

'Mirror on the wall, who is fairest of them all?'

The fourth part of this series on the classics of English literature features Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The poignant tale set in the racially divided world of 1940s Ohio addresses each one of us who has looked in the mirror and felt dejected and unloved just because of a nose or chin that wasn't sharp enough.

Ritika Singh

How does one learn self-love in a world full of harsh critiques and judgements? What happens when we internalise notions of beauty that do not align with us? When self-worth is measured through the eyes of others it often blurs one's own reflection in the mirror.

The Bluest Eye (1970) by Toni Morrison is a masterpiece that resonates deeply, leaving an indelible mark on the soul. It is a riveting story of hope and hopelessness, love and hate, dreams and darkness. It speaks to any one who has felt unloved and unlovable only because of a nose or chin that wasn't sharp enough. Written almost 50 years ago, it is more relevant today in a world consumed by the culture



Toni Morrison

of social media bombarded with viral pretty pictures of pedestal beauty. Do we see ourselves through our own eyes or does beauty always lie in the eyes of the beholder? Morrison answers in the afterword to the novel: "Beauty was not simply something to behold; it was something one could do."

Selected for the popular Oprah Book Club, *The Bluest Eye* is a wonderful opening to the magnificent oeuvre of Morrison's craft. Known for her genius to make prose poetic, her writing teaches us the power of empathy and understanding difference. With Maya Angelou, bell hooks, and Alice Walker, she is one of the most important African American women writers who spoke of the silenced and oppressed. Writing in the backdrop of the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and '70s, they made Black women, rendered invisible through history, the centre of their craft and helped create a literary canon on the horrors of gendered racial discrimination. Their works speak of the universality of emotions and the power of self-assertion. Morrison's novels are unforgettable for the power of words to change the world and make it possible for us to 'breed love'.

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The Bluest Eye explores themes of beauty, identity and systemic racism

The first novel written by the Nobel Prize-winning author brought Toni Morrison immediate recognition for the profound sensitivity and depth with which she weaves a

poignant and heart-wrenching tale set in the racially divided world of 1940s Ohio.

At the heart of the story is Pecola Breedlove, an eleven-year-old Black girl who longs for blue eyes, believing that they would bring her the love and acceptance she desperately craves. Her desire for the bluest set of eyes comes from the

ideals of beauty that this young girl learns from the society around her.

Believing that she is ugly because she looks different than blue-eyed dolls given to girls to play or from pictures of white girls in magazines and advertisements,

Pecola spirals into the dark depths of self-hatred and scorn under the tyranny of beauty defined by societal norms. To escape her abusive family and caustic classmates, she starts to dream and pray.

Surrounded by an abusive father, absent brother, and suffering mother, the Breedlove

household is devoid of safety and care. Desperate to change her fortune, she writes a letter to God to grant her a miracle and give her blue eyes that would make her visible to the world. As Pecola's life unfolds, Morrison explores themes of beauty, identity, and systemic racism through a tapestry of rich, unforgettable characters and evocative prose.

This powerful novel is a profound examination of the devastating effects of internalised racism and the yearning for a sense of belonging in a world that often feels hostile and unforgiving.

The *Bluest Eye* reminds us of the healing, transformative, and radical power of self-love and worth.



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