

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:

Dick and Jane primer	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.
Diction	in literary usage, the writer’s choice of words and the connotations implied.
Imagery	patterns of words that appeal to the imaginary senses; these word patterns may appeal to sight (visual), sound (auditory), touch (tactile), or smell (olfactory).
Detail	an individual separate part of something, especially one of several items of information.
Language	the human use of spoken or written words as a communication system.
Syntax	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.
Theme	the subject of a discourse, discussion, piece of writing, or artistic composition.
Style	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.
Tone	the author’s attitude towards a subject.
Point of view	someone’s way of thinking about or approaching a subject, as shaped by his or her own character, experience, mindset, and history.
Setting	the surroundings or environment in which something exists or takes place.
Characterization	portrayal of fictional character and the way in which the writer portrays the characters in a book, play, or movie.

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>

Kiri Davis Documentary – The Doll Test

http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/6/a_girl_like_me/index.php?fs=about

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:

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Plume , 1994. Print.

The AP Vertical Teams Guide for English. [New York]: College Entrance Examination Board, 2002. Print.

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/tmorrison.htm>

<http://www.tonimorrisonociety.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/tmorriss.htm>

[*Creative Commons Nimeä-Epäkaupallinen-Ei muutettuja teoksia 1.0 Suomi \(Finland\) lisenssillä.*](#)

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/tmorriss.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=MqSFqnUFOs&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:

1. Visit the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture. View exhibits that examine black freedom writers in the “Strength of Mind” gallery.
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.
3. Read Toni Morrison’s childrens book, *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*.
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

Diction, **I**magery, **D**etails, **L**anguage, and **S**yntax

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 be *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	servicing 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
Idiomatc	Peculiar, vernacular	Symbolic	representative, metaphorical
Inspid	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 commends, 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

<http://www.kisd.org/khs/english/help%20page/DIDLS%20Breakdown.htm>

Resource Sheet 4

DIDLS Notes

NAME: _____

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

	TEXTUAL EVIDENCE	ANALYSIS OF TEXT
DICTION Analyze the connotation of the words Morrison uses.		
IMAGES Analyze the sensory appeals Morrison uses.		
DETAILS Analyze the facts included or omitted.		
LANGUAGE Analyze what type of language Morrison uses.		
SYNTAX Analyze the sentence structure and how it affects the reader's attitude.		

Resource Sheet 6

Quickwrite

Directions: Consider how our society can remedy the skewed beliefs about beauty in our culture? What can you do as an individual? Explain.
