

# Teaching Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*: Employing the Theme/Motif of Community

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**Teaching Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*  
Employing the Theme/Motif of Community**

Diplomski rad  
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## **Summary**

This master thesis explores the issues regarding black communities in Toni Morrison's novels *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* and their application to teaching Toni Morrison to high school students. These issues include internalized racism, double consciousness, and scapegoating. Finding theoretical support in writings of Michael Awkward, Christopher Douglas, Jane Kuenz, and Toni Morrison herself, to name a few, the first two parts of the paper focus on the motif of the community in both novels. The third part of the paper presents my approach to teaching Morrison's novels. It consists of a six period lesson plan that includes introduction to the works of Toni Morrison and readings of both of the novels. The classroom discussion focuses on the motif of community in both novels. The classroom activities are directed to students' understanding of the issues raised in the novels and their ability to have critical opinion on them. The readings of Toni Morrison's work are also utilized to raise students' awareness of the world around them and improve their understanding of the authentic material in a foreign language.

**Keywords:** teaching Toni Morrison, motif of black community, internalized racism, scapegoating, *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*

## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction .....  | 1  |
| 1. The Analysis of the Community in <i>Beloved</i> .....                                    | 2  |
| 1.1. Corruption of the Community in <i>Beloved</i> .....                                    | 2  |
| 1.2. The Ancestor .....   | 2  |
| 1.3. Scapegoating as a Means to an End .....  | 3  |
| 1.4. Importance of the Minor Characters .....   | 5  |
| 1.5. Denver as the New Leader .....   | 7  |
| 1.6. The Prospect of Healing .....  | 9  |
| 2. Analysis of <i>The Bluest Eye</i> .....  | 10 |
| 2.1. Family as the Basic Unit of a Community .....  | 10 |
| 2.2. Pecola as the Perfect Scapegoat .....  | 12 |
| 2.3. Pauline and Cholly .....   | 14 |
| 2.4. Internalized Racism as an Everyday Occurrence in <i>The Bluest Eye</i> .....           | 17 |
| 2.5. Claudia as the Embodiment of Merged Consciousness .....                                | 20 |
| 2.6. Lessons Learned by <i>The Bluest Eye</i> .....   | 22 |
| 3. Teaching <i>The Bluest Eye</i> and <i>Beloved</i> Employing the Motif of Community ..... | 24 |
| 3.1. Teaching Toni Morrison in Croatian High Schools .....                                  | 24 |
| 3.2. <i>The Bluest Eye</i> in the Classroom .....   | 25 |
| 3.3. Teaching <i>Beloved</i> .....  | 27 |
| 3.4. Significance of Teaching Literature in the EFL Classrooms of High Schools .....        | 29 |
| Conclusion .....  | 30 |
| Works Cited .....   | 33 |
| Appendices .....  | 35 |

## Introduction

Toni Morrison is an African-American writer who in 1993 won the Nobel Prize for literature. Her work is of great importance and significance in the United States of America, however in Europe, namely in Croatia, her works are only taught in the undergraduate and graduate courses at Departments of English. Morrison raises important issues of racism and internalized racism in her works, which are not often discussed in Croatian classrooms. Moreover, her writing style offers students good chance to read an authentic material in English. For this thesis I chose two of her works, namely *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, because they show progress in Morrison's writing over a period of time and they both offer a great insight into the black community and its activities. In my approach to teaching these two novels, I will focus on the important motif/theme in the novels – the community. In the first two parts of the paper, I will analyze the features of the black community in *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* as well as the influence and effect of the white standards on the black community. The attention will also be paid to the importance of the ancestor for the black community. In addition, the paper will try to explain these motifs through the lens of Morrison's writing style. The third part of the paper offers a six period lesson plan for English as a foreign language class. This lesson plan is adapted for the fourth grade students of high schools in Croatia.

## **1. The Analysis of the Community in *Beloved***

### **1.1. Corruption of the Community in *Beloved***

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* begins with a quote from the Epistle to the Romans saying: "I will call them my people, which were not my people" (qtd. in *Beloved* xiii). This already gives a hint to the reader that there is something wrong with the community in *Beloved*, yet it also offers the possibility of correcting this wrong in the end. The black community in *Beloved* has a false perception of what the black community should look like. In respect to their false perception, the community offers Sethe and Denver as scapegoats and casts them away. They do this to ensure the safety of the community as a whole. In other words, the black community compromises to sustain the normative standards of white supremacy. They do this because they are afraid that they will seem uncivilized to the outside world if they accept the infanticide in their community. They would rather aspire to the white standards than forgive the faults of their own "people." So, they compromise by marginalizing Sethe and Denver to keep up appearances. What the black people in *Beloved* need to realize is that in order to heal themselves as a community, they have to accept their blackness and set the rules for their community on their own terms.

### **1.2. The Ancestor**

In her essay "Rootedness," Morrison stresses the importance of the leader of the black community: "[The] ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, they provide a certain kind of wisdom" ("Rootedness" 343). She calls these leaders ancestors. Without an ancestor, the community falls apart. Baby Suggs has a role of the ancestor in *Beloved*. After she is freed, Baby Suggs comes to Cincinnati. There she receives great support and help from the local community. In Cincinnati, she can finally make a life for herself. After not finding her place in the church, she starts preaching her own way: "Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it" (Morrison, *Beloved* 51). Every Saturday afternoon she gathers people in the Clearing where she promotes self-love:

So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or

feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.  
(Morrison, *Beloved* 52)

This unites the community and Baby Suggs is happy.

However, when Sethe arrives, even before she commits the murder, the community starts to grow apart from Baby Suggs and her family: “124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when?” (Morrison, *Beloved* 78). In other words, the community starts to turn their backs on Baby Suggs out of jealousy. Even Baby Suggs realizes that she “offended them by excess” (Morrison, *Beloved* 79). This reaction of the community is reasonable, but close knit communities do not isolate its members just because of one mishap. More importantly, they do not turn their backs on the leader, in this case Baby Suggs. After the murder, people still help Baby Suggs to some extent but Baby Suggs and her family are not part of their community anymore. The loss of her granddaughter is the final straw for Baby Suggs. After a life in slavery, she cannot cope with the loss anymore and just gives up and finally dies. The answer to the loss of the ancestor is that the community needs to find a new one. Until they do that, there is no possibility of healing.

### **1.3. Scapegoating as a Means to an End**

Sethe is the one whose act seals her family’s destiny as scapegoats of the community. She kills her child in order to save it from a life in slavery. Although she believes she freed her child by killing it, the act of murder does not come without a price. The community comes to the rescue, when it comes to the issue of Sethe’s life and imprisonment, but this is as far as they can go. The community excludes Sethe and her family from their lives in order to protect their humanity. What is meant by that is that they scapegoat them because they are afraid that by forgiving Sethe they are approving of her actions and therefore confirming white men’s stereotypes of black people. The members of the community are black, but they are also American and live by the white standards. Although they probably understand why Sethe did what she did, it would be their doom to publicly approve of her act. So they decide to cast out the weaker part of the community for the greater good.

Morrison establishes the connection with her readers that enables them to understand the severity of this issue. She explains her narrative approach:

The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense. No lobby, no door, no entrance – a gangplank, perhaps (but a very short one). (Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 161)

To put it differently, Sethe finally escapes from slavery and finds a home, yet a white man manages to find her again and wants to take her happiness away from her. Her motherhood prevents her from passivity and she has to do something to protect her children. Thanks to Morrison's way of writing, the reader comprehends that but the reader also understands the community which has been through the same situation as Sethe. This is where the issue of double consciousness arises. The community does not want to confirm the white man's view of black people. They are afraid that if they help Sethe they will be seen as animals who are approving of murder. The community saves Sethe's life but they also know that the logical thing to do is to distance themselves from her. They take the easier way out in order to keep up their appearances in the eyes of white men by scapegoating Sethe.

In his essay "The Evil of Fulfillment," Michael Awkward offers an insight into a connection between scapegoating and double consciousness. He uses Du Bois' theory on double consciousness and applies it to the novel *The Bluest Eye* in order to explain what happened to Pecola. Du Bois explains the term of double consciousness as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" ("The Souls of Black Folk"). In the case of the black community, the others are the whites and the one self is a black man. Du Bois also stresses that a black man has to find a balance between being a black man and an American, and to accomplish the balance there has to come to some sort of a compromise. According to Du Bois's theory, Awkward suggests that the community in *The Bluest Eye* scapegoats Pecola because she is the weakest link. Pecola and her family truly accept the white standards of beauty and self-worth, which makes them the perfect victims. Pecola is willing to sacrifice herself in order to fit into the white society. In this way, she presents herself as a perfect scapegoat for the society and they sacrifice her for the greater good. Although *The Bluest Eye* is different from *Beloved*, Awkward's interpretation also offers a great model for the analysis of the problems discussed in *Beloved*. Sethe presents herself as a perfect scapegoat after she commits the murder.



Similarly, James Baldwin suggests that the black man's real enemy is not a white man: "The entire universe is then peopled only with his enemies, who are not only white men armed with rope and rifle, but his own far-flung and contemptible kinsmen. Their blackness is his degradation and it is their stupid and passive endurance which makes his end inevitable" (qtd. in *Awkward* 187). He ensures that this passivity is what makes the black community fall apart. This means that as long as black men accept white standards, they can never be unified. The black community has to accept their blackness and this is the only way they can achieve unity. Black people must no longer seek for white authentication, but they have to aspire to the merged consciousness, to use Du Bois's term.

