Setting the Stage:
Analysis Strategies for Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*

*Museum Connection:* Art and Enlightenment

**Purpose:** In this lesson students will analyze stylistic elements in the writing of Toni Morrison to comment on her portrayal of African American identity and standards of beauty during the 1940s and 1950s.

**Course:** English 11: American Literature

**Time Frame:** *(90 minute class)*

Note: If your class is not studying *The Bluest Eye*, you may utilize the first part of the lesson (approximately 45 minutes) for passage analysis strategies.

**English Core Learning Goals (Assessment Limits):**

1.2.1 The student will consider the contributions of plot, character, setting, conflict, and point of view when constructing the meaning of a text.
1.2.2 The student will determine how the speaker, organization, sentence structure, word choice, tone, rhythm, and imagery reveal an author’s purpose.
1.2.3 The student will explain the effectiveness of stylistic elements in a text that communicate an author's purpose.
1.2.5 The student will extend or further develop meaning by explaining the implications of the text for the reader or contemporary society.
1.3.1 The student will explain how language and textual devices create meaning.
1.3.3 The student will identify features of language that create tone and voice.
2.1.3 The student will compose to express personal ideas, using prose and/or poetic forms.
4.1.1 The student will state and explain a personal response to a given text.

**Common Core State Reading Standards for Literature 6-12**

- RL3: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- RL5: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- RL10: By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
Objectives:
- The student will be able to discuss and analyze stylistic elements that reveal Toni Morrison’s style of writing in order to make inferences about characters in the novel.
- The student will be able to interpret a text in order to discuss/predict characterization, themes, etc. in a work.
- The student will be able to practice annotation / “good” reading strategies using passages from *The Bluest Eye*.
- The student will be able to comment on African American identity and standards of beauty through the work of Toni Morrison and the video clip experiment of “The Doll Test” in order to grasp the effect of racial inequality and segregation of African Americans in the 1940s and 50s.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dick and Jane primer</td>
<td>a series of U.S. children’s books, used from the 1930s to the 1960s, for teaching elementary students how to read. They were about a boy and a girl whose lives and families were typically White American middle-class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diction</td>
<td>in literary usage, the writer’s choice of words and the connotations implied.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imagery</td>
<td>patterns of words that appeal to the imaginary senses; these word patterns may appeal to sight (visual), sound (auditory), touch (tactile), or smell (olfactory).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detail</td>
<td>an individual separate part of something, especially one of several items of information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>the human use of spoken or written words as a communication system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>the ordering of and relationship between the words and other structural elements in phrases and sentences. The syntax may be of whole, a single phrase or sentence, or of and individual speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>the subject of a discourse, discussion, piece of writing, or artistic composition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>the way in which something is written or performed, as distinct from its content. A way of writing, especially a way regarded as expressing a particular attitude or typifying a particular period. A distinctive and identifiable form in of writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>the author’s attitude towards a subject.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Point of view</td>
<td>someone’s way of thinking about or approaching a subject, as shaped by his or her own character, experience, mindset, and history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>the surroundings or environment in which something exists or takes place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td>portrayal of fictional character and the way in which the writer portrays the characters in a book, play, or movie.</td>
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Materials:

*For the Teacher:*

- Resource Sheet 1: PowerPoint on “Style”
- Resource Sheet 2: *The Bluest Eye* Reading Passages for Analysis
- Resource Sheet 4: DIDLS
- LCD Projector / ELMO / Laptop
- Dick and Jane Information website - [http://www.ed.psu.edu/Englishpds/Articles/LiteratureStudy/Dick%20and%20Jane.htm](http://www.ed.psu.edu/Englishpds/Articles/LiteratureStudy/Dick%20and%20Jane.htm)
For the Student:

Resource Sheet 1: PowerPoint on “Style”
Resource Sheet 2: The Bluest Eye Reading Passages for Analysis
Resource Sheet 3: Post-reading Questions
Resource Sheet 4: DIDLS
Resource Sheet 5: DIDLS Notes
Resource Sheet 6: Quickwrite

Resources:

Publications:


