

The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison

A story of ugliness written beautifully.

Toni Morrison is a Nobel Prize in Literature winner. *The Bluest Eye* is her first novel set in the 1940s and takes place in Loraine, Ohio, the writer's hometown, and was published in 1974 after five years of writing.

The story contains passages about racism, poverty, pedophilia, the rape of a 10-year-old by her father and the poisoning of a dog. All of which is why it is uncomfortable and disturbing. It is also a masterful literary work that deserves more than one reading to extract its multiple meanings. The prose is dense and poetic and not an easy read both for its content and style.

At its core it is the story of a young black girl who believes she is ugly (compared to the Shirley Temple ideal) and who desperately wishes for blue eyes so she could be beautiful.

It is certainly not obscene or pornographic by any reasonable definition. The novel is often categorized as for eighth grade reading but because of its content sometimes is assigned to a ninth grade or higher level. In any case, in practice, it is recognized as an important work and is often used in AP courses and college level classes. My take is that it is certainly appropriate for high school and possibly middle school age groups.

I struggle to understand the motivations of those who wish to ban these kinds of books. Some is purely political opportunism but others may be offended by the subject matter, i.e. sex, racism and there are those who simply do not want their children exposed to anything that would make them feel uncomfortable. The reality is that at some point in their education young adults need to be exposed to uncomfortable topics, whether it be the Holocaust or the kind of ugliness written about by Ms. Morrison.

Reading this book will make you confident in pushing back against its banning as well as giving you some insight and into a world that most of us have been fortunate to not experience.

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