#### **1.4. Importance of the Minor Characters**

Other than the members of Sethe's family, there is a number of important minor characters, which offer the reader a closer look into the community in *Beloved*. Morrison states about her writing that "there are no words in the final text that are unnecessary, and no people who are not absolutely necessary" ("The Site of Memory" 100). This serves as evidence of the significance of every character in *Beloved*. However, for the purpose of the analysis of the community, I will focus on Paul D, Schoolteacher, and Lady Jones.

Paul D is a unifying factor between the community and Sethe. He becomes a new member of the community, which shows the community's openness to healing. He also manages to show support to Sethe, which she desperately needs. Paul D comes into the story as a much needed man in Sethe's life. He brings with him his traumas but instead of making him less desirable, these traumas bring him closer to Sethe: "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (Morrison, *Beloved* 155). For a while, things start to get better for Sethe and Denver and Sethe can finally see her life going towards the future and not the past. However, due to Stamp Paid's involvement with Sethe's life, Paul D leaves her. Stamp Paid lets him know about the murder of Sethe's baby. This makes Paul D doubt Sethe. He fell in love with her for who she was at the Sweet Home. Now she is different. Even he who loves her, eventually compares her to an animal: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (Morrison, *Beloved* 93). He cannot understand her thick love and finally he abandons them.

Paul D is then left without a home and at this point the community offers help to him: "You pick any house, any house where colored live. In all of Cincinnati. Pick any one and you welcome to stay there. I'm apologizing because they didn't offer or tell you. But you

welcome anywhere you want to be” (Morrison, *Beloved* 130). This is where the community finally opens itself to the possibility of healing. They manage to put their differences aside and help Paul D as a fellow human being. It also shows that if they are willing to accept a new member, they can have a future as a unified, more coherent community. When Paul D finally decides to stop running away from his problems and goes back to Sethe, not only does he achieve peace, but he also brings peace to Sethe. He also feels that his masculinity has been threatened, but by his role as a unifying factor his masculinity is affirmed. He brings the two worlds together and confirms his agency. Unlike the stereotypes of a man as an agent, he also shows tender and calm love towards Sethe. This offers a redefinition of masculinity which connects both man’s agency and his kind love.

In contrast to Paul D’s redefined masculinity and his humanity towards others, Schoolteacher presents everything that is corrupt in the traditional white male dominated system. He is the only completely white character which will be mentioned in this paper. The white color of his skin sets him apart as the superior in the society. He presents the standard the other characters in this novel should aspire to. Schoolteacher is the cause of double consciousness of the people in Sethe’s community because his opinion is what shapes the other’s opinions. The problem is that he as a person has corrupted values and by being the standard in the society, it also makes the society corrupt. To be precise, he sees black people as just animals: “Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke” (Morrison, *Beloved* 72). This view of black people causes the community to separate themselves from Sethe. By distancing themselves from Sethe and her actions, the community also distances itself from this point of view on black people. In other words, the community is afraid to support Sethe, because they think that by supporting her they would also support the standard opinion that black people are just animals without reason and emotion. However, Schoolteacher’s behavior not only lacks traces of human, compassionate behavior towards other people, but it also does not show any traces of regret for his actions, unlike the community which in the end is able to let go of the set standards and opinions and come together for the greater purpose.

Additionally, since Schoolteacher is taken here as a representative of the white system, his corrupt nature shows everything that is wrong with systematic white superiority. Du Bois talks about prejudices as “the natural defense of culture against barbarism, learning against ignorance, purity against crime, the ‘higher’ against the ‘lower’ races” (“The Souls of Black Folk”). This suggests that Schoolteacher’s and by that the white men’s behavior towards

black people results from fear. This is confirmed when he finally leaves Sethe alone after she kills her baby. Schoolteacher's nature and his prejudices against black people make members of the black community in this novel turn their backs on Sethe and cause the problem of an unresolved double consciousness.

The community's attitude towards Lady Jones is another sign of double consciousness that the community is suffering from. Lady Jones is a woman of mixed heritage, but what makes her interesting is not the color of her skin but her attitude towards it: "Gray eyes and yellow woolly hair, every strand of which she hated—though whether it was the color or the texture even she didn't know" (Morrison, *Beloved* 140). One could say that because of her skin, she was privileged. She got the opportunity to go to the school with white children, which means she got the opportunity to learn more than the other black children. She returns this privilege by teaching the less fortunate children. Even though she is in a way privileged because of her whiteness, she is not accepted by her community as it would be assumed she would. They have been calling her the "white nigger" and saying that "all that yellow [has] gone to waste" (Morrison, *Beloved* 139) her whole life. Because of that she believes that the rest of the world despises her hair as much as she does. The real reason her community has not accepted her is because they believe she did not use her "whiteness" to her privilege. It is clearly seen that whiteness is something to aspire to by the black people. Now they feel that Lady Jones could have gone much further in her life thanks to her skin color. This is exactly what is meant by the term double consciousness. This woman cannot come to terms with either her whiteness or her blackness and until she manages to do it she will not be at peace. The same thing goes for the community in this novel. Until they accept their blackness as an essential part of them, they cannot fully function as a community.

### **1.5. Denver as the New Leader**

Denver is Sethe's daughter who grows up in a lonely environment isolated from the rest of the world. She is in a way punished for her mother's sin without having anything to do with it. At one point, she even voices her dissatisfaction: "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either" (Morrison, *Beloved* 9). Denver is lonely and when Beloved comes back from the dead, it is like an answer to her prayers. She finally has somebody to befriend. After Paul D leaves, Sethe, Beloved, and Denver form their own isolated community. In their

words, they are finally free to be and do what they want. No matter how happy, Denver is also scared that this happiness can easily go away:

All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. (Morrison, *Beloved* 116)

From this quote we can see the doubt which she struggles with. On the one hand, she is afraid of the things outside, on the other she is curious enough to know what those things that scare her are. Here we can witness shaping of her future self.

After a while things do go from good to bad. This is understandable, because nobody can live isolated from their community and expect things to go well. Since Sethe does not have a job anymore, the three of them starve. At this point Denver realizes that she has to do something about it: “Whatever was happening, it only worked with three--not two--and since neither Beloved nor Sethe seemed to care what the next day might bring ... Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help” (Morrison, *Beloved* 136). Denver decides to act, although it scares her. By doing that she manages to find her agency and break out of the circle of repeated trauma. She is also finally able to gain her voice and become her own person: “It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve” (Morrison, *Beloved* 142). It turned out that all she had to do was ask for help. Simply by making the first step she manages to achieve miracles. The community immediately starts to help by giving them food each week. In this short period of time, Denver also learns how to read with Lady Jones' help. She takes over the household and takes care of Beloved and Sethe. After a while, she realizes she can get a job with the skills she acquired and goes to the Bodwins, who helped her grandma in the past. She also succeeds in that.

Throughout the novel, Denver grows up. Even though she is eighteen, initially she does not behave like an adult. She is codependent on her mother for everything. However, through the events that happen in *Beloved*, she starts gaining her voice and realizes what she needs to do. By wanting to protect her mother and sister, she becomes her own person. With her agency she manages to unite the community that has marginalized her family for eighteen

years. She refuses to accept the tragic destiny of her family and this time her community rises to the occasion.

### **1.6. The Prospect of Healing**

Whereas the community in *The Bluest Eye* tragically fails to acknowledge their agency, the community in *Beloved* manages to come together for the greater purpose. Denver rises as a new possible leader. She reunites her community simply by making the first step and asking for help.

Luckily, the community in this novel realizes what the cure for their problem is. Baby Suggs points this out already in the beginning. The solution for the acceptance of their blackness is simply love. Baby Suggs says that black people need to love themselves first and only then they can love other people. Although the solution has been known for the whole time, the community needed time to process it and forget about the rest of the world. When Sethe truly needs their help in the end, they are ready to love and accept her: “For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words ... It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash” (Morrison, *Beloved* 148). The symbol of Sethe’s rebirth is also the symbol of the community’s rebirth. It seems that they have come to the beginning, to the Clearing, but this time they are ready to act according to Baby Suggs’s preaching. The rebirth represents reconciliation between the community and Sethe, but also reconciliation with their blackness. When the community finally stops caring what white people think of them and accepts their blackness, they are healed. After that Paul D helps Sethe in her personal healing with his care and love, and the open-endedness of the novel allows the readers to interpret Sethe’s destiny for themselves.

## 2. The Analysis of *The Bluest Eye*

### 2.1. Family as the Basic Unit of a Community

*The Bluest Eye* begins with a primer text taken from Dick and Jane reader for children. Dick and Jane have the perfect family and their story serves as “the only visible model for happiness” (Kuenz 98). They are a white middle class family living a happy life in their green-and-white house. The stories about Dick and Jane were taught in schools at that time. They were superficial with no regards to the history, “as if no thing and no time exists beyond the suburban present” (Werrlein 198). With no regards to different ethnicities or classes, the stories about Dick and Jane exclude all non-white children.

This particular story repeats itself three times in the beginning of the novel and each part of the story is used as an introduction to the respective chapters of the novel. First the story is presented as such, the second time without capitals or punctuation, and the third time without capitals, punctuation, and spacing. Malmgren explains that “the first represents the life of white families, orderly and ‘readable’; the second, that of the MacTeer family, confused but still readable; and the last, that of the Breedlove family, incoherent and unintelligible” (152). That means that even before one meets the Breedloves, there is already an impossible standard for them to fulfill as a family. The ideal primer family preconditions them for failure, because the Breedlove family represents the complete antithesis of the typical white American standard of the ideal family. Claudia, as a narrator, introduces the Breedlove family to the novel. She describes them as ugly, not because they were physically ugly, but because they internalized their ugliness:

You looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 34)

Their self-loath comes from the fact that they truly believe that their skin color makes them less worthy. Instead of trying to find positive aspects of their blackness or to understand that they are just as the others, the Breedloves silently accept the incorrect notion that they are worse than anyone else. This silent consent comes from Pauline’s and Cholly’s own histories but more about that later in the paper.

In contrast to their family name - Breedlove, there is no love between the family members. They are alienated from each other with no visible desire to change that. The reader learns the ways in which each member of the family copes with their “ugliness”:

Mrs. Breedlove handled hers as an actor does a prop: for the articulation of the character, for support of a role she frequently imagined as hers-martyrdom. Sammy used his as a weapon to cause others pain. He adjusted his behavior to it, chose his companions on the basis of it: people who could be fascinated, even intimidated. And Pecola. She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed-peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask. (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 34-35)

The father, Cholly, is an alcoholic. The Breedloves do not turn to each other in times of crisis, but rather to their individual coping mechanisms. The parents do not give a good example of loving couple to their children. They often fight, which leaves a great toll on their children. Pecola also does not receive any guidance or teaching from her parents, which is their role in the society. She turns for advice about menstruation and love to Frieda and Claudia who are just children like her. Pecola does not understand love and asks “how do you get somebody to love you” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 29) because she has never felt it from anyone. The only thing she knows about love is what she has heard from her parents and this is silence and choking sounds during their love making. She wonders if that is the norm. As Awkward puts it, she “acquires only misinformation: that love must necessarily be characterized solely by pain and absence” (203). It is tragic that the only love she finally receives from her family is when Cholly rapes her and she cannot tell if that is a bad thing or not.

The Breedloves also lose their accommodation when Cholly accidentally burns their house while being drunk. With this event they are “put outdoors.” Claudia explains the heaviness of this state: “If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are put outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 18). This state in which the Breedloves find themselves “signifies more precisely the state of being completely outside the community and its help” (Gillan 173). It suggests that not only they lost the roof over their heads, but also that they do not have their people to turn to. The Breedloves do not have any relatives in Lorain and they are estranged from their families in the South. Pecola has to live with the MacTeers because they are the only ones willing to house her. This event, which happens in the beginning of the novel, puts the Breedloves on the margins of their community.

Family represents the basic unit of the community. It is the first place where children learn the basic behavior inside of a community. In the case of the Breedloves as a family it does not function properly. The Breedloves are alienated from each other and there is no visible love between them. When they have a problem, they do not turn to each other, as it should ideally work, but instead to their own coping mechanisms. They are just four individuals who live together. The Breedloves are the perfect opposite of an ideal family of Dick and Jane that is given in the novel as an example. The problem is that if family as the basic unit does not function, the community as a whole in *The Bluest Eye* cannot function accordingly. There are no grounds on which to build a successful community. The picture of the Breedlove family is the initial notion of what is wrong with the community in *The Bluest Eye*.

## **2.2. Pecola as the Perfect Scapegoat**

The members of the community in *The Bluest Eye* are the most important component of the community. In the next chapters, I will analyze the most important characters in this novel, starting with Pecola as the central character in this novel.

Pecola is an 11-year-old girl who lives in the town of Lorain, Ohio. There she is constantly surrounded by the popular images of the white mass culture. This immensely influences her sense of self. Pecola's biggest wish is to have blue eyes. As Claudia explains it, blue eyes were a sign of beauty and they were promoted by the blue-eyed dolls which every girl wanted. Being exposed from an early age to this image of beauty, Pecola could not help but want to look like that herself. This takes a devastating toll on her psyche. Her double consciousness is expressed by her inability to see herself unless as someone else. She only manages to love herself when she identifies herself with the images of the white culture:

Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 43)

Only when she can identify herself as Mary Jane, she can love herself as a person and be happy with her self-image. However, most of the time she cannot even do that. In hard times when her parents fight, she tries to disappear:



She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now ... The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 39)

The constant motif in the novel is the eyes. In her mind, Pecola's brown eyes are the only thing she cannot erase and the only thing she badly wants to change. It is no surprise that in the end they are the ones who secure her tragic end.

In her community Pecola is regularly cast away. People around her either ignore her or abuse her. In school, she is constantly ignored by the teachers who assume she has nothing clever to say. When she goes to the candy store, the Polish salesman first ignores her and only after a while unwillingly sells her the candy. The boys tease her “about matters over which [she] had no control ... That they themselves were black, or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 55). It is their own self-hatred that motivates them to abuse Pecola. They need someone to release their anger on. Similarly, Geraldine sees Pecola as the unwanted part of herself and insults her as the “nasty little black bitch” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 75). Using Neumann’s theory, Awkward explains this double consciousness: “[t]he self is split ... into the good, desirable, unshadowed ideal self and the evil, undesirable, shadowed black self” (191). That means that the part of a person which accepts the white standards is the good one and the one that represents black characteristics is the evil one. For the other members of the community in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola represents this evil part. They need her to feel better about themselves. Unlike *Beloved* where Sethe is shunned from her community because of something she did, Pecola is left out because of her inherited traits. Being ignored and abused, she assumes the role of the “other” inside of the community of an already marginalized group of people. Even the title of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, wherein eye can be understood as I, implies Pecola’s loneliness. In other words, she does not belong to her own community where she should be accepted and loved.

Pecola’s biggest problem is her internalized hatred towards herself. Her inability to reconcile with herself as she is leads her to insanity. In the state of madness, she finally manages to get the one thing she wants – blue eyes. The fact that she receives double voice at the end of the novel through her imaginary friend only ensures her state of permanent double consciousness. At this point, it is too late for Pecola to merge her consciousness into one

identity true to her heritage. As an already cast away member of her community, Pecola's insanity only seals her fate of a scapegoat. "According to Neumann, scapegoating results from the necessity for the self and/or the community to rid itself of the 'guilt-feeling' inherent in any individual or group failure to attain the 'acknowledged values' of that group" (Awkward 190). In this context, scapegoating is a necessary action for the community to cleanse itself. The community does not try to deal with this feeling of failure and shame, caused by the pressures of white society, because it is easier for them to cast it away onto Pecola. Everybody agrees to be silent about Pecola and she just becomes one more Aunt Julia case: "inability or refusal [of the community] to make sense of her actions, to put them in context, foreshadows their eventual scapegoating of Pecola and suggests that the town has an undiagnosed and unexamined history of producing women like Pecola, that her experience—and the extremity of it—is not an isolated instance" (Kuenz 107). Pecola, who learned from her parents to accept her ugliness silently, adopts the role of scapegoat: "All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 159). Nobody protests about what has been done to Pecola. Only Claudia realizes much later that it was wrong what they had done, but as she says "it's much, much, much too late" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 160).

### **2.3. Pauline and Cholly**

Pauline and Cholly both get separate chapters of the novel where their respective histories are told. They explain in detail what made them the way they are. The chapters are told by the omniscient narrator so they are reliable. They both were once part of their communities in the South and had their people. However, throughout their lives they lost touch with their relatives and disconnected themselves from their heritage. Once they moved to the North, they were surrounded by the white images in the media and they were heavily influenced by it. The influence of the mass white culture caused them to feel bad in their own skin. This developed as the state of double consciousness, where the first one is the one they had back at home and the other one which they developed in the North.

Although Pauline says that "she never felt at home anywhere" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 88), it seems she liked to live in Kentucky with her family. She loved being alone and arranging things and taking care of the household. It was the place where she felt safe and satisfied: "The stillness and isolation both calmed and energized her" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 90). When she first met Cholly and when they started dating, they loved each other. More

importantly, they appreciated each other's both good and bad traits. For Pauline her happiness ends when they move to Lorain, Ohio: "It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks. The ones I seed before was something hateful, but they didn't come around too much" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 93). Only after Pauline loses her community, she starts to appreciate it. She adds: "Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 93). Pauline grew up in the countryside and she was always surrounded by the black people she knew. Now when she is in an unfamiliar setting, she is exposed to the white society. Even the black people there are different and she feels unwelcomed. According to her, the black people in the North resemble more closely to the white people than to the black people she knows. With time she also starts to grow apart from Cholly, who manages to find new friends in Lorain. Pauline nevertheless attempts to find her place in the world. She first starts going to the movies. The problem is that the movies offer her unreal picture of life: "Like the Dick-and-Jane story, Pauline's movies continuously present her with a life, again presumably ideal, which she does not now have and which she has little, if any, chance of ever enjoying in any capacity other than that of 'the ideal servant'" (Kuenz 103). After a while, her life in the world of movies ends when she loses her tooth. It results in her understanding that she will never resemble any of the actresses in the movies nor she will ever fit into the society of white consumerism.

Just like in her childhood, Pauline finds her place in housekeeping. The only role that is acceptable for her to have in the white-aspiring society is that of an ideal black family servant. She starts working for the Fisher family and soon finds herself identifying with them. Similarly to Pecola, Pauline tries to make things that she does not like disappear. She tries to make her own family disappear from her life and spends all her time at the Fishers. This is why, when Pecola comes to the house and knocks over the pie, Pauline gets so angry. Pecola disrupts the illusion of "her" white family and reminds her that in the end she does not belong there: "Crazy fool ... my floor, mess ... look what you ... work ... get on out ... now that ... crazy ... my floor, my floor ... my floor" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 87). Pauline gets angry at Pecola and instead of a role of a nurturer she takes on the role of the oppressor. Instead of trying to make the lives of her children different from her own, she does the same thing to them and passes on her self-hatred to them. She is one of the culprits for Pecola's final breakdown. Pauline never tries to be there for Pecola and never shows her any signs of love. When she finds Pecola after the rape, she starts beating her instead of helping her. She does

not want to try to understand her daughter; she just wants Pecola to disappear with her problems.