Web Sites:

http://www.ed.psu.edu/Englishpds/Articles/LiteratureStudy/Dick%20and%20Jane.htm
http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/6/a_girl_like_me/index.php?fs=about
http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/tmorris.htm
http://www.tonimorrisonssociety.org/
http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/biographies/morrison.html
http://books.google.com/books?id=12_KUGLXigMC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Historical Background:

American author, Toni Morrison, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. In her work she explored the experience and roles of black women in a racist and male dominated society. In the center of her complex and multilayered narratives is the unique cultural inheritance of African-Americans. Morrison has been a member of both the National Council on the Arts and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

"Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company." (from Nobel Lecture, 1993)
Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, where her parents moved to escape the problems of southern racism. Her family was made up of migrants, sharecroppers on both sides. Morrison grew up in the black community of Lorain. She spent her childhood in the Midwest and read voraciously, from Jane Austen to Tolstoy. Morrison's father, George Wofford, was a welder, and told her folktales of the black community, transferring his African-American heritage to another generation. In 1949 she entered Howard University in Washington, D.C., one of America's most distinguished black colleges. There she changed her name from "Chloe" to "Toni," explaining once that people found "Chloe" too difficult to pronounce. She continued her studies at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Morrison wrote her thesis on suicide in the works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, receiving her M.A. in 1955.

During 1955-57 Morrison was an instructor in English at Texas Southern University and taught in the English department at Howard. In 1964 she moved to Syracuse, New York, working as a textbook editor. After eighteen months she was transferred to the New York headquarters of Random House. There she edited books by such black authors as Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones. She also continued to teach at two branches of the State University of New York. In 1984 she was appointed to an Albert Schweitzer chair at the University of New York at Albany, where she nurtured young writers through two-year fellowships.

While teaching at Howard University and caring for her two children, Morrison wrote her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970). With its publication, Morrison also established her new identity, which she later in 1992 rejected: "I am really Chloe Anthony Wofford. That's who I am. I have been writing under this other person's name. I write some things now as Chloe Wofford, private things. I regret having called myself Toni Morrison when I published my first novel, *The Bluest Eye,*” a story of all black characters set in the community of a small, Midwestern town. The book was partly based on Morrison's story written for a writers' group, which she joined after her six-year marriage with the Jamaican architect Harold Morrison broke up.

Pecola Breedlove, the central character of *The Bluest Eye*, prays each night for the blue-eyed beauty of Shirley Temple. She believes everything would be all right if only she had beautiful blue eyes. The narrator, Claudia MacTeer, tries to understand the destruction of Pecola, who is raped twice by her father. Traumatized by the attacks, she visits minister Micah Elihue Whitcom, who gives her poisoned meat to feed his old, sick dog. Driven to madness, she invents an imaginary friend, who reassures that her eyes are the bluest in the world. The novel was removed from the 11th-grade curriculum at Lathrop High School in 1994 after parents' complaints. It was also challenged in the West Chester, Pennsylvania, school district, at Morrisville (Pennsylvania) Borough High School, and in 2003, parents of students attending the Kern High School District in Bakersfield, California, challenged the use of the novel in the curriculum.

http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/tmorris.htm

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Lesson Development:

Motivation:

Refer to Resource Sheet 1: The PowerPoint Presentation to use throughout the lesson.

Show images from the Internet of various styles of clothing, dancing, and room décor in order to identify and define “style.” Students should recognize that style is what makes something unique and personal to an individual. Then, ask how style relates to an author’s writing.

What elements could we analyze when discussing an author’s style? Take responses from students. Introduce the Resource Sheets in the order stated under For the Student.

Procedures:

• Tell students that we will be looking at the opening section of The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison. We should be able to generate a variety of ideas about this novel just from the opening paragraphs. This activity will model active reading strategies for the students.

• Distribute the Toni Morrison biographical information found at http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/tmorris.htm and Resource Sheet2: The Bluest Eye Reading Passage. The teacher may highlight key points from the biographical information or the students may read information on their own.

Students, on their own, should read the passages from Resource Sheet2: The Bluest Eye Reading Passage. Give students ample time to read the passages and jot down notes. To focus their reading, ask them to compare and contrast the two sections of text. As a class, prior to the small group discussion, ask students if they have heard of a Dick and Jane primer. The teacher should give students information or notes about the Dick and Jane primer if students have no prior knowledge. The teacher may refer to the websites listed in the lesson for information. http://www.ed.psu.edu/Englishpds/Articles/LiteratureStudy/Dick%20and%20Jane.htm for information or have students read the article.

• Once this idea has been discussed, students (individually) should take 2-3 minutes to go back to that passage and write down any additional ideas they have gathered about the passage. Students should reflect on how the literal and symbolic meanings of the Dick and Jane primer affect their understanding of the text.

• Divide students into small groups. Depending on the class, you may want to assign roles for each student in each group. Example: Each group could have a discussion leader, a reporter and a note-taker. Give students 10 minutes to discuss their findings, make predictions about the novel, idea themes, analyze the author’s style, etc. The teacher should circulate around the room, monitor the groups, and refocus them as needed. Students may use Resource Sheet 3: Post-reading Questions to guide their discussion and analysis of the passages.

• Once group discussion time is finished, bring class back together as a large group. Place the copy of the reading passage on the document camera or overhead for the students to see. Have each group report their findings and model the annotation of the passage for the class. (You could have
each group come up to the projector and write in their notes – or the teacher could take the notes). Also, if a laptop and LCD projector is available, you can have the passage handout as a Word document on your computer, open the file to display on the overhead screen, and use the File, Insert Comment tool. If you have never used this before, you place the cursor where you would like to include a note, click File – Insert Comment and a pink bubble will appear on the Word document – and then the teacher can type in the comment.

- After all notes are taken on the passage, the teacher should add to some of the ideas or discuss ones that may not have been covered in the group analysis. Refer to the DIDLs Resource Sheet 4: DIDLS to find concepts and questions as a guide. Students may complete Resource Sheet 5: DIDLS Notes to support their note-taking during the discussion.
- Follow up questions with students - What key themes do they think will be addressed in this novel? How does Morrison use elements of style to emphasize these themes? How can we describe Pecola? How can we describe Pecola’s father, Cholly? What effect does Morrison want to achieve through the italicized introduction? How might society treat a young African American girl differently from a European-American girl during the 1940s and 50s? What pressures might she face? Can you guess the significance of the title, The Bluest Eye? Think about the year 1941. What do you know about this time period?
- Discuss The Doll Test from the 1940s and 50s. Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted psychological experiments on African American children. In one test, The Doll Test, young children were given brown dolls and white dolls (these dolls were the same make and style – just different in color). In the experiment, the Clarks found that most of the black children viewed the black dolls negatively and the white dolls positively. This study was cited in Brown vs. Board of Education as support for the idea that damage was being done to African American children because of school segregation. Recently (2005), Kiri Davis reconducted the Clark’s Doll Test and the results are quite similar. Show the 7 minutes 8 seconds documentary to the students. Information referring to the documentary is available at the following websites:

  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64rSgf0iOhQ&list=PL43D9C89B6A0A3A61
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqSFqnUFOns&list=PL43D9C89B6A0A3A61
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0BxFRU_SOw
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i20d11fGz-0&list=PL43D9C89B6A0A3A61
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i20d11fGz-0&list=PL43D9C89B6A0A3A61

Follow up discussion – Use Resource Sheet 6: Quickwrite to answer the final assessment questions: What standards of beauty are imposed on young children and teens today? How might these “standards” have affected Pecola throughout the course of The Bluest Eye? How does the passage from the novel echo the images of “beauty” and “perfection” in American culture?

Assessment: Students will be graded informally on their participation in class. Teacher will also grade the Journal/Quickwrite response as well as the students’ annotations on the text of the reading passage.
**Closure: (10 minutes) Resource Sheet 6: Journal/Quickwrite** – Students will complete a journal or quickwrite response to today’s lesson. They can write about what they learned about passage analysis, new terms they learned, etc. They can comment on one of the issues discussed in class – standards of beauty, 1940s time period, predictions about the novel, etc.

**Thoughtful Application(s):**

- Expand on the Quickwrite to consider some ideas about how to remedy the skewed beliefs about beauty in our culture.
- Revisit the passage to discuss how Morrison’s use of the elements of style enhances the themes of the passage.
- Identify and discuss groups other than African Americans who have suffered from a feeling of being “less than” due to cultural beliefs and ideas about beauty.

**Lesson Extensions:**


2. Lucille Clifton embraced African American heritage and feminist themes in her writings. Research poet and writer Lucille Clifton. Compare her writing style with that of Toni Morrison.


4. How does the poetry that is featured in the museum compare to the themes and ideas in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*? Compare the images of beauty and identity in the excerpts from *The Bluest Eye* to Lucille Clifton’s poem, “Homage to My Hips” which is displayed in the museum.

5. The Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.
   
   a. Journey in History Theatre provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum’s gallery.
      
      i. Take the theme tour, Heritage and experience the rich, cultural heritage of Maryland’s African American community. Learn how African Americans established and influenced Maryland’s historic communities, social organizations, work traditions and artistic customs.

      ii. Contact group reservations for schedule updates.
Resource Sheet 1
PowerPoint

For PowerPoint:

Open the hyperlink below

http://www.msde.state.md.us/w/DickandJanePowerPoint.ppt
Resource Sheet 2

_The Bluest Eye_ Reading Passages for Analysis

For Resource:

Open Hyperlink below

http://tinyurl.com/d8kelm5

Scroll down to page 9
Resource Sheet 3

_The Bluest Eye_ Post-reading Questions

1. How does Morrison use elements of style to emphasize her themes?

2. How can we describe Pecola?

3. How can we describe Cholly?

4. What effect does Morrison want to achieve through the italicized introduction?

5. How might society treat a young African-American girl differently from a European-American girl during the 1940s and 50s? What pressures will she face?

6. What standards of beauty are imposed on young children and teens today?

7. How does the passage we reread today echo the images of “beauty” and “perfection” in American culture?
Resource Sheet 4

DIDLS

Diction – The connotation of the word choice.
Images – Vivid appeals to understanding through senses.
Details – Facts that are included or those omitted.
Language – The overall use of language, such as formal, informal, colloquial, jargon.
Sentence Structure – How structure affects the reader’s attitude.

DIDLS

Use diction to find tone. Use imagery, details, language and syntax to support tone.

TONE

Author's attitude toward the subject, toward himself, or toward the audience.

DICTION

Adjectives, nouns, verbs, adverbs, negative words, positive words, synonyms, contrast.
Look at the words that jump out at you - Evaluate only those words to find tone

Also look at:

Colloquial (Slang)          Old-Fashioned
Informal (Conversational)  Formal (Literary)
Connotative (Suggestive meaning)  Denotative (Exact meaning)
Concrete (Specific)          Abstract (General or Conceptual)
Euphonious (Pleasant Sounding)  Cacophonous (Harsh sounding)
Monosyllabic (One syllable)  Polysyllabic (More than one syllable)

• Describe diction (choice of words) by considering the following:
  1. Words can be monosyllabic (one syllable in length) or polysyllabic (more than one syllable in length). The higher the ratio of polysyllabic words, the more difficult the content.
  2. Words can be mainly colloquial (slang), informal (conversational), formal (literary) or old-fashioned.
  3. Words can be mainly denotative (containing an exact meaning, e.g., dress) or connotative (containing suggested meaning, e.g., gown)
  4. Words can be concrete (specific) or abstract (general or conceptual).
  5. Words can euphonious (pleasant sounding, e.g., languid, murmur) or cacophonous (harsh sound, e.g., raucous, croak).

IMAGERY

Creates a vivid picture and appeals to the senses

Alliteration  repetition of consonant sounds at the start of a word  The giggling girl gave gum.
Assonance  repetition of vowel sounds in the middle of a word  Moths cough and drop wings
Consonance  repetition of consonant sounds in the middle of a word  The man has kin in Spain
Onomatopoeia  writing sounds as words  The clock went tick tock
Simile  a direct comparison of unlike things using like or as  Her hair is like a rat’s nest
Metaphor  a direct comparison of unlike things  The man’s suit is a rainbow
Hyperbole  a deliberate exaggeration for effect  I’d die for a piece of candy
Understatement  represents something as less than it is  A million dollars is okay
Personification  attributing human qualities to inhuman objects  The teapot cried for water
Metonymy  word exchanged for another closely associated with it  Uncle Sam wants you!
Pun  play on words – Uses words with multiple meanings  Shoes menders mend soles.
Symbol  something that represents/stands for something else  the American Flag
Analogy  comparing two things that have at least one thing in common  A similar thing happened...
Oxymoron  Use or words seemingly in contradiction to each other  bittersweet chocolate

DETAILS  specifics the author includes about facts – his opinion

LANGUAGE  • Words that describe the entire body of words in a text – not isolated bits of diction
Artificial  false  Literal  apparent, word for word
Bombastic  pompous, ostentatious  Moralistic  puritanical, righteous
Colloquial  vernacular  Obscure  unclear
Concrete  actual, specific, particular  Obtuse  dull-witted, undiscerning
Connotative  alludes to; suggestive  Ordinary  everyday, common
Cultured  cultivated, refined, finished  Pedantic  didactic, scholastic, bookish
Detached  cut-off, removed, separated  Plain  clear, obvious
Emotional  expressive of emotions  Poetic  lyric, melodious, romantic
Esoteric  understood by a chosen few  Precise  exact, accurate, decisive
Euphemistic  insincere, affected  Pretentious  pompous, gaudy, inflated
Exact  verbatim, precise  Provincial  rural, rustic, unpolished
Figurative  serving as illustration  Scholarly  intellectual, academic
Formal  academic, conventional  Sensuous  passionate, luscious
Grotesque  hideous, deformed  Simple  clear, intelligible
Homespun  folksy, homey, native, rustic  Slang  lingo, colloquialism
Idiomatic  Peculiar, vernacular  Symbolic  representative, metaphorical
Insipid  uninteresting, tame, dull  Trite  common, banal, stereotyped
Jargon  vocabulary for a profession  Informal  casual, relaxed, unofficial
Learned  educated, experienced  Vulgar  coarse, indecent, tasteless

• Rhetorical Devices -- The use of language that creates a literary effect – enhance and support
Rhetorical Question  food for thought; create satire/sarcasm; pose dilemma
Euphemism  substituting a milder or less offensive sounding word(s)
Aphorism  universal commend, sayings, proverbs – convey major point
Repetition  also called refrain; repeated word, sentence or phrase
Restatement  main point said in another way
Irony  Either verbal or situational – good for revealing attitude
Allusion  refers to something universally known
Paradox  a statement that can be true and false at the same time

SYNTAX
Consider the following patterns and structures:
- Does the sentence length fit the subject matter?
- Why is the sentence length effective?
- What variety of sentence lengths are present?
- Sentence beginnings – Variety or Pattern?
- Arrangement of ideas in sentences
- Arrangement of ideas in paragraph – Pattern?

Construction of sentences to convey attitude
- Declarative  assertive – A statement
- Imperative  authoritative - Command
- Interrogative  asks a question
- Simple Sentence  one subject and one verb
- Loose Sentence  details after the subject and verb – happening now
| Periodic Sentence | details before the subject and verb – reflection on a past event |
| Juxtaposition    | normally unassociated ideas, words or phrases placed next together |
| Parallelism      | show equal ideas; for emphasis; for rhythm |
| Repetition       | words, sounds, and ideas used more than once – rhythm/emphasis |
| Rhetorical Question | a question that expects no answer |

**Punctuation is included in syntax**

| Ellipses       | a trailing off; equally etc.; going off into a dreamlike state |
| Dash           | interruption of a thought; an interjection of a thought into another |
| Semicolon      | parallel ideas; equal ideas; a piling up of detail |
| Colon          | a list; a definition or explanation; a result |
| Italics        | for emphasis |
| Capitalization | for emphasis |
| Exclamation Point | for emphasis; for emotion |

Adapted from Kilgore ISD, Texas

**Directions:** Analyze the style of the first part of the novel by looking at DIDLS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTUAL EVIDENCE</th>
<th>ANALYSIS OF TEXT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DICTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze the connotation of the words Morrison uses.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IMAGES</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze the sensory appeals Morrison uses.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DETAILS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze the facts included or omitted.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze what type of language Morrison uses.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SYNTAX</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze the sentence structure and how it affects the reader’s attitude.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Directions: Consider how our society can remedy the skewed beliefs about beauty in our culture? What can you do as an individual? Explain.