinforce Pecola's notion about Blue Eyes?

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14. How does Mr. Yacobowski provoke the very behavior he is angry over?

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15. What does the encounter with Mr. Yacobowski reinforce in Pecola?

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16. Why are the Mary Janes so important to Pecola?

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17. How do the whores who live above the Breedloves treat Pecola? What does her treatment of them suggest about her character?

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18. How is it suggested that Pecola does not truly understand the three women who live above her?

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19. What makes the three whores unique in their circumstances? How does this difference help to illustrate Pecola's predominant character trait?

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20. What are the whores trying to do for Pecola?

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Winter

1. What are the standards by which Claudia and Frieda evaluate Maureen Peel?  
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2. Claudia's hatred of Maureen seems more intense than Frieda's. Why is this less surprising than it would have been if Frieda's dislike were worse?  
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3. As the boys surround Pecola, insulting her, what does her behavior imply about her character?  
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4. Why do the boys halt their teasing when Maureen is a witness but not when Claudia or Frieda threaten them?  
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5. What does Maureen share about her family? What insight does it provide?  
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6. Why does the descriptor of "black" hold such power as an insult to Claudia and Frieda?  
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7. Why is fear of the "Thing" greater than the jealousy of Maureen?  
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**SEETHECATITGOESMEOWCOMEANDOPLAY...**

1. What is the purpose of the opening paragraphs of this chapter?

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2. In what way was Junior, as a baby, neglected?

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3. Which theme is supported by Geraldine's explanation of "colored people" and "niggers"?

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4. What is Junior's main impetus for bullying?

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5. Why does Junior target Pecola when he typically stays away from black girls?

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6. How does the incident between Pecola and Junior become ironic?

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7. Why is Junior so angry about Pecola's reaction to the cat?

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8. How is Pecola's behavior atypical for her?

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9. In remembering her past and judging Pecola, what does Geraldine do to her race?

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10. What is so detrimental in the interaction between Geraldine and Pecola?

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11. "She could not hold it low enough to avoid seeing the snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement." What does this line illustrate?

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### Spring

1. In what way are the tender spring branches much like Claudia and Frieda?

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2. Why is it not surprising that Mr. Henry abuses Frieda?

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3. In what way do Claudia and Frieda reveal their immaturity as Frieda revisits the encounter with Mr. Henry?

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4. How does the neighborhood where Mrs. Breedlove works reinforce the notion that “white” equals “beauty”?

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5. How is the notion that white is beautiful further reinforced by the Fisher home?

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6. How does Mrs. Breedlove abuse Pecola's already damaged self-esteem?

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7. What does the appearance of the Fisher girl echo?

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8. What does the incident in the Fisher home reveal about Mrs. Breedlove's character?

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**SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICE...**

1. How does Pauline use her bad foot to her own benefit?

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2. What does the idea of the “stranger” in Pauline’s life represent? What does this imply about Pauline?

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3. What is ironic about the analogy of Cholly as Prince Charming?

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4. What does Pauline’s rotten tooth symbolize for her?

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5. How has Pauline changed as a result of the life with Cholly in the North?

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6. Why can’t Pauline leave Cholly even as she realizes that he is not a good man for her?

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7. Why does the narrator describe the damaging effects of the movies with which Pauline becomes obsessed? What is ironic about Pauline's obsession with the movies?

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8. How is Pecola's birth a foreshadowing of events to come?

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9. What prevents Pauline from viewing her daughter as beautiful?

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10. Why does Pauline change so drastically following the birth of her second child?

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11. What role do Cholly and the children serve in Pauline's "new life"? Why is this ironic?

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12. What do the alternating points-of-view in this chapter accomplish?

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**SEE FATHER HE IS BIG AND STRONG...**

1. What does the story of Cholly's birth and the information about his mother help to explain about him?

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2. Why is Blue Jack not a healthy role model for Cholly?

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3. What is Jake's role in Cholly's development as a character?

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6. In what way is Cholly "free."

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**SEETHEDOGBOWWOWGOESTHEDOG...**

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5. Why does Claudia wish so fervently for Pecola's baby to live?

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6. What evidence of the MacTeer girls' naïve innocence is provided in this chapter?

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**LOOKLOOKHERECOMESA FRIENDTHE FRIENDWILLPLAYWITHJANE...**

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6. "The soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers." How is this line a metaphor for the society in which Pecola lives?

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7. How did society fail Pecola?

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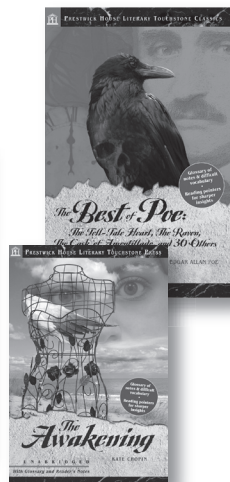
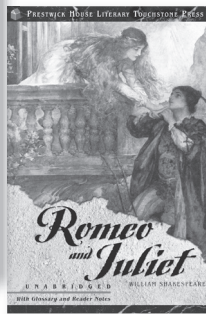
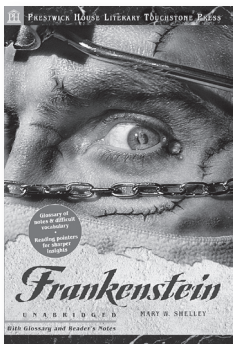
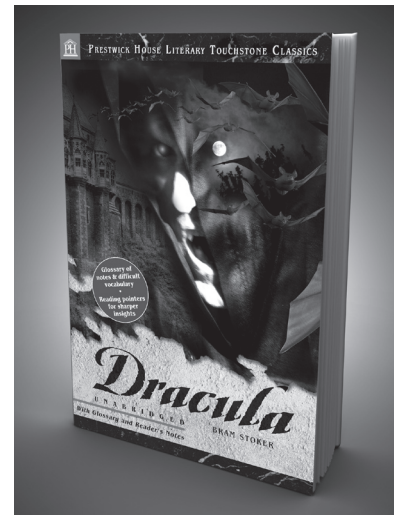
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