Finally Pauline's religion comes as an answer to her reconciliation with herself. She sees the solution in the next life, where everything wrong will be made right. However, "Pauline's belief system, whose either-or design requires its adherents to judge others, often by impossible standards, leads her to leave behind those persons, including her family members, whom she feels fail to measure up to her standards. She thus becomes an extreme individualist, a person cut loose from her cultural moorings" (Alexander 114). Although her religion helps her to cope with the everyday life, it alienates her from everyone around her. Another major mistake Pauline makes throughout the search for her people is that she neglects her people who could actually make her feel welcome. In the beginning, she does not fit into the community of black women in the North but she does not even try to make friends with them. Whereas we see Cholly going out and drinking with his new friends, Pauline always stays alone in the house.

Although he was abandoned by his mother as a baby, Cholly had pretty happy childhood. He was raised by his Aunt Jimmy. Aunt Jimmy is as close as this novel gets to the representation of an ancestor. In *Beloved* there is a clear ancestor, Baby Suggs, who dies in the novel and then towards the end the reader gets a feeling that Denver will be the new leader in the community. In *The Bluest Eye* Aunt Jimmy was Cholly's ancestor, she did not influence other characters in the novel. She passes on her heritage onto Cholly. She raises him in a black community, where they respect their cultural heritage and where the members of the community rely on each other for support. While Aunt Jimmy is dying, the old women come to her and they spend time with her in conversation. They stick together through thick and thin: "Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders ... The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 109). They really knew what it is to have their people. The whole world was against them, but unlike the members of the community in Lorain, they did not turn on each other with hatred but with love. Cholly also has a father figure in Blue. Blue is masculine, big, and strong. "They talked about the women Blue had had, and the fights he'd been in in when he was younger, about how he talked way out of getting lynched once, and how others hadn't!" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 106). Blue is a male role model for Cholly. At this point in his growing up he needs him to pass on to him the manly activities, such as cutting watermelon. This all falls apart when Aunt Jimmy dies. Her funeral presents the culmination of Cholly's growing up. At the funeral the whole community gathers. They make sure Cholly has

everything he needs. They prepare food and drinks and enjoy the conversation. Cholly meets Darlene and has his first sexual experience. The issue arises when he is caught in the middle of the intercourse with Darlene. First he is described in his sexual awakening: “His mouth was full of the taste of muscadine ... The smell of promised rain, pine, and muscadine made him giddy” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 115). Then the two white hunters come and take away his just found masculinity. They ridicule him in front of Darlene and instead of hating them, he starts hating her. He immediately accepts their superiority. As Jennifer Gillan puts it: “They destroy Cholly’s idea of mutually nurturing natural relations between people learned at Aunt Jimmy’s bedside, and replace it with the artificial hierarchical power relations revealed by flashlight” (172). After that evening, Cholly abandons his community out of shame and fear and sets on a search for his father. This ends as a huge failure with his father not even acknowledging him.

At this point, Cholly realizes that he is free. He does not have anybody to come back to and he finds his lost manhood after meeting three women on his way. In this state of unlimited freedom he meets Pauline. He loved Pauline, but he was not ready to get married. In her essay, Gillan explains that succumbing to the pressures of society Pauline and Cholly embrace the nuclear family model, but they are not able to sustain it. When Pauline has to take the role of the primary breadwinner due to Cholly’s alcoholism, they are forced into a role reversal. Once again Cholly is emasculated and then completely abandons his family. Cholly does not know how to take on his role of a father. In the scene of the rape, he expresses his desire to give something to Pecola but he just does not know how: “What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter?” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 127). Cholly is already at a point of no return. His double consciousness, just like Pauline’s, is so deeply rooted in him that it is a part of him he passes onto his children. He is a man who once knew what it was like to be a proud black man but has in course of circumstances in his life lost it. He is now only able to feel self-hatred and hatred towards the other black people like Darlene.

#### **2.4. Internalized Racism as an Everyday Occurrence in *The Bluest Eye***

There are several minor characters in *The Bluest Eye* that epitomize the expression of internalized racism. These are the people who judge people of their own ethnic group according to the standards of the white society. It is well-known that the mulatto blacks occupied higher position in the community because of their whiter skin. However, in the

novel nobody seems to remember that the whiter skin of the mulattoes comes from miscegenation. Their superiority over the darker blacks in their communities comes from the history of rape by the white slave owners. This issue arises in *The Bluest Eye*. Geraldine and Soaphead Church are the ones who mostly internalize their feeling of superiority and then pass it on to the other members of their community with devastating results such as Pecola's insanity.

Geraldine is introduced in the novel not as an individual but as a part of a bigger group of girls who “come from Mobile, Aiken. From Newport News. From Marietta. From Meridian” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 67). Geraldine's part of the novel starts with the long introduction of these brown girls and their cultural practices. These girls have an internalized desire to be white. Morrison describes them in the following way:

They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. Here they learn the rest of the lesson begun in those soft houses with porch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to behave. (*The Bluest Eye* 68)

The most important lesson they learn is how to get rid of their funkiness. In his article on *The Bluest Eye*, Christopher Douglas explains the practice of funkiness:

Setting up a fundamental ambivalence, *The Bluest Eye* on the one hand locates funk as a species-wide quality is understood to have been already lost by white people in a process that was either racial or cultural (perhaps this loss is what makes someone white); accordingly, funk is the heritage of the ‘particular brown girls,’ who are threatened with its loss. The funk is embodied and racialized through the various phenotypic differences that mark the social construction of race and that threaten to overwhelm the whitening process. (210)

These women are described in their beauty rituals where they change their hair texture and put lipstick in a way it makes their lips appear smaller. These rituals are not cultural practices, they are more “describing a typology of cultural loss” (Douglas 212). These black women would rather hide the features that make them black in order to fit into the white beauty standards than to accept their looks as they are. They lose their funkiness, yet this funkiness is a set of characteristics that makes them not only black but human as well. One could argue that by stripping themselves of their funkiness, these women are turning themselves into dolls. This does not surprise since their idols are blue-eyed dolls. They do not show emotions or any signs of vulnerability or love.

Geraldine comes into the story as one of these women. She was raised to behave well. She was privileged enough because of her lighter skin to attend the best schools. She, too, worries that some part of her blackness will surface. Not only does Geraldine's life revolve around these practices, but she also passes them to her son: "She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quite; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 71). Junior belongs to the former group, which Geraldine made sure of. She cuts his hair short, puts lotion on his skin to prevent it from being ashen, and most importantly she forbids him to play with other black children. Junior, on the other hand, wishes to play with the black boys. He wants to do things that are typical for boys, to play in dirt, curse, and pee together. The polarity between the son and the mother prevents them to love each other and be a united family. Douglas explains that "while doing certain things and holding certain values might abstractly define membership in a culture, the [novel] devalues such membership in favor of an identitarian, body-based, essentialist 'culture' which has its origin and true value in race" (211). In other words, Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* sees acceptance of one's body and race as the only answer to the problem of double consciousness. This unfortunately does not happen for most characters in the novel.

Geraldine's story line continues with her son bringing Pecola to their home. He, just like the other boys, teases Pecola and throws his mother's cat, which he hates, on her. Geraldine comes home in the middle of this and loses her temper. For her, Pecola is everything that she tries to escape. Pecola represents a threat in her sanitized environment. When she sees Pecola, Geraldine is reminded of the thing she hates the most, and that is her blackness. Alexander thus states that "[the brown girls] seem willing to exchange their personhood, and consequently their heritage, for models of themselves that only strengthen in their minds the cultural norms that make them hate their true selves" (118). Geraldine does not want Pecola in her home and she lashes out at her making her one of the people who drew Pecola into madness.

That being said, it is Soaphead Church who puts the final nail in Pecola's coffin. He represents everything that is corrupt in Lorain's black community. He comes from a long family line of mixed heritage. The ability to "separate [themselves] in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 132) has been passed on from one generation to the other. Each generation tried to marry up in order to lighten their skin. They felt superior to the other black people, managed to cultivate their whiteness, and acquire academic education. In their professional and private practices they were corrupt and

lascivious. Elihue Micah Whitcomb grew up in this kind of a family with the father as his only parent. He is a highly educated man who spends most of his life in search of himself. He is a misanthrope, which means he cannot stand people or being touched by them. He likes to surround himself with things humans had touched: “the residue of the human spirit smeared on inanimate objects was all he could withstand of humanity” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 131). He is also unable to have intercourse with women, and he only finds satisfaction in little girls because they are the only thing that is clean enough for him. After realization that in America he can only do jobs that are available for black people, he settles in Lorain, Ohio. There he becomes “Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 130), in other words a sort of a prophet, and changes his name to Soaphead Church. The community sees him as a solution for all the unnatural problems one can come across. He becomes some sort of a leader of the community, which, one can argue, makes him an ancestor of the black community in Lorain. Having a fraud for an ancestor, makes this whole community one big deceit. They have a fake leader, they appreciate the white man’s values and in times of need they turn against each other. These aspects do not make a functional community.

Through his fake practice Soaphead Church comes in contact with Pecola, who comes to him in her search for blue eyes. He tricks her into believing she will get her blue eyes and Pecola, as naive as she is, believes him. She leaves his place thinking that she has gained blue eyes. What is even more twisted about Soaphead Church is that after Pecola leaves, he writes a letter to God. In this letter he reaffirms his belief that he is some sort of a god. He writes: “I, I have caused a miracle. I gave her the eyes. I gave her the blue, blue, two blue eyes ... You see? I, too, have created” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 143). Not only does he not regret the damage that he has caused to Pecola’s psyche, he is also proud of it. In conclusion, Soaphead Church is an individual who strips himself of his cultural identity and, more importantly, of his humanity in general. In his pursuit to blend into the world of white men, he tries to make himself a god. By doing this, he sacrifices one girl’s life just to make himself feel superior.

## **2.5. Claudia as the Embodiment of Merged Consciousness**

Even though most of the characters in *The Bluest Eye* suffer from self-hatred and self-denial, there are also some characters who accept their past and present and are able to live in peace. One of these characters is Claudia. Claudia, together with the omniscient narrator, is the narrator of this novel. As the narrator, she is already an adult but throughout the plot of the



novel she is still a child. In her reconstruction of the past events, she is able to give voice to Pecola's story. Moreover, through her revision she is the only one who understands why Pecola's scapegoating happened and how it could have been prevented.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia lives with her family, the MacTeers. They are the closest to a real family that this novel comes. Even though their lives are not perfect and they are poor and struggle, they seem to be at peace with themselves which helps them to live their lives as a united family. Claudia remembers her mother's anger when she got sick, but only through her reconstruction does she understand that this anger came from her mother's helplessness to fight their poverty. She now understands that "it was a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 14). Additionally, the MacTeers are grounded in reality. They are not seduced by the white world of consumerism. Their lives are more focused on their actions than on the images. This influences their children in a good way. Claudia expresses her wish for Christmas: "I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. I wanted rather to feel something" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 21). Even at such young age, Claudia discards the consumerist notion of owning things and opts for feeling. She realizes that the emotions and experiences are more important than material possessions. Moreover, the MacTeers are the only ones in the novel who actually help the members of their community. When Pecola ends with no roof over her head, the MacTeers put her up. Claudia's mother treats her the same way as her daughters and they are the only ones in their community who accept Pecola.

As mentioned before, blue-eyed, blond dolls represent the ideal of beauty in *The Bluest Eye*. Everybody admires them, all of the children want to play with them, and all of the parents want their child to be them. However, Claudia does not share the same opinion as her community. She despises the doll: "I [have] only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 20). Claudia is the only one who questions the beauty of blue-eyed dolls. She wants to know the thing that makes them pretty and her not. The same applies to the other white symbols in her life. Whereas Pecola and Frieda admire Shirley Temple, Claudia feels only hatred for her. She does not understand what gives Shirley the right to dance with Bojangles, "who was [her] friend, [her] uncle, [her] daddy" (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 19). She does not understand why Bojangles, who is a part of her people, prefers Shirley over someone like her. Claudia admits that later she learns to love her. Kuenz explains it:

*The Bluest Eye* suggests that this “development”—the sexualization of Claudia’s body (changes both in it and in how she experiences it) and the simultaneous transformation of her psyche is learned and achieved through commodities like the Shirley Temple cups that proscribe appearance and behavior in accordance with the images they project. Claudia learns to “love” Shirley Temple when she learns to identify herself as Shirley Temple. (100)

This suggests that by growing up black women lose their self-love and start to aspire to fulfill the impossible standards of white beauty. Claudia clearly states: “Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 62). This indicates that she has once loved herself but through the process of growing up lost it.

Claudia is able to be the narrator of this novel because she has a voice. She is able to reconstruct the past events and make sense of them. She understands why it had to come to scapegoating Pecola and more importantly she knows what could have been done to prevent it. In their despair to save Pecola’s baby, Claudia and Frieda plant marigolds as children. They believe if they grow, Pecola’s baby will be safe. However, that does not happen. Claudia later explains it: “This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 160). Of course, this is a metaphor that in their town there was no place for Pecola. Only after long time Claudia realizes that by voicing their opinion this tragedy could have been avoided. She is the only character who manages to gain voice and tell Pecola’s story. Although it does not change anything, it can serve as a lesson for future.

## **2.6. Lessons Learned by *The Bluest Eye***

The community in *The Bluest Eye* cannot really be called a community. There is no network of people who are connected with each other in their everyday lives. People in Lorain live as individuals. They each have their own struggles and problems, but instead of asking someone for help, they try to fix them on their own. In addition, they are constantly exposed to the images of white beauty and desperately try to fit them. This causes them to develop double consciousness, where one is their African and the other their American identity. The problem is that the people in *The Bluest Eye* would rather sacrifice everything in order to become more American and by doing that they rid themselves of their African heritage. In that process of self-denial they feel shame and guilt and need to cleanse themselves of that feeling. This

causes the tragic end of Pecola's scapegoating. To sum up, this tragic end could have been avoided by showing love to Pecola and guiding her in her growing up. Unfortunately, her parents and the rest of the community are willing to sacrifice her because they do not seem to care about her. Only Claudia realizes that in her reexamination of the past, but as she says it is too late now to change anything.

### **3. Teaching *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* Employing the Motif of Community**

#### **3.1. Teaching Toni Morrison in Croatian High Schools**

Toni Morrison and her works are mostly taught to undergraduates and graduates at the universities. In this paper, I will adapt teaching of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* to the students of secondary education in Croatia, namely the seniors. For these students, English is the first foreign language so the class has to be carefully organized in order to be understandable for everybody. In addition, Toni Morrison is not part of the Croatian curriculum of English as a foreign language. Generally, literature is taught as a part of the culture and civilization part of the curriculum in the English as a foreign language classroom. There is space for only few short literary texts while teaching grammar and vocabulary is still the main focus of the English lessons. In my opinion, literature should be more present in English teaching, because students not only benefit from broadening their vocabulary by reading an authentic text, but they also acquire knowledge about the world around them. Reading literature can promote active learning and critical thinking which should be aspired to in today's teaching and is beneficial to student's future as an academic citizen. Toni Morrison and her literary texts are good choice for the advanced learners in order to put their knowledge about American past in the context and make them think about difficult issues which they do not have a chance to discuss in their everyday life.

My lesson plan for teaching Morrison includes the two novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, the introduction to and the conclusion of the topic taught over the three double periods of ninety minutes. Lesson plan grids of the three double periods can be found in the appendix A on the page 35. In the following paragraphs, I will thoroughly describe and explain outlines of these lessons.

In the introduction, the teacher presents the topic to students. As most students have not probably heard about Toni Morrison, the class starts with a short biography of Toni Morrison. Ideally, the teacher presents it in a form of power-point presentation. If that is not possible, the teacher can use overhead projector and present the biography on the sheet. The presentation is located in the appendix B on the page 43 of this paper. Morrison's biography contains general information about her and her work. It also presents her most important fiction and non-fiction works. The biography also shortly explains Morrison's style and motivation for writing using quotes from Morrison's essays and interviews. After that the lesson continues with a couple of questions about students' expectations of the assigned readings. Students are asked to write five keywords that express their expectations on a piece

of paper. After that, they are asked to read some of them aloud in order to compare their ideas. The teacher points out that students have to keep the keywords till the end of the lessons on Toni Morrison. Then the teacher plays a video of an interview with Toni Morrison where Morrison explains her motivation for writing and the inspiration behind her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. Before playing the video, the teacher gives students a set of questions such as: What is Morrison's first novel about? Why did she start writing? What was her main concern while writing *The Bluest Eye*? How do you like her character? These questions should guide students' attention while watching the video. After the watching, students answer the questions and the first lesson ends with a short discussion concerning the video.

### **3.2. *The Bluest Eye* in the Classroom**

The second lesson starts with the introduction of the main theme in *The Bluest Eye*, that is, the white beauty standards and their influence on Pecola. In order to familiarize students with the issues raised here, the teacher brings selected fashion magazines to the class, as suggested by Kathryn Earle in her essay "Teaching Controversy: *The Bluest Eye* in the Multicultural Classroom." She/he asks students to go through the magazines either in a pair or a group, depending on the size of the class, and notice what race is most present. When students give the answer, the teacher asks them to find the woman they consider the most beautiful in the magazines. Some students show their pictures. The teacher ends the activity with a picture of the "perfect woman," which students make together by brainstorming. This picture should be guided towards a person of white race with blue eyes and blond hair. The teacher then asks for number of students who look like that in the classroom. The discussion is then led trying to answer the question of the meaning of not meeting these standards. After the discussion, the teacher connects it with Pecola and the title of the first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. If there is some extra time left, she/he also asks students to comment on the singularity of the eye in the title.

