



Toni Morrison's

THE BLUEST EYE

adapted by Lydia R. Diamond



STUDY GUIDE

Created by Virginia Stage Company in collaboration with Norfolk State University and The College of William & Mary



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#TheBluestEye

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- enthusiasm for teamwork
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- strength in their ability to listen and express themselves effectively
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Because it has such positive and far-reaching outcomes for our students, VSC's education model emphasizes process over product. We believe that students will emerge from their time with VSC's educational programs with skills that will serve them well in all areas of life.

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- develop greater confidence through the creative play experience
- develop a spirit of curiosity
- learn to develop and appreciate the value of kindness
- develop or expand spatial awareness
- use dramatic prompts to create imaginative movement
- cooperate with others in group sessions
- learn how to use their voice safely and effectively
- learn how to use their bodies effectively with character development
- work with peers to write scripts
- explore characters and settings
- rehearse in a positive, supportive environment
- practice respectful critique of others' work
- put it all together to create original theatre for others.

Virginia Stage Company's production adheres to the following Virginia's English Standards of Learning requirements for grades 5-12:

Reading and Writing – 5.4, 5.5., 5.7, 5.8, 6.4, 6.5, 6.7, 6.8, 7.4, 7.5, 7.7, 7.8, 8.5, 8.5, 8.7, 8.8, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5, 10.6, 10.7, 11.3, 11.4, 11.5, 11.6, 11.7, 12.3, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6, 12.7

Theatre Arts – 6.15, 6.16, 6.17, 6.20, 6.21, 6.23, 6.24, 6.25, 7.17, 7.18, 7.19, 7.20, 7.21, 7.22, 7.23, 8.15, 8.16, 7.17, 8.18, 8.19, 8.20, 8.21, 8.22, 8.23, 8.24, 8.25

Introduction to Theatre – TI. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

Theatre Arts II Dramatic Literature and Theatre History – TII. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

What To Expect In This Guide

To learn more about the evolvment from novel to show, analysis, background information, and engagement models

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**Created by Virginia Stage Company in
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Layout by
Crystal Tuxhorn

Theatre Etiquette

There are simple rules that all audience members should follow to make the play as enjoyable as possible. Remember, a live theater performance can be very exciting. All of the people involved in the production, both cast and crew, work very hard to be sure they give a great performance. It is the job of the audience members to help the performers give their best performance possible. The audience can do this by practicing the rules of theater etiquette.

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone or, if it must be on, put it on vibrate. Do not speak on the phone OR text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to many shows about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Don't speak during the performance...whispering is still speaking, so only in an emergency. Remember that the Overture (introductory music) in Musical Theater is part of the performance, so be quiet when it begins.
- Do not take pictures during the performance. It is prohibited by law and can be very distracting to the actors.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment...rude to the actors and your fellow audience members.
- Do not eat or drink in the theater. If you must have a cough drop, or something of that nature, do not make noise with the wrapper.
- Do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- Do not angle your head together with your "special someone" as you obstruct the view of the people behind you.
- Don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Do applaud when the performance is over...this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Stand and applaud if you really thought the show was great.
- Do not whistle or scream out to the performers.

Biographies Toni Morrison & Lydia Diamond

Toni Morrison

Acclaimed author and Pulitzer Prize winner Toni Morrison has been lauded for her role in making black literature mainstream. The second child out of four from a working-class African American family, Morrison attended Howard University in 1949. She graduated in 1953 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and went on to Cornell University to earn her Master of Arts in 1955. From there, Morrison taught at various universities before becoming the first black female senior editor in the fiction department at Random House.

Morrison initially conceptualized *The Bluest Eye* as a short story. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston published the novel in 1970 where it garnered attention as mandatory reading for the Black Studies department at The City University of New York City. Morrison's second published work, *Sula*, was nominated for a National Book Award. *Beloved*, Morrison's most notable work for which she won a Pulitzer prize, was published in 1987. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, making Morrison the first black woman of any nationality to win a Nobel Prize.

Lydia Diamond

Lydia R. Diamond, a graduate of Northwestern University, has won widespread acclaim for her work as a playwright. Diamond was born in 1969 in Detroit, Michigan. She recently worked as a professor of theatre at Boston University. Among other accolades, she was a W.E.B. Du Bois institute fellow in 2005 and 2006, and received an Honorary Doctorate of Arts from Pine Manor College. Along with *Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*, her works include *The Gift Horse*, *Smart People*, *Stick Fly*, and *Voyeurs de Venus*. Her works frequently deal with issues of gender and race. Diamond and her husband Dr. John Diamond have a son named Baylor. She is now a clinical associate professor of theatre at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Synopsis

The Bluest Eye tells the story of one year in the life of a young black girl in 1940s Lorain, Ohio. Eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove wants nothing more than to be loved by her family and schoolmates. Left to fend for herself, she blames her dark skin and prays for blue eyes, sure that love will follow. The events of *The Bluest Eye* take place primarily from the Autumn of 1940 to the same time in 1941, but in order to explain the full stories behind those events, the narrative frequently moves back in time.

Characters

Claudia MacTeer

is the younger of two sisters in the MacTeer family. She contributes two “voices” to the story — one as a child, one as an adult — with curiosity, compassion and perspective, which she uses to reflect on the fate of her childhood friend, Pecola.

Frieda MacTeer

is the older of the sisters, less adventuresome and witty than Claudia and, in some ways, dependent on her sister for judgment, despite her reserves of general, practical information.

Pecola Breedlove

is the “little -girl-gone-to-woman” in the story. She shares her family’s conviction that she is ugly and unworthy but somehow has sufficient resolve to attempt a few self-help strategies. Of all the characters, Pecola has been most damaged by her circumstances in life, beginning with having a family incapable of normal expressions of love and protection. Nearly every event in her life leaves her a victim, and the story examines what influences led to her fate and what influences kept her from being helped.

Mrs. MacTeer/Mama

is too busy maintaining a household on meager resources to hover affectionately over her children, but her love for Claudia and Frieda is evident in the work she does to keep the family nourished, healthy and together.

Mr. MacTeer

has little verbal presence in his household, but he works hard to keep the family going and is fiercely protective of his children when it is necessary.

Mr. Yacobowski

as a member of the immigrant working class, has also been marginalized by mainstream society, but as a white male, he is “allowed” to feel superior to a little black girl. His interaction with Pecola supplies the narrative with a vignette portraying the dynamics of class division in American society.

Mrs. Breedlove/Pauline

originally from the South, fails to find community, intimacy or sustaining work in Ohio. She falls under the spell of lifestyle and beauty standards that she cannot achieve and consequently drifts into resentment, self righteousness and greater isolation. Cut off from any source of emotional self-nourishment, she is unable to nurture her children. Her daughter, Pecola, calls her Mrs. Breedlove.

Mr. Breedlove/Cholly

Pauline’s husband and Pecola’s father, knew nothing about his father and was abandoned by his mother at four days of age. He is, nonetheless, vigorous, sensual and spirited — perhaps because he was rescued and raised by Aunt Jimmy and her warm-hearted female friends — and has no trouble calling attention to himself once he leaves home after his aunt’s death and enters the world.

Aunt Jimmy

is Cholly’s aunt, who rescues him at the age of four days from the train tracks. She is a woman of great energy and warmth and, as a result, is surrounded by a bevy of older female friends who heap affection and concern onto Cholly. When she becomes ill and dies, Cholly is overwhelmed with feelings of loss but has no means of expressing them. Although Aunt Jimmy’s friends would have stepped in to take charge of him, Cholly, with no immediate family members left, flees.

Soaphead Church/Elihue Micah Whitcomb

His name Soaphead refers to the particular appearance of his hair—tight and curly that held “a sheen and wave when pomaded with soap lather.” Soaphead’s chief attribute is his fastidiousness, which creates the necessity for a pristine and lifeless “life.” He uses his “special powers” to grant Pecola her wish for blue eyes.

The World of the Play



Lexicon Background & Cultural Content

IMPORTANT LOCATIONS:

The play takes place around 1941 in Lorain, Ohio-the same city where Morrison lived as a child.

Garden Avenue:

Garden Avenue is a road in Lorain, Ohio, that was frequented by Toni Morrison in her youth. Garden Avenue, geographically, is only 6 minutes up the road from Lorain High School where Morrison attended, and in the general vicinity of where Morrison grew up.

Lake Shore Park:

Lake Shore park was a piece of an overarching park system built under state legislature passed on April 25, 1904. Its purpose was to "authorize any township to establish a free public park." This park, geographically, was also only a few minutes walk from Lorain High School where Morrison attended.

CULTURAL CONTEXT:

The Doll Test:

The doll test was a psychological experiment performed in 1947 by Mamie and Kenneth Clark, aimed at examining the negative and long-lasting effects of segregation on children. For the test, children were asked to choose between a white or black doll when proposed questions like "show me the doll that you like to play with"; "show me the nice doll... And the doll that's a bad doll?" The study showed that a majority of segregated students rejected the black doll, and had a preference for the white one. Dr. Clark accounts that when the children were asked to show the doll that looks most like them, some became "emotionally upset at having to identify with the doll that they had rejected," with some crying, and even storming out of the room. This experiment was particularly significant as it played a role in the desegregation of schools through *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.



Precious Lord:

The hymn "Precious Lord" was written by Thomas Dorsey (alternatively known as the "Father of Black Gospel Music" in 1932 following the death of his wife and infant son during childbirth. Over time, the song has been recorded by famous figures such as Elvis Presley, and favored by others such as Martin Luther King Jr. and President Lyndon B. Johnson.

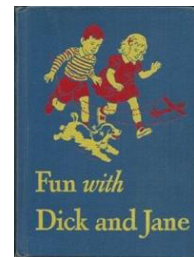
"Precious Lord, take my hand
 Lead me on, let me stand
 I'm tired, I'm weak, I'm lone
 Through the storm, through the night
 Lead me on to the light
 Take my hand precious Lord, lead me on

When my way grows drear
 Precious Lord linger near,
 When my life is almost gone
 Hear my cry hear my call
 Hold my hand lest I fall
 Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me on"
 -excerpt from the hymn, used in the novel

Lexicon Background & Cultural Content

Dick & Jane Books:

Dick & Jane books were commonly used in public schools as tools to teach children to read from the 1940s-1960s. The books featured a limited vocabulary with supplementing illustrations that were meant to draw the children's attention. They were intent on teaching children through the "look-say" or "whole-word" reading method, which focused on understanding the entire word as a whole rather than sounding it out phonetically. It was not until 1965 that the first African American characters were illustrated into the series.



Vicks Salve:

Known more commonly today as "Vicks VapoRub," this is a type of ointment used on the chest, back, and throat for cough suppression, or on joints for minor aches and pains.

Cod-liver oil:

Like the name implies, this vitamin-rich oil is derived from the livers of codfish and has the potential to help lower inflammation of the body, reduce anxiety and depression, support a healthy immune system, and much more. It was commonly given to children in the US, until concerns of vitamin toxicity arose.



"Outdoors":

Slang term, meaning to be homeless and sleeping outdoors or outside, such as on the street or in the woods. During the Great Depression, homelessness followed the employment crisis and were embodied in the shacktowns of "Hooverville."



Shirley Temple:

Shirley Temple was an American child star in her younger years and a U.S. diplomat throughout her adult life. She was thought to have brought optimism and an escape during the Great Depression.

Bojangles:

Bill Robinson was an American Broadway and Hollywood dancer known for his dancing roles with Shirley Temple in the 1930's. He received little schooling as a child and began dancing at the age of eight, going on to star in black musical comedies, and later becoming a top vaudeville star. He was praised for his ingenuity in creating new steps for tap routines, and his ability to run backwards.



Soft-shoeing it:

Referring to a type of tap dancing that is done in soft-soled shoes without metal taps.



Jean Harlow:

Harlean Carpenter, the "original blonde bombshell," was a successful actress in the early 1930's, known for her striking platinum blonde hair, sensual appearance, and comedic roles.

Lexicon Background & Cultural Content

Mary Jane candies:

Originally made in 1914, Mary Jane candies are bite-sized peanut butter and molasses flavored taffy candy named after the aunt of Charles N. Miller. The candy is wrapped in a yellow wrapper with a depiction of a small girl on the front in an all yellow outfit.



CCC camps:

Established in 1933 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the "Civilian Conservation Corps," or the CCC, was a work relief program that employed young men ages 17-28 on environmental projects during the Great Depression. It was part of Roosevelt's "New Deal," and was thought to have been as a success, as the program planted over three billion trees, created jobs for nearly three million men, and helped shape the course of our modern national parks. Women were banned from joining the CCC, and African American men were housed in separate training camps than their white counterparts.

Switches:

A switch is defined as a "slender, flexible shoot, rod, etc. used especially in whipping or disciplining". Yet, this practice of switching has its origins traced to slavery in which masters of young enslaved children would use slim trimmings of trees to whip children instead of the hide and tails of a traditional whip.

Clubfoot:

Clubfoot is a description for a range of foot abnormalities usually present at birth in which the child is twisted out of shape or position. The general cause of clubfoot is that the tendons (the tissues connecting the muscles to the bone) are shorter than usual.

Gandy Dancer:

A gandy dancer was a slang term during the expansionary era of American progress when a vast amount railroads and tracks were being constructed across the United States. It referred to an individual who was a laborer in a railroad section. The part 'gandy' would refer to a section or part of the track that the laborer used during construction, and the part 'dancer' referred to how the laborer tamps down the earth between the ties.

Chain Gang:

The term 'chain gang,' at the most basic level, is a method of shackling prisoners, slaves, or convicts together and transporting them across distances. However, chain gangs also refer to individuals shackled together and forced to work while shackled together. These individuals would also remain shackled together while they ate and slept. It was commonly employed in southern states while plantation owners transported enslaved individuals to different plantations, or by prisons who used the chain gang method to coerce prisoners to work on projects.

FLORA & THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

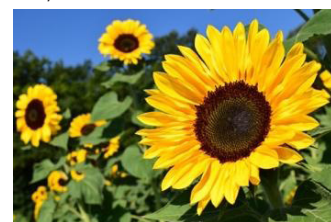
Dandelion:

This long-stemmed, predominantly yellow or white flower usually blooms any time between May and June, and dies within the first frost of winter. The dandelion has a rich history in folklore and an abundance of spiritual meaning. Typically, the dandelion is seen as a representation of getting through the struggles of life and emerging victorious through those struggles. However, the dandelion also has been noted to represent the power and warmth of the sun.



Sunflower:

This simple, tall yellow flower has been noted to reside mainly in the New England region of the United States. This flower commonly blooms during the summer and a portion during the fall months, yet typically begins to die during the start of winter. The sunflower's name comes from two Greek words, "helios" which means sun, and "anthos" which means flower. As well, a myth surrounding the meaning of the sunflower comes from the Greek myth of Apollo and Clytie. In said myth, Clytie has fallen in love with Apollo but Apollo falls for another. In her distress and jealous rage, Clytie, asks her father to bury her alive, a request which he accepts. Apollo, in anger, turns Clytie into a flower, however, since Clytie still loved Apollo she would spend her days watching Apollo as he moved the sun across the sky, similar to how the sunflower always moves to face the sun. Due to its connection with the sun and this myth, the sunflower has historically been associated with adoration and loyalty.



Lexicon Background & Cultural Content

Pine:

Red pine is a tall, straight pine, distinctive for its scaly, reddish bark. In order to prepare for planting, fire is needed to prepare the seedbed and eliminate the competing species so that the red pine can grow. This pine is most likely found in the New England region of the United States. The pine has origins in a variety of mythical backgrounds. For the Scots and Egyptians, the pine tree was seen as a sign of royalty or heroism. For the Greeks, the pine tree has been associated with the gods of fertility.



Rosebuds:

This bright cinnamon colored rose is native to the New England region of the United States. The usual bloom time for this plant is during the spring and usually dies at the start or mid of winter. The oldest mythological meaning of the rose comes from the Greeks, specifically the goddess Aphrodite, known as the creator of the rose. The myth goes as follows: her lover, Adonis, the most beautiful man in the world, was mortally wounded hunting for a boar. So, Aphrodite's tears and Adonis's blood created a rose out of their mixture. Thus this myth has given the rose an association to both love and romance. However, the rose also has been given other meanings such as: confidentiality, secrecy, and purity.



Muscadine Grapes:

These grapes are primarily found in the southeastern United States, ranging anywhere from Delaware to the Gulf of Mexico. These white grapes are typically referred to and known as "America's first grape." Mythologically, grapes have a long tradition of being associated with the Roman god of Wine, Bacchus, or his Greek equivalent, Dionysios. Grapes also have a history of being represented by gods of fertility and fruitfulness.

Pussy willow:

These small, shrubby-esque catkins (a plant without petals or showy colors) can be found along the East coast of the United States. These catkins are primarily white-budded, alongside an assortment of colors depending the type of pussy willow extending from the bud. These plants are said to mark the end of winter and the start of spring. Pussy willows have a symbolic root in the Christian holiday, Easter. It is usually used as a representation of Jesus when he died and rose three days later. Pussy willows, following their connection to this religious holiday, have developed a connotative representation of life and blooming.



Forsythia:

These hardy, yellow shrubs are typically found in the southeastern United States. These plants sprout and bud in early spring, and remain until the coming winter. Forsythia has meanings and roots in almost all areas and cultures in which it grows, or is known. Predominantly in American Folklore descended from the Victorian era, forsythias are usually associated with anticipation. As an old saying goes, "Three snows after the forsythia bloom." Which is to say, "it is not yet spring, we must wait."

Lilac:

These small, tiny flowers are seen sprouting throughout the southeastern parts of the United States in the spring, and usually last for many generations if there is significant chill in the winter. These flowers are commonly known by their light purple color, however, can come in quite a large variety of colors. The lilac has mythological origin in a Greek myth about the forest god, Pan, who was in love with a nymph named Syringa. Syringa, attempting to flee from Pan's persistence, turned herself into a lilac bush, which from Pan created his first pan pipe. Depending on the color of the lilac, it has different meanings, however, it generally represents spirituality, love, and innocence.



Marigolds:

These bright yellow shrubs can be found in the eastern part of the United States. Marigolds tend to sprout at the beginning of spring and die around the first frost of winter. Marigolds typically come in a wide variety of colors ranging from yellow, orange, and red shades. Mythologically, marigolds typically represent life, birth and the natural order of existence.

Adaptation: An Essay

Generic Engineering: The Miracle of Successful Adaptation

But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.

Toni Morrison's 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*, p. 6
Lydia Diamond's 2003 stage adaptation of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, l.i.

In the epigraph above, written early in Morrison's novel and delivered early in Diamond's play, the nine-year-old narrator/character Claudia warns that she cannot explain the inexplicable: in this case, the obscene and tragic act that occupies the dark heart of both works. The infamous act is Cholly Breedlove's rape and impregnation of his adolescent daughter Pecola in 1941. To explore that "why" courts madness, which is indeed the fate for the protagonist Pecola in both versions of the story. But this dangerous delving into chaos is, of course, precisely why Morrison wrote the novel. As she tells us in her Foreword, she feels compelled to understand the rapist Cholly, abused himself as a teenager by whites (in the midst of his sexual initiation). Says Morrison, "...[S]ome victims of powerful self-loathing turn out to be dangerous, violent, reproducing the enemy who has humiliated them over and over" (ix-x). And she must understand his victim/daughter Pecola: "...[T]here are some who collapse silently, anonymously, with no voice to express or acknowledge it [their destruction]" (x). And she must try to help her readers comprehend the society that produces them.

Though by no means an issue so important as racism, colorism, and human depravity, the why and how of adaptation can be almost as baffling to explain. The why of adaptation is the lesser challenge. Adapters do their work to reach a new audience and perhaps to profit thereby. But is it always a gain for Art itself? Poor adaptations of great works of art abound; successful ones such as Diamond's are fairly rare. And how is it even possible to extract the narrative DNA from one organism (the original text in its original genre) and insert it into a whole new organism—a new medium in, say, three dimensions (the stage) instead of two (the page)? No wonder a monstrous chimera so often results (Laws, "King Adapter," hereafter KA, 124). Yet, just as with genetic engineering, miracles can also occur: healthy new works that are clearly the offspring of a great parent, but with admirable new qualities of their own, contributed by the adapter or his/her collaborators (Ibid 126). If the adaptation is a collective art form such as a play, it is especially hard to say exactly who contributed which 'genes' and when.

Both ordinary art-lovers and theorists of adaptation invariably slip into metaphors of procreation to discuss the wily object of their inquiry. The original artist and adapter are often spoken of as lovers, with the ardent adapter being "faithful" to his or her source. Or perhaps an adaptation is "loose" (also a sexual pejorative). And yet some "loose" adaptations are themselves great works of art: *Romeo and Juliet* famously becomes its loose adaptation *West Side Story* (the stage musical and then, in another generative step, the film). And just because an adaptation is "close" does not necessarily make it worthwhile. Does mankind really benefit from a musical stage version of the film *Kinky Boots*? Some Broadway producer is surely benefiting, or it would not still be running. So is there such a thing as 'promiscuous' adapting?

To slightly shift metaphors, is adaptation a spiritual 'possession' of the adapter by the source author? Is adaptation the art of midwifery or is it priestly transubstantiation (turning wine into blood)? Is it concretization? Is it translation? (Laws, "Not Everybody's Protest Film," hereafter NEPF 27). Is it like "signifying" Henry Louis Gates' now-common literary term for one artist's riffing on the work of another using words instead of musical notes (Laws, NEPF, p. 28)? Or does it work more like Freud's dreamwork, which whittles down our memories (much of adapting a text is cutting it) and then disguises unacceptable repressed elements by various tricks – displacement and condensation chief among them – before 'replaying' said memories in their new costumes (Laws, KA, p. 129)? For that matter, isn't all art merely the 're-costuming' of previous myths (cf. Northrop Frye) or 'misreading' or other artworks? The prolific critic Harold Bloom calls the latter idea, Oedipal "misprision" (Laws, NEPF, p. 28).

And how and where exactly does any work of art even exist to begin with? Literary theorists cannot even agree on that. Expressive mode theorists suggest the true location of a text is its point of emanation, i.e., the mind (conscious or not) of its author. Rhetorical mode theorists prefer the notion that a text exists in the minds (conscious or unconscious)

Adaptation: An Essay

of its different readers; while mimetic mode theorists see any text as a changing reflection of the social and political world from which it springs or in which it is consumed. (Laws, "How Many Children," hereafter HMC, 452 ff.) We can throw many a Marxist or post-colonialist into that last grouping. And we mustn't forget the notorious deconstructionists, followed by the pesky post-modernists, who opined that all texts free float in language itself without any true boundaries among them, given the self-referentiality and interdependence of every word on every other word for its meaning. If all art is pastiche, then all art is adaptation! But that way does lie madness (and certainly copyright violations).

Useful discussion of adaptation must eschew the rabbit hole of ontological literary theory and be glad for real above-ground rabbits, which do, in fact, occur as unique individuals of a given species (for our purpose, genre). A novel has certain generic characteristics and is particularly 'good' at doing certain things: hopping about in time, for instance, with just the shift of a tense or changing point of view by simply shifting narrators. Toni Morrison uses first-person narrator Claudia, but switches occasionally to an unknown third-person narrator, before jumping back to make Pauline (Pecola's negligent mother), a temporary first-person narrator. Cholly's miserable backstory is narrated in third person, but Claudia makes periodic returns to use first person again.

Drama can use readers' theater techniques, i.e., have actors portraying characters "tell" some necessary narrative and "act out" other elements. Some events might be too intense to show onstage – a very relevant problem in a text about incest. Actors can tellingly double or triple up on their roles, drawing inferred comparisons between or among those various figures portrayed. But it is hard to hop around in time onstage. There must be convention-driven changes in lighting or scenery or body language to indicate such shifts; otherwise, what we see onstage is presumed to be eternally present.

As Harvey Young and Jocelyn Prince point out in their article "Adapting *The Bluest Eye* for the Stage" (p. 148), Lydia Diamond's adaptation of Morrison's seminal novel was commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre of Chicago's Steppenwolf for Young Adults (SYA) and New Plays Initiative (NPI). Diamond was a young African American playwright who had herself written a play called *The Gift Horse* (2002).

The first part of the miracle is a young playwright being permitted to touch the work of America's only living (female) Nobel Prize winner in Literature (1993), the formidable Toni Morrison, renowned for her fierce creative and critical intellect. Best known for her novels, Morrison has herself written plays, most notably *Dreaming Emmett* [Till] (1986) and *Desdemona* (2012). And yet she permitted Diamond a crack at the work of adapting one of her best known and most revered novels. As with all decent adaptations, something was lost in the necessarily brutal paring down of the original and something was gained in the new generic incarnation.

'Taking Liberties': Diamond's Changes

Two of the most significant genre distinctions between a novel and a play have yet to be mentioned. In a novel, readers can be given direct access to a character's thoughts; in a drama, we have only the somewhat hoary convention of soliloquy to 'overhear' a character's thoughts spoken out loud. Otherwise, a character must reveal himself or herself through dialogue with others, stage actions, gestures or – and here we come back to soliloquy – a direct address of the audience which breaks the illusion of a self-contained world up on the stage (known as breaking the fourth wall). Another profound difference in fiction and drama is that in fiction, any given linguistic signifier (any word) can have multiple signifieds (meanings) – influenced by the life experiences of each individual reader receiving it. On stage, crucial signifiers (including whole characters and their appearance) must be pre-selected by someone (casting director, director) to appear for that performance on that particular stage for an ephemeral, never-to-be-exactly-repeated performance. If a dog, for example, is mentioned in the source text and the adapter decides it must be shown in the adaptation (and not just mentioned like Old Bob the dog whose poisoning pushes Pecola over into madness), it must be a specific dog of a specific color and specific breed or mixture of breeds that trots onstage, not the tan dachshund, brindled St. Bernard or black poodle (cf. Goethe's *Faust*) each reader of the source may have conjured up in his or her imagination. This inevitable restriction of 'signifieds' may, in fact, be why readers complain so often that they "preferred the original book" (meaning their own set of signifieds) over whatever they have seen on stage (or screen). Such changes are inherent in the very process of adaptation, moving meanings from one medium to another. But adapters change the source by very consciously eliminating or modifying narrative elements, as well.

Careful readers of Morrison's novel will notice that Diamond has cut characters such as the town whores, be it for time and/or to make the novel more appropriate for young adults (as the commission entailed). Mr. Henry, the oversexed lodger, is gone, perhaps for the same reason. And Soaphead Church, while still an oddball in the adaptation, is

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no longer a pedophile, as he is in Morrison's novel. Two (or even three, if one suspects Mr. Henry) pedophiles must have seemed too much in a play that absolutely **MUST** include the incest perpetrated by Cholly against his daughter Pecola. Gone are Morrison's musings on the Great Migration going on throughout America at the time. Although wonderful, they can be cut.

But the success of Diamond's adaptation is her skill in selecting Morrison's most vital, memorable metaphors and images from the novel, pulling them over into the adaptation (placed, per force, into the dialogue of the characters). Of course, we must have the passages from Dick and Jane. They can be cut back a bit, sonically (instead of visually) jumbled, and – something new on Diamond's part – apportioned to the most logical characters (a Mother says Dick and Jane's Mother's words; a Father, Dick and Jane's Father's words). Claudia's riff on the horror of people being "outdoors" (we would say "homeless") is shortened but snatched over into the play. The novel's quick simile describing Claudia's mother's love as "thick and dark as Alaga syrup" is lifted into the play, but so is the oddly intricate metaphor describing Claudia (and now Frieda's, too) undesired sense of pity for the miserable Pecola. Says the stage Claudia, "I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets." In the play, Frieda then takes up the rest of the directly-borrowed Morrison passage: "But she held it in where it could lap up into her eyes" (Morrison, pp. 73-74; Diamond, I.iii). Diamond knows to take parts of the passage on Cholly's being "dangerously free" directly from Morrison (159). It is the essence of his character. There is directly borrowed dialogue in the scene where Mrs. Breedlove denies her own daughter and her daughter's friends for the love of the little white child she serves as a maid. But Diamond adds a beautifully theatrical twist to Morrison's original white family's kitchen scene by suggesting that the pretty little white girl be depicted, in the play, by a life-size doll (III.i.). The Steppenwolf production ended up using a regular-sized doll, but went with Diamond's creative impulse (Young 525-527). Simple theatrical magic likewise enhances Pecola's 'mad' scene. Much of the dialogue is lifted over from the novel, but one cannot show 'italics' (the alien voice in Pecola's head is distinguished that way in the novel) onstage. Ah, but one can pre-record the actor's voice and have one portion of the mad scene dialogue emanate from 'nowhere' (offstage). Pecola can thereby babble with and to herself schizophrenically in her very own voice.

The key imagery of dolls and Shirley Temple and Mary Janes and those blue eyes is moved into dialogue or direct address of the audience. Diamond knows to retain mention of the candy-buying scene when Pecola is humiliated by the shopkeeper. Diamond skillfully threads her borrowings into the leitmotifs she has necessarily unbraided (from Morrison) but re-braided, in Morrison's style, onstage. In both novel and play the "high-yellow dream child," Maureen Peal, has long brown hair "braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back" (Morrison 62; Diamond II.i.). Of course, Diamond uses that. Diamond's judgment on which metaphors and scenes are indispensable seems, at times, uncanny. It is the reason the play succeeds.

Diamond ends her play with Morrison's very words, the words that echo both works' beginning observation that the marigolds would not grow the year Pecola was raped, impregnated, and driven mad by racism, colorism, and human depravity (born of society's depravity). Both artists, Morrison in 1970 and Diamond in 2003, warn of an "entire country... hostile to marigolds that year":

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 p. 206; Diamond III.vii).

To produce this play, adapted from that prescient novel, is to ask again, in March 2019, if the "entire country" has really changed that much in what will soon be the 50 years since *The Bluest Eye's* publication. The novel and play end with the despairing words: "...[I]t's much, much, much too late." Let us hope these two artists—the genius Morrison and the talented Diamond—were wrong on that count.

Page Laws

Page Laws is Professor of English and Dean of the RC Nusbaum Honors College at Norfolk State University. She also serves on the VSC Board of Trustees. An outreach program entitled "Changing the Narrative on Race," co-sponsored by Virginia Stage Company and other partners, is being held for selected 12th graders in the Norfolk Public Schools and all interested local citizens. For more information on the grant project (sponsored by VA Humanities and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation), contact Dr. Laws at prlaws@nsu.edu.

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Canon Toni Morrison & Lