

## Second Reaction: How Do You Teach What is Silent to Some and Reality to Others?

Toni Morrison. *The Bluest Eye*. New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 2007. Print.

*Megan Paulk*



How do you make various perspectives reality for all when different voices are limited in society? How do you make various perspectives reality when some view representation as not needed because “in their eyes” everyone is represented? As Toni Morrison begins *The Bluest Eye* with the famous “Dick and Jane” story, she sets the stage for what is visible and what is invisible. How do you teach what is not accessible? If your lived community does not have diverse voices, people, and perspectives, how can we learn about the variety of people and perspectives in our world? One way to widen a community’s views of differences could be through the project known as Human Library ([humanlibrary.org](http://humanlibrary.org)) with the motto “unjudged someone.” The concept is to learn about differences through interactions, conversations, and respectful discourse. Building from the Human Library project, another way (and sometimes the only way) is through literature.

In *The Bluest Eye*, there are depictions of rape, racism, and sexual content, concepts that are visible to some and invisible to others. Through these depictions, however, the story creates more impact and opportunities for conversations about topics that have been experienced by some and not experienced by others. Throughout the book there are various actions taken by numerous characters that left me, as the reader, asking, “How could someone do that?” However, Morrison provides one possible answer to that question by demonstrating how identity is formed from a young age. Morrison shows the reader how injustice and oppression can severely alter lives and negatively impact identity, which impact future actions, thoughts, and decisions – in essence a trauma response.

While there are depictions of what some may consider only “adult topics”. I frankly become angry when I saw reviews suggesting that only adults should read this book and not school aged students. The conversations, reflections, and questions that this book invokes are imperative to discuss as adults and students. For some it may provide a connection point, for others there is an opportunity to expand perspectives that are often shaped by inaccurate representations via the media. Discussions and reflections around this book have the potential to open minds on how oppression creates more oppression.

Why do we shy away from these conversations? Specifically, conversations about life experiences dealing with oppressions, injustices, racism, privilege, and the ways in which privilege is utilized. These conversations should not be shied away from but brought to the forefront as we continue to advocate for truth telling, sharing perspectives, and widening the views of all people regardless of their identity or lived experiences. These conversations have the possibility of leading to the creation of empathy and the formation of meaningful relationships. Everyone has a story to tell and that is their truth.

As with the conversations and reflections that come from reading *The Bluest Eyes*, my positionality for this review is based on my reality – raised in an all-White community and having my first Black teacher in college. While reviewing and reflecting I centered my reaction on the reality that *The Bluest Eyes*, is a book that could be utilized in communities like the one I grew up in, where racial and ethnic diversity is nonexistent. This story can provide an important, yet missing (invisible) perspective.

In summary, *The Bluest Eye* provides various perspectives of Black women and girls in society. The main character, Pecola, longs for blue eyes while the narrator, Claudia, rejects all things associated with little White girls. Why does Pecola want blue eyes? To what extent does she go to “achieve” this? The themes in this book can evoke thoughtful conversations in all classrooms. In a world where books are banned and race conversations are restricted, we must ask ourselves, why? Is it to keep the visible, visible, and to continue to try to silence the rest? Or maybe it is to keep the narrative constructed of limited views and perspectives? *The Bluest Eye* is a salient piece of literature that can be used to convey lived experiences and broaden perspectives regardless of your identity and lived reality.

### **About the Author**

**Megan Paulk** is currently a doctoral candidate in the Curriculum, Foundations and Reading Education Program in Curriculum Studies at Georgia Southern University. Her research centers on the lived experiences of white mothers raising biracial children, who are in interracial relationships and examining their racial shifts in perspectives, using a Podcast Methodology. She

has created a podcast in conjunction with her dissertation called *White Women in a Black Barbershop*.