The in-class reading starts with the primer of the novel. The teacher hands out the text to students. Students read the text on their own and then one student can read the first primer aloud. The teacher then asks some questions about the text: What does it represent? Who is mentioned? Why are there three versions of the same text? How are the two latter ones different from the first one? Do you know a family that is like Dick and Jane's? She/he facilitates the answers towards the conclusion that the first one represents the ideal white family, and the latter two more realistic representations of families. This means that there is

no such thing as an ideal family. Everybody has their own problems and issues. After this activity, the teacher gives students the assigned readings and questions for the next double period. Students should do these readings alone at home. This gives them the chance to read at their own pace and get more involved with the readings by focusing on the given questions. The readings include pages 17-23, where Pecola is introduced to the readers and the meaning of white symbols such as Shirley Temple and blue-eyed dolls is discussed. It also includes pages 34-49 where Pecola's family is introduced, pages 67-76 that talk about Geraldine, pages 130-144 which are the chapter about Soaphead Church, and finally pages 150-160 which are the final chapter of the novel. These pages refer to the edition of the novel named in the Works Cited section. I have decided to include these specific chapters because they depict the circumstances in which Pecola lives. They are about her family and members of the community who play important role in her scapegoating. The assigned readings also come with a set of questions and exercises that will help guide students while reading and serve as a basis for discussion in class. These questions and exercises are composed in a handout which can be found in the appendix C on the page 48 of this paper. In the following paragraph, I will present this handout.

Questions for the pages 17-23: This excerpt talks about the Breedloves. After reading try to answer the following questions: Who are the members of the Breedlove family? What is the significance of their name and does it match their relationship? What does "put outdoors" mean in their case? What makes them ugly? What are the ways in which they cope with their ugliness? How do they match up with the ideal primer family? The chapter about Geraldine (pages 67-76) introduces the meaning of internalized racism to the novel. Try to find the meaning of this term while reading the chapter. Also pay attention to the following questions: What are the characteristics of the brown girls from Mobile, Aiken, etc.? How does Geraldine fit into this description? Why is the cat so important to her? Why does she react the way she does when she sees Pecola? How do the people in this community treat Pecola? The chapter about Soaphead Church (pages 130-144): Soaphead Church is also preoccupied by similar issues as Geraldine. Can you find them? Why is he "better" than anyone else in his community? In your opinion: why did he deceive Pecola? What would happen if Pecola really received blue eyes? Would her life change for the better? Explain your answer with additional two sentences. The last chapter is included in the reader to give you a conclusion of the novel. What happens to Pecola in the end? In what words would you describe Pecola's experience?

The next double period starts with the discussion of the assigned readings. The teacher follows the order of the assigned chapters. Accordingly, the lesson begins with the discussion

about the Breedlove family. With the help of the questions the teacher facilitates the discussion. If needed, she/he asks additional questions to guide the discussion towards the conclusion. The conclusion should be that the Breedloves do not match their name. There is no love in this family. The members of the family live as individuals. They also do not have their people to turn to in time of need. The parts about Geraldine and Soaphead Church can be discussed together. It is important to stress the term internalized racism and if students do not figure out what the term means, the teacher should explain it with the quotes from the text. One such quote is: “Wherever it erupts, this Funk, they wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it; wherever it drips, flowers, or clings, they find it and fight it until it dies” (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 68). It is also important to give students the historical background of miscegenation and the hierarchy in the black community. The conclusion serves for students to understand what happened to Pecola. As they are not given to read the whole novel, it is good for them to read the ending. In the end students write their alternative endings to the novel and try to make them more positive. Moreover, the chosen chapters create a coherent reader, which offers students enough information to understand the plot and significance of the community in the novel. I also need to point out that in my approach to teaching *The Bluest Eye* I chose to disregard the part with rape. The reason is not only the sensitivity of this topic, but also its insignificance for the motif of the community in the novel. The discussion of *The Bluest Eye* ideally takes up 45 minutes of the double period.

### **3.3. Teaching *Beloved***

In the next period the teacher introduces *Beloved* to the class. Since *Beloved* is inspired by the true events it is necessary to mention Margaret Garner and what happened to her. However, as Carolyn C. Denard stresses: “that history is not the sum of the story Morrison tells in this novel. She seeks to get at the interior of that history, to see how these awful experiences, historically lumped into statistical summaries of the slave experience, affected slaves one by one” (41). The teacher also mentions what Morrison stated in one of her interviews: “I didn’t do any more research at all about that story. I did a lot of research about everything else in the book – Cincinnati and abolitionists, and the Underground Railroad – but I refused to find out anything else about Margaret Garner. I really wanted to invent her life” (Denard 41). This statement should make it clear for students to read this work as a work of fiction and not as a historical work. The teacher explains the terms Morrison mentions in her statement. Moreover, since *Beloved* is dealing with the serious topic of maternal filicide, I expect

students to be shocked by this topic. In my opinion, it is reasonable to expect them to judge Sethe because they cannot possibly imagine how it is to be in that kind of a situation. In explaining this to students, I rely mostly on Denard's approach. She uses role play to make sure that students pay attention to the novel by itself and not the abhorring history. She says: "I initially developed the following list of hypothetical questions to sensitize students to the human meaning behind the historical facts of this novel, and I suggest it now as an early discussion exercise to encourage students to respond not only to the history but more important, to the characters' responses to that history" (44). I selected couple of Denard's examples to be discussed by students. For this activity students are divided into groups and each group gets one situation. They should try to put themselves in that situation and decide what they would do. These hypothetical situations go as following: "You are a political prisoner. You have been subject to the worst, most inhumane treatment imaginable. You escape with your young child. You are captured. You can either kill the child or have the child live the life that you have lived. What do you do?" (44); You are sent away to a work camp where you receive treatment worse than slavery, and you are at the mercy of the overseer's sexual and physical whims. What do you do? (45); A woman in your community kills her children to save them from what, in her opinion, is a living hell. How do you, as a community member, respond? (45). The cards for this activity are located in the appendix D on the page 49. This activity helps to put the classroom in the right place for understanding this novel. It also helps students to understand the place of desperation from where Sethe's act came. This introductory class on *Beloved* also includes the analysis of the epigraph at the beginning of the novel. The analysis should consist of finding the meaning behind the epigraph and comparing it to the community in *The Bluest Eye*. Students are then given their readers for the next class. The reader on *Beloved* includes the first chapter to introduce them to the style of writing in this novel and to give them the basic overview of the plot. Students are also given the part about Baby Suggs which explains her role in the community when she gathered people in the Clearing. Additionally, students are asked to read the chapter 26 and the final chapter 28 at home. Like the reader for *The Bluest Eye*, this one also contains series of questions and exercises for students to do after or during the reading. This handout is in the appendix E on the page 50.

The questions for the first chapter are: What is the atmosphere in the novel? Do you understand the chronology of the events that are mentioned? What events are mentioned? Which characters appear in the first chapter? Who visits Sethe? Who is he? The exercises for the Baby Suggs part go as following: Read the following excerpt. What is it about? What is



Baby Suggs' role in this community? What do you think Clearing is? Morrison's style of writing is at times difficult to follow in *Beloved*. Try to make a list of the chronological order of the events that happened in the chapter 26. What is the significance of Denver in this chapter? What makes women gather and help Sethe? What united them in the end? Questions for the chapter 28: How does the novel end? What does it mean: "This is not the story to pass on"?

The final double period class starts with the discussion on *Beloved*. Students discuss the beginning of the novel. The teacher asks whether it was difficult for them to understand what is happening. The teacher also asks them how they felt when they started reading the novel. She/he explains Morrison's writing style by using her words in her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken." This should make students feel little better if they did not quite understand the plot. The teacher then starts with the homework assignment. By answering the questions for the first chapter students who did not understand the plot now have the chance to do so. Then they start to analyze Baby Suggs' part. Students find the significance of Baby Suggs as the leader and the nature as a unifying place for the black community. The teacher introduces the term ancestor and explains it. She also continues the discussion about the leader of the community implicitly suggesting Denver. Students should come to the conclusion that since Baby Suggs' death the community needed the new leader but they did not find it. Only when they were able to do so, they could unite. Then there is the chapter 26 where the community gathers. Students compare the communities in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. They can do that orally while the teacher notes their answers in the table on the board or they can make the comparison together in groups and then present them. This comparison also serves to lead the discussion towards the common conclusion about Toni Morrison and her way of writing, the motivation of her writing, and the novels that we talked about. The teacher also points out to the passage: "This is not the story to pass on" and asks students to interpret it. They finish the class with the conclusions on the significance of these two novels. They also remember the keywords from the beginning of the lesson and see whether their expectations were fulfilled or not.

### **3.4. Significance of Teaching Literature in the EFL Classrooms of High Schools**

In Croatia, literature as a part of English classes in the secondary schools is not really present. There is room for maybe one or two short stories in the whole school year but not for difficult novels such as *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. By trying to create a lesson plan for these two

novels, I now understand the difficulty of this attempt. There is not enough time to incorporate the whole two novels in the time period of six lessons which I chose. However, the whole novels could be offered to the strongest and most motivated students as an extra activity. Because of the lack of time I chose to include only certain parts of the novels which I think draw good picture of the communities and their state in these novels. Focusing on one crucial motif in these novels enables the teacher to go into greater depths when it comes to discussions with students and the activities which she/he carries out with the students. In conclusion, literature should be a part of the English teaching, because it creates the whole new experience for the learners of a foreign language. It offers them an insight into the culture of the language they are learning and gives them a chance to put their previous knowledge from history lessons to use. This is really useful because in their everyday life students in Croatia rarely have a chance to come across issues such as slavery or the influence of white standards to the psyche of black people. By reading Toni Morrison's texts they not only improve their knowledge of English but they also revise their previous knowledge about history and improve their cultural competence. This makes students' knowledge definitely more durable over the longer period of time than it would be by just learning facts.

## Conclusion

Teaching Toni Morrison to the 18-year-old students is a complex task. In her works, Morrison raises challenging issues of the historical past of African-Americans in the United States of America. However, her novels are not to be read and discussed as historical books but as works of fiction. Granted there has to be an overview of the historical events given to students for the general understanding. In her/his teaching, the teacher should better focus on one key aspect of the novels, such as the theme/motif of community which I chose, in order to more easily guide the discussion and the focus of students in the classroom. In this paper, I offered a lesson plan for teaching these novels on the basis of the book *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Toni Morrison* and my previous knowledge as a student of English language and literature. However, this lesson plan has not been executed in an actual classroom with the actual students. In the real classroom some difficulties in teaching these works would definitely occur. First I predict the confusion about the historical background of the novels. This is where the teacher serves as a guide and offers as much support as she/he can by giving students facts they need to understand the novels. I also expect difficulties in understanding Morrison's style of writing. This can also be solved with the help of the teacher by rereading the parts which are confusing and facilitating discussion with the guiding questions. Also, the home assignments are constructed in a way that they help guide students towards better understanding of the literary texts. This leads to the final predicted difficulty and that is students' motivation in class and their diligence when it comes to the homework. I expect that some of the students would not read the assigned readings or answer the questions. This can be prevented to some extent by grading the assignments and making these grades the significant part of their final grade. Since these lessons take over a lot of time, it can be easier for students to focus on the novels by clearing their other obligations when it comes to English such as oral or written examinations. Students can be easily graded for the oral examination by participating in discussions throughout these six periods or for the written assignments by grading their homeworks. This can motivate students to participate more and do their homeworks in time. However, the ability to carry out these lessons in a real classroom would offer a great chance to improve this lesson plan based on the reaction and the understanding of students. This lesson plan is also not set in stone. It is rather a suggestion presenting the key chapters, motifs, and terms for the understanding of the novels *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* and possible sets of questions used to facilitate discussion in the classroom. In

conclusion, Toni Morrison is a great writer who writes about the topics that really matter and she should be more present in the language classrooms. Naturally, her novels are hard to teach because of the severity of the thematic but, when adapted properly for the classroom, they can be really beneficial not only for the students' language improvement but also for their advancement as human beings.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Lesson Outline of the First Double Period

##### 1. Introduction

| <b>Lesson stages / timing</b> | <b>Aims</b>                              | <b>Procedure</b>  | <b>Methods and techniques</b> | <b>Social forms</b> | <b>Teaching aids / Materials</b> |
|-------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Lead-in<br>5'                 | Students should be able to give guesses. | 1.1. The teacher comes into classroom and writes Toni Morrison on the blackboard. She/he asks students whether they know who that is. She/he assumes they do not know and asks them to guess. | Guessing, brainstorming       | Teacher-led         | Blackboard, chalk                |

##### 2. Main Part

| <b>Lesson stages / timing</b>                     | <b>Aims</b>   | <b>Procedure</b>   | <b>Methods and techniques</b> | <b>Social forms</b> | <b>Teaching aids / Materials</b>                |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Presentati<br>on of the<br>new<br>material<br>15' | Students should extract information from the presentation . | 2.1. The teacher explains who Toni Morrison is and presents students with a short biography of Toni Morrison using a power-point presentation or a sheet on the overhead projector. Students pay attention and can later give most important facts about Morrison. | Presentation                  | Teacher-led         | Power-point presentation/<br>overhead projector |
| Practice<br>15'                                   | Students should predict main                                | 2.2. After the presentation, the teacher asks students what they   | Predictions                   | Individual work     | Sheet of paper, pen                             |

|   |   |   |                         |                 |                                  |
|---|---|---|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
|   | themes of the lessons and form expectations .   | expect of <i>Beloved</i> and <i>The Bluest Eye</i> . By asking that she/he wants to know which genre, themes, and motifs they expect. Students answer the teacher's questions. The teacher then asks students to write five keywords on a sheet of paper containing their expectations regarding the assigned readings. Students write them and volunteers read them aloud. They also keep them till the end of the lessons on Toni Morrison. |                         |                 |                                  |
| Presentati<br>on of the<br>new<br>material<br>10' | Students should be able to answer the questions by extracting information from the video. | 2.3. Students watch a video on Morrison's motivation for writing her first novel, <i>The Bluest Eye</i> . After the video, students orally answer the teacher's questions which the teacher gave students before watching: What is Morrison's first novel about? Why did she start writing? What was her main concern while writing <i>The Bluest Eye</i> ? How do you like her character?  | Discussion              | Teacher-led     | Video, computer/vid<br>eo player |
| Practice<br>15'                                   | Students should be  | 2.4. As an introduction to the  | Working on an authentic | Pair/group work | Magazines                        |



|                    |  |   |   |        |                   |
|--------------------|--|---|---|--------|-------------------|
|                    | able to report about their findings.   | main theme of the novel, the teacher brings beauty magazines to the class. Students first go through magazines in pairs/groups and mark which race is most present. After that, they search for the woman they consider the most beautiful in the magazines.  | material                                      |        |                   |
| Application<br>15' | Students should connect the pictures in the magazines with the influence they have on the society. | 2.5. Together with the teacher, students make picture of the "perfect woman." The teacher writes students' ideas on the blackboard. She/he later asks students for the number of students in class who look like that. This thought serves to provoke discussion on the beauty standards and to connect these issues to <i>The Bluest Eye</i> . | Brainstorming, provoking thoughts, discussion | Plenum | Blackboard, chalk |

### 3. Conclusion

| Lesson stages / timing                  | Aims  | Procedure  | Methods and techniques                        | Social forms | Teaching aids / Materials |
|---|---|--|---|--------------|---------------------------|
| Presentation of the new material<br>15' | Students should be able to differentiate the three texts and identify the relationships between | 3.1. The teacher distributes the primer text of the novel to the students. One student reads it aloud. After that, teacher asks some questions: What | In-class reading, questions for comprehension | Teacher-led  | Text                      |

|  |       |  |  |  |  |
|--|-------|--|--|--|--|
|  | them. | does it represent?<br>Who is mentioned?<br>Why are there three versions of the same text? How are the two latter ones different from the first one? Do you know a family that is like Dick and Jane's? Students answer the teacher's questions and by doing that lead a discussion. At the end of the class, the teacher distributes the readers with the assigned readings and handouts with the questions for the next time. |  |  |  |
|--|-------|--|--|--|--|

## Lesson Outline of the Second Double Period

### 1. Introduction

| Lesson stages / timing | Aims   | Procedure  | Methods and techniques | Social forms | Teaching aids / Materials |
|------------------------|--|--|------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Lead-in<br>5'          | Students should be able to revise the previous lesson. | 1.1. The class starts with the short revision of the previous lesson. The teacher asks students to summarize in short what they did. | Revision               | Teacher-led  | /                         |

### 2. Main Part

| Lesson stages / timing | Aims  | Procedure   | Methods and techniques | Social forms | Teaching aids / Materials |
|------------------------|---|---|------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Practice<br>15'        | Students should be able to answer the questions and discuss the issues. | 2.1. The teacher begins discussion on the Breedlove family. She/he asks questions from the handout. Students answer the | Discussion             | Plenum       | Handout, reader           |

|   |  |   |  |                         |                                |
|---|--|---|--|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
|   |  | questions and lead discussion. They come to a common conclusion.  |  |                         |                                |
| Application<br>15'                      | Students should be able to identify the similarities and differences between the two characters. | 2.2. Discussion is then focused on Geraldine and Soaphead Church. Students compare these two characters and come to the conclusion on what internalized racism is. The teacher also explains terms miscegenation and gives the historical background of the hierarchy in the black community.   | Comparison, deduction                            | Plenum, Teacher-led     | Handout, reader                |
| Transfer<br>15'                         | Students should be able to write their own ending.   | 2.3. Students finish discussion on <i>The Bluest Eye</i> with the final chapter. They explain to the teacher why the ending is the way it is. They write alternative endings for Pecola and <i>The Bluest Eye</i> .   | Discussion, in-class writing, alternative ending | Plenum, individual work | Handout, reader, notebook, pen |
| Presentation of the new material<br>10' | Students should be able to extract information from teacher's lecture.                           | 2.4. The teacher introduces novel <i>Beloved</i> to the class. She explains the story about Margaret Garner and gives quotes by Morrison in which she explains her writing process. The teacher also explains terms abolition and Underground Railroad which are mentioned in Morrison's quote. | Lecture  | Teacher-led             | Blackboard, chalk              |
| Practice                                | Students   | 2.5. Students are   | Role play  | Group work              | Role play                      |

|     |   |   |  |  |       |
|-----|---|---|--|--|-------|
| 15' | should be able to form their own reactions to the given situations. | given role play cards. They are divided into three groups. Each group gets one role play situation. They react to these situations in their groups and lead discussions. This activity should help students to understand the community in <i>Beloved</i> . |  |  | cards |
|-----|---|---|--|--|-------|

### 3. Conclusion

| Lesson stages / timing | Aims  | Procedure   | Methods and techniques                 | Social forms | Teaching aids / Materials               |
|------------------------|---|---|--|--------------|---|
| Application<br>15'     | Students should be able to identify the relationship between the epigraph and the community in <i>The Bluest Eye</i> and <i>Beloved</i> . | 3.1. Students read the epigraph of the novel and analyze it. They also apply this epigraph to the community in <i>The Bluest Eye</i> . With the help of the epigraph, they make a conclusion about the communities in both <i>The Bluest Eye</i> and <i>Beloved</i> . Students are also given the readers and the respective questions for the next time. | In-class reading, analysis of the text | Plenum       | Text reader, handouts for the next time |

### Lesson Outline of the Third Double Period

#### 1. Introduction

| Lesson stages / timing | Aims                       | Procedure  | Methods and techniques | Social forms | Teaching aids / Materials |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--|------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Lead-in<br>10'         | Students should be able to | 1.1. The teacher explains Morrison's writing style using | Explanation            | Teacher-led  | Reader                    |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  | answer the question by extracting information from the text. | the quotes from Morrison. She/he asks students whether it was difficult to understand the chronology of the events in the novel. |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

## 2. Main Part

| <b>Lesson stages / timing</b> | <b>Aims</b>   | <b>Procedure</b>   | <b>Methods and techniques</b>  | <b>Social forms</b>     | <b>Teaching aids / Materials</b> |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Practice<br>15'               | Students should be able to answer the questions.                        | 2.1. Students start the analysis of <i>Beloved</i> by answering the questions for the first chapter. By doing that, they make it clear what is happening in the novel for those who might not have understood the plot. They also name the characters in the novel.                                      | Questions and answers, summary | Individual work, Plenum | Handout, reader                  |
| Application<br>15'            | Students should be able to explain significances and solve the problem. | 2.2. Students explain the role of Baby Suggs in the community. They also examine the significance of the Clearing. The teacher introduces the term ancestor and explains it. She/he asks students to apply this definition to Baby Suggs and offer a solution for the community after Baby Suggs' death. | Deduction                      | Plenum                  | Handout, reader                  |
| Application                   | Students  | 2.3. The teacher   | Discussion,                    | Plenum                  | Handout,                         |

|                 |   |  |                    |        |                   |
|-----------------|---|--|--------------------|--------|-------------------|
| 15'             | should be able to report about their analyses of the chapter 6. | connects the previous discussion to the discussion about Denver and community's gathering. Students analyze the chapter 26 of the novel.   | making connections |        | reader            |
| Transfer<br>20' | Students should be able to differentiate communities.           | 2.4. Students compare the communities in <i>The Bluest Eye</i> and <i>Beloved</i> . The teacher writes what they are saying in the table on the blackboard. If they need support for the facts in both novels, the teacher gives them. | Comparison         | Plenum | Blackboard, chalk |

### 3. Conclusion

| <b>Lesson stages / timing</b> | <b>Aims</b>   | <b>Procedure</b>   | <b>Methods and techniques</b>    | <b>Social forms</b> | <b>Teaching aids / Materials</b> |
|-------------------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Practice<br>10'               | Students should be able to discuss the citation.                            | 3.1. Students search for the significance of the quote "this is not the story to pass on." The teacher facilitates them but makes sure that they are aware that there is no right answer.  | Analysis of citation, discussion | Teacher-led, plenum | /                                |
| Application<br>15'            | Students should be able to form their own conclusions about the two novels. | 3.2. Students make conclusions about the communities in these two novels and the significance of the novels for literature. They also check their keywords from the beginning of the lessons and see if their expectations were met. | Making conclusions               | Plenum              | Papers with the keywords         |

## Appendix B

# Toni Morrison



(BORN ON FEBRUARY 18, 1931 IN LORAIN, OHIO AS CHLOE ARDELIA WOFFORD)

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## Early Life and Career

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- the second oldest of four children in a working-class family
- her parents moved to Ohio to escape southern racism and instilled a sense of heritage through telling traditional African American folktales
- lived in an integrated neighborhood unaware of the racial divisions:

**"When I was in first grade, nobody thought I was inferior. I was the only black in the class and the only child who could read"**

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- 
- 1953 B.A. in English from Howard University
  - 1955 M.A. from Cornell University; thesis on the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner
  - went on to teach English at Texas Southern University and later at Howard University, where she met her husband Harold Morrison with whom she had two children
  - in 1965, after the divorce, moves to New York, where she works as a senior editor for a textbook publisher
  - later works for Random House, where she edited works for such authors as Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones

## Writing Career

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- Morrison began writing fiction as part of an informal group of poets and writers at Howard University
- there she introduced a short story about a black girl who longed to have blue eyes – this was later developed into her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
- in 1975 *Sula* (1973) was nominated for the American Book Award
- *Song of Solomon* (1977) became the first work by an African-American author to be a featured selection in the book-of-the-month club since *Native Son* by Richard Wright.
- In 1987 Morrison's novel *Beloved* became a critical success. When the novel failed to win the National Book Award as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award, 48 black critics and writers protested the omission. Shortly afterward, it won the **Pulitzer Prize** for fiction and the **American Book Award**.





- ***Beloved*** was adapted into the 1998 film of the same name starring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover
- Morrison later used Margaret Garner's life story again in the libretto for a new opera, *Margaret Garner*, with music by Richard Danielpour
- In May 2006, *The New York Times Book Review* named *Beloved* **the best American novel** published in the previous 25 years
- In 1993 Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature – first African American woman
- continues writing – her most recent novel ***God Help the Child*** (2015)

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## Later Life


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- in 1989 became a professor at Princeton University where she established a special workshop for writers and performers known as the **Princeton Atelier** in 1994
- In 1999, Morrison branched out to children's literature. She worked with her son Slade on ***The Big Box***, ***The Book of Mean People*** (2002) and ***The Ant or the Grasshopper?*** (2003)
- She has also explored other genres, writing the play ***Dreaming Emmett*** in the mid-1980s and the lyrics for "**Four Songs**" with composer Andre Previn in 1994 and "**Sweet Talk**" with composer Richard Danielpour in 1997
- in October 2009 Morrison spoke out about censorship after one of her books was **banned** at a Michigan high school
- editor for ***Burn This Book***, a collection of essays on censorship and the power of the written word

## The importance of fighting censorship

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**“The thought that leads me to contemplate with dread the erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists' questions challenging authority never being posed, unstaged plays, canceled films—that thought is a nightmare. As though a whole universe is being described in invisible ink.”**



## Quotes

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**“ If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.”**

**“The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power.”**



**Novels**

*The Bluest Eye* (1970)

*Sula* (1973)

*Song of Solomon* (1977)

*Tar Baby* (1981)

*Beloved* (1987)

*Jazz* (1992)

*Paradise* (1997)

*Love* (2003)

*A Mercy* (2008)

*Home* (2012)

*God Help the Child* (2015)

**Children's literature (with Slade Morrison)**

*The Big Box* (1999)

*The Book of Mean People* (2002)

*Peeny Butter Fudge* (2009)

**Short fiction**

"Recitatif" (1983)

**Plays**

*Dreaming Emmett* (performed 1986)

*Desdemona* (first performed May 15, 2011, in Vienna)

**Libretto**

*Margaret Garner* (first performed May 2005)

**Non-fiction**

*The Black Book* (1974)

*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992)

*Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (editor) (1992)

*Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case* (co-editor) (1997)

*Remember: The Journey to School Integration* (April 2004)

*What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, edited by Carolyn C. Denard (April 2008)

*Burn This Book: Essay Anthology*, editor (2009)

## Sources:

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<http://www.biography.com/people/toni-morrison-9415590#recent-projects>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toni\\_Morrison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toni_Morrison)

## Appendix C

### Assignments for *The Bluest Eye* readings

#### a) Pages 17-23:

This excerpt talks about the Breedloves. After reading it, try to answer the following questions: Who are the members of the Breedlove family? What is the significance of their name and does it match their relationship? What does “put outdoors” mean in their case? What makes them ugly? What are the ways in which they cope with their ugliness? How do they match up with the ideal primer family?

b) Pages 67-76 introduce the meaning of internalized racism to the novel. Try to find the meaning of this term while reading the chapter.

Also, pay attention to the following questions: What are the characteristics of the brown girls from Mobile, Aiken, etc.? How does Geraldine fit into this description? Why is the cat so important to her? Why does she react the way she does when she sees Pecola? How do the people in this community treat Pecola?

c) Pages 130-144: Soaphead Church is preoccupied by similar issues as Geraldine.

Can you find them? Why is he “better” than anyone else in his community?

In your opinion: Why did he deceive Pecola? What would happen if Pecola really received blue eyes?

Would her life change for the better? Explain your answer with additional two sentences.

d) Pages 150-160: The last chapter is included in the reader to give you a conclusion of the novel. What happens to Pecola in the end? In what words would you describe Pecola’s experience?

## **Appendix D**

### **Role play cards**

You are a political prisoner. You have been subject to the worst, most inhumane treatment imaginable. You escape with your young child. You are captured. You can either kill the child or have the child live the life that you have lived. What do you do?

You are sent away to a work camp where you receive treatment worse than slavery, and you are at the mercy of the overseer's sexual and physical whims. What do you do?

A woman in your community kills her children to save them from what, in her opinion, is a living hell. How do you, as a community member, respond?

## **Appendix E**

### **Assignments for *Beloved* readings**

#### **a) The first chapter:**

What is the atmosphere in the novel? Do you understand the chronology of the events that are mentioned? What events are mentioned? Which characters appear in the first chapter? Who visits Sethe? Who is he?

#### **b) Excerpt about Baby Suggs:**

Read the following excerpt. What is it about? What is Baby Suggs' role in this community? What do you think Clearing is?

#### **c) Chapter 26:**

Morrison's style of writing is at times difficult to follow in *Beloved*. Try to make a list of the chronological order of the events that happened in the chapter 26. What is the significance of Denver in this chapter? What makes women gather and help Sethe? What united them in the end?

#### **d) Chapter 28:**

How does the novel end? What does it mean: "This is not the story to pass on"?