

**STRUCTURE****17.0 Objectives****17.1 Toni Morrison's narrative style and language****17.2 The point of view in *The Bluest Eye*****17.3 Tone of the novel *The Bluest Eye*****17.4 Background of the novel *The Bluest Eye*****17.5 Symbols on the novel *The Bluest Eye*****17.6 Motifs in the novel *The Bluest eye*****17.7 Feminist Perspectives in *The Bluest eye*****17.8 Foreword and Afterword of the novel by Toni Morrison****17.9 Significance of the title of the novel *The Bluest Eye*****17.10 Let Us Sum Up****17.11 Key Words****17.12 Suggested Reading****Answers**

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**17.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit, we shall discuss technical aspects of Toni Morrison's writing. We shall discuss the point of view of the novel 'The Bluest Eye', the tone of the novel and the background of the novel. We shall also deal with symbols and motifs in 'The Bluest Eye'.

Toni Morrison's narrative style has multiple perspectives. She often alternates between first and third person omniscient narration. In this unit, we shall also discuss feminist perspective in 'The Bluest Eye'. At the end, we shall also deal with importance of Morrison's foreword and afterword in which she makes a number of points regarding the theme of the novel and her writing style.

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**17.1 TONI MORRISON'S NARRATIVE STYLE AND LANGUAGE**

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Toni Morrison's writing and narrative style is unique. She incorporates various techniques such as metaphorical diction, ironic use of names and visual images. The theme of 'The Bluest Eye' revolves around African-American's internalized taboo about white skin and the blue eyes as the standard of beauty. The desire to transform her identity itself becomes the desire for blue eyes for Pecola Breedlove who loathes

herself for her black skin and ugly body. The intense desire for blue eyes becomes a symptom of Pecola's instable mind.

The novel 'The Bluest Eye' begins with a Dick and Jane paragraph, a white American myth for removed from the realities presented in the novel. Thereafter, the black narrator Claudia MacTeer narrates much of the story and the events that Claudia would not have witnessed are narrated by third person narrator as omniscient narrator.

Morrison uses fragmented narrative with multiple perspectives. Her different narrative styles alternate between first person narrator Claudia and third person omniscient narrator. Claudia is a nine year old girl who conveys her perceptions giving the novel the aspect of innocent way of looking at life and the world. On the other hand, the third person omniscient narration allows the novel to cover broader view of time and space. The novel opens giving historical perspectives about racial issues of past and how they still impacted the characters of the novel in twentieth century.

Even in third person narration, there is a series of paragraphs from Pauline Breedlove's perspectives. Pauline's southern dialect makes the narrative more inclusive depicting rural and less educated characters. Morrison's style easily distinguishable for her unique use of language. She uses historical references, descriptive analogies and varied sentence structure. She often uses smiles that help the readers connect the content with alternate images and experiences. Her frequent use of historical references provides not only information about the time period in which her novel takes place but also adds depth and realism to the stories.

Toni Morrison uses a wide variety of sentences that makes her writing fluid. Morrison charms the readers by manipulating sentence length and words to express the tone and emotions. She often avoids verbs in her sentences such as "Laughter, relief, a steep hunger for food", (The Bluest Eye, 143). Morrison's distinctive style has made her unique and prominent novelist in the literary world.

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## **17.2 THE POINT OF VIEW IN THE BLUEST EYE**

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The point of view of 'The Bluest Eye' alternates between the first person observations of Claudia MacTeer who befriends Pecola Breedlove, and third person omniscient narrator. Most of Claudia's narration comes from the view point of a nine year old girl, while an older, wiser Claudia corrects her immature misapprehensions. Morrison also employs a third-person omniscient perspective for those portions of the novel not narrated by Claudia.

The third person omniscient explores the past stories of the character like Pauline, Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's parents and narrates sections like chapter Five's elaborates discussion on black womanhood. Pecola herself narrates a brief section of the final chapter through an interior dialogue.

'The Bluest Eye' has different narrative voices which give different perspectives of the same situation. In the prologue, the main narrator is Claudia but the prologue is told in the past tense as it is used to

describe events that took place in Lorain, Ohio in 1940s. Claudia's adult point of view is presented in the prologue. Claudia narrates her story in two different perspectives – in past tense in the prologue and the present tense throughout major part of the story. Multiple points of view make reader experience multiple perspectives that Toni Morrison wants to convey.

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### **17.3 TONE OF THE NOVEL THE BLUEST EYE**

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'The Bluest Eye' is a deeply poetic novel that describes and ponders over feelings of love, sex and self-loathing. The novel also has a philosophical tone which features very terse and wisdom packed aphorisms. Throughout the novel, there is a mixture of depression and being uplifted. Pecola seems depressed all the time as she thinks that she is ugly and unlovable. Claudia differs from Pecola about her concept beauty. She thinks that white skin and blue eyes alone do not create beauty. Claudia fights for what she believes in. Here, the tone of the novel reflects rebellion against prevalent norms of beauty.

Toni Morrison focuses more on the thoughts of her character in the novel than on their feelings. Morrison wanted her readers to be touched rather than moved. The overall tone of the novel is lyrical, elegiac, embittered and matter-of-fact. The mood of the story is bitter and melancholic. Morrison remains detached while describing the depressive and melancholic life of Pecola Breedlove. Even Cholly Breedlove who rapes his own daughter is portrayed not as a villain but as the victim of racism and humiliating experiences.

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### **17.4 BACKGROUND OF THE NOVEL THE BLUEST EYE**

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'The Bluest Eye' is the novel that takes place mainly in Lorain, Ohio in the United States, which is in north side of America. The story takes place in 1940s, when there was racism and inequality between whites and non-whites. In the early 1600s, the white Americans brought slaves from Africa and traded them. The black Africans were treated as property in America until 1863 when a document called the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by the president of America. The document abolished slavery legally but the whites still continued to regard themselves superior to non-whites. The black African-Americans also suffered from inferiority complex and self-hatred considering themselves as ugly and hateable. The African-Americans were segregated from the white Americans and the black Americans could not use the facilities like public transport, schools and other public services as the white Americans did. Such humiliating experiences psychologically scarred the psyche of the black Americans. In "The Bluest Eye", Pecola Breedlove becomes the victim of self-loathing as she considers herself as 'ugly' and therefore dreams of having the bluest eyes.

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### **17.5 SYMBOLS ON THE NOVEL THE BLUEST EYE**

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Symbols are objects, figures or colours that represent abstract ideas or concepts. In "The Bluest eye", there are several significant

symbols. The novel begins with a sentence from Dick and Jane narrative: “there is the house”. Homes symbolise emotional situations and values of characters who inhabit them. Pauline Breedlove does not like her home which means that for her, home is miserable and suffocating. The MacTeer home is tended carefully by Mrs MacTeer. Therefore, MacTeer house is full of love and warmth.

Blue eyes are the central symbol in the novel. They symbolise the beauty and happiness that Pecola links with the white people with white skin and blue eyes. They also symbolize Pecola’s blindness as she loses her sanity and hallucinates that she has blue eyes. The blue also represents sadness and therefore, the bluest eye also means the saddest eye.

Claudia and Frieda associate marigolds with survival, safety and well-being of Pecola’s baby. They believe that marigolds they have planted grow, Pecola’s baby would survive and grow. Marigolds also represent renewal of nature. Dandelions are known as weeds and they represent black people who are treated as ugly, useless and unwanted. Milk represents whiteness and beauty and so, Pecola drinks milk to attain white skin like white Americans. Three prostitutes China, Poland and Miss Marie symbolize freedom from social constraints. Shirley Temple was an American actress, singer and dancer. Claudia MacTeer hates her and she pulls apart the Shirley Temple doll which was given to her as a Christmas gift. She tears apart the doll to search for beauty inside the doll. Claudia expresses her rebellious nature against the prevalent norms of beauty.

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## **17.6 MOTIFS IN THE NOVEL THE BLUEST EYE**

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Motifs in literary works are recurring structures, contrasts or literary devices. Motifs help in developing and informing the major themes of the literary text.

The novel “The Bluest eye” opens with Dick and Jane narrative. It is a distorted narrative with sentences and words together. The world of Dick and Jane is probably white, upper middleclass. It contrasts with the dark and ugly world of the black Americans because of their internationalized values regarding beauty and happiness. Dick and Jane narrative and the novel provide ironic commentary on each other. Dick and Jane narrative is used as a prologue by Toni Morrison. She repeats the paragraph three times which are highly different from each other.

‘Dick and Jane’ reader was a popular primer in the public school in 1940s. It is a racist discourse. The piece of the narrative “Dick and Jane” is very important as it offers an interpretative key to Morrison’s text. The three versions of the narrative represent ideals or stereotypes, mimics and castoffs. The first version is directly coated from the primer by Morrison which symbolises the life style of white world. According to this text, the white family is associated with morality, prosperity and civilized attitude. In this perfect world, the blacks have no space at all.

The second version has no capitalization and punctuations. Here the pressure of dominant community or black community is represented.

The black Americans mimic white people with self-hatred towards their own origin and identity. Mrs Geraldine and Maureen Peel represent mixed race. The third version is formless in which all words are messed up together. This preface suggests that Morrison's story will strive to undercut this traditional children's narrative. It signifies how there is no room in Western society for Pecola and her family.

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### **17.7 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN THE BLUEST EYE**

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'The Bluest eye' is mostly concerned with the experiences of black women during 1940s in the USA. It presents the realistic view of the life they lived with utter humiliation and self-loathing. 'The Bluest eye' is very poignant expression of Toni Morrison's ethnic cultural feminism. It is a serious critique of the black poverty, loss of positive self-image and powerlessness. Pecola, the protagonist of the novel has internationalized the Western standards of beauty under the pressure of racialism. She is fascinated by the blue eyes and white skin of the white Americans. She hates herself for her ugliness and dreams for the bluest eyes.

Self-loathing of the black people made them cruel, violent and inhuman like Pecola's father Cholly who raped her and made her pregnant. Pecola's alienation from the folk knowledge and values destroyed her mentally and spiritually.

There are three female characters in the novel who occupy pivotal place in the novel. They are Pecola, Pauline and Claudia. The incestuous violence against Pecola by Cholly reveals that he has no other option to assert his male superiority and therefore, he subdues his own helpless daughter and rapes her. Claudia makes a very illustrating observation when the novel is about to end that, "and Cholly loved her. I am sure he did. He at any rate was one who loved her."

Claudia is the only character in the novel who makes an attempt at deconstructing the ideology of the dominant society by dismembering white dolls. Pauline, Pecola's mother embraces the western notion of history glorifying future and belittling the past and present. She performs neither the role of a mother nor that of a wife. She loves the house of the white family where she works more than her own home and family.

'The Bluest eye' is a novel that deals with the themes of identity, gender and race. Morrison's central project was to question the standards of beauty that oppressed and humiliated the African-American women. The connection between physical appearance and sense of worthiness is discussed as the major theme of the novel. By presenting the character of Pecola, Morrison accuses the whole black society of being powerless and self-loathing by accepting norms of beauty established by the whites. The standard of white beauty destroyed Pauline Breedlove even more than her daughter Pecola who hated not only herself but her entire community and family. Her marital life was completely shattered and gloomy. Pecola's ruined life was consequences of her parents' violent and loveless marital life. Morrison's feminist perspectives depict the double-colonized life of the black women in the United States during 1940s

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## **17.8 FOREWORD AND AFTERWORD OF THE NOVEL BY TONI MORRISON**

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Foreword and Afterword of the ‘The Bluest Eye’ are highly significant as they explain Toni Morrison’s perspective on racial beauty, self-esteem and acceptance. She explains that experiencing hate is an experience everyone goes through. She notes that hate is for things that cannot be changed. She ties this into the main origin of her foreword a story about how one of her friends said she wanted blue eyes when they were young. Morrison says that she was disgusted when her friend made her a statement because it showed a total lack of self-esteem and that her friend had been told by someone that blue eyes were more attractive. Because of the racist history of America, there are many African-American who do not see their own natural beauty but hate themselves considering themselves ugly.

The first sentence of Morrison’s foreword to ‘The Bluest Eye’ says that, “There can’t be anyone, I am sure, who doesn’t know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained period of time”. She says that it is devastating for a person to be disliked and rejected. Thus, the foreword of ‘The Bluest Eye’ does an amazing job of highlighting a very prevalent problem that has always existed in human society.

In the afterword to ‘The Bluest Eye’, Morrison explains her goal of writing the novel. She wants to make a statement about the damage that internalized racism can do to the most vulnerable member of the community – a black young girl. Morrison tells the story from multiple perspectives keeping the girl’s dignity intact.

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## **17.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE OF THE NOVEL THE BLUEST EYE**

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The title of the novel is quite significant as it refers to the fervent desire of Pecola Breedlove for beautiful blue eyes. Her insanity at the end of the novel is her only way to escape the where she is not considered beautiful. She experiences hallucination that she has attained bluest eyes. Throughout the novel, the desire for having blue eyes is portrayed is a profoundly desirable norm of beauty. The society depicted in the novel values whiteness and bluest eyes as the important and inevitable traits of beauty. The only person who does not subscribe to this value system is Claudia MacTeer, the narrator who dismembers white dolls and hate Shirley Temple for blue eyes.

At the end of the novel, Pecola is tricked by a con man Soaphead Church into believing that she has blue eyes. This belief becomes a component of insanity that she succumbs into the end of the novel.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

#### **Short Notes: Assignment For Students**

1. Write a short note on Toni Morrison’s narrative style.
2. Discuss the background of the novel in about 200 words.

3. Write a short note on feminist perspectives in *The Bluest Eye*.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

### **Short Answer Questions**

1. What is the significance of the title of *The Bluest Eye*?
2. What is the point of view of novel *The Bluest Eye*?
3. What is the central symbol of the novel?
4. What do marigolds symbolise?
5. Explain Dick and Jane narrative in brief.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

### **Multiple Choice Questions**

1. What does Pecola long for?
  - (a) Money
  - (b) Toys
  - (c) Friend
  - (d) Bluest Eye
2. In how many forms “Dick and Jane” primer appear in the novel?
  - (a) 5
  - (b) 3
  - (c) 2
  - (d) 4
3. Who is the narrator in the ‘prologue’?
  - (a) Pecola
  - (b) Claudia
  - (c) Pauline
  - (d) Cholly
4. Emancipation Proclamation was signed in
  - (a) 1860
  - (b) 1880
  - (c) 1863
  - (d) 1864
5. “Dick and Jane” reader was a popular
  - (a) Primer
  - (b) Book
  - (c) Document
  - (d) Format
6. Second version of “Dick and Jane” has no
  - (a) Pauses
  - (b) Capitalizations and punctuations
  - (c) Words
  - (d) Sentences
7. Toni Morrison’s feminist perspectives are
  - (a) Ethnic cultural
  - (b) Eco-feminist
  - (c) Third-wave feminism
  - (d) None of the above
8. The Afterword by Toni Morrison in “The Bluest Eye” explains
  - (a) Her philosophy
  - (b) Her perspectives on beauty

- (c) Her goal of writing the novel
- (d) Her feminist ideology

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### 17.10 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have discussed important critical aspects of the novel “The Bluest Eye” such as Morrison’s narrative style, tone of the novel, point of view in the novel, background of the novel and symbols and motifs in the “The Bluest Eye”. We have also discussed feminist perspectives in the novel. Morrison’s foreword and after word represent her goal of writing the novel. The novel highlights the fact that self-loathing is synonymous with self-annihilation.

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### 17.11 KEY WORDS

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- Omniscient:** knowing everything  
**Befriends:** to become somebody’s friend  
**Aphorisms:** a short phrase that expresses in a clever way  
**Sanity** : the state of having a normal healthy mind  
**Motif:** a recurring subject. Theme, idea, etc.  
**Castoff:** thrown away, rejected, discarded  
**Poignant:** keenly distressing to the feelings  
**Incestuous:** being so close or intimate as to prevent proper functioning  
**Subdues:** to defeat somebody/something or bring somebody/something under control  
**Oppress:** to treat a group of people in a cruel and unfair way by not allowing them the same freedom and rights as others

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### 17.12 SUGGESTED READING

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1. Morrison, Toni (2007) “*The Bluest Eye*” New York: Vintage International.
2. Morrison, Toni, *Toni Morrison talks about her Motivation for Writing* YouTube National Visionary Leadership Project, 2008.
3. Jan Furman, (1996), *Toni Morrison’s fiction* (Revised and Expanded edition) Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Caroline-press.
4. Hill Rigney, B. ‘*The voices of Toni Morrison*’ (1991) Ohio University press.
5. Khayati, Abdellatif (1999) “*Representation, Race and Language of the Ineffable in Toni Morrison’s narrative*”, African-American Review.

### ANSWERS

#### Check your progress 2

1. The title of the novel is “The Bluest Eye” which refers to the fervent desire of Pecola Breedlove for blue eyes. Like many other black Americans she loathes herself for having black ugly skin and no blue eyes. When she goes insane, she experiences an illusion that she has attained blue eyes.



2. The point of view of the novel “The Bluest Eye” alternates between first person observations of Claudia MacTeer and third person omniscient narrator. Claudia’s major narration comes from a view point of a nine year old girl while an older, wiser Claudia corrects her misapprehensions later. A third person omniscient perspectives are the portions of the novel not narrated by Claudia.
3. Blue eyes are the central symbol of the novel. They symbolize the beauty and happiness that Pecola Breedlove links with the white people with their white skin and blue eyes. They also symbolises her blindness as she loses her sanity and hallucinates that she has blue eyes.
4. Marigolds symbolise survival, safety and well-being of Pecola’s baby. Claudia and Frieda believe that if marigolds they have planted grow well, Pecola’s baby will also survive and grow.
5. “Dick and Jane” narrative is used as a prologue by Toni Morrison. She repeats a paragraph thrice which is quite different from each other. ‘Dick and Jane’ reader was a popular primer in schools during 1940s. It represents racist discourse. The three versions of the narrative represents ideals or stereotypes, mimics and cast-off. It suggests that in a perfect world of the whites, blacks have no space at all.

**Check your progress 3**

1. D
2. B
3. B
4. C
5. A
6. B
7. A
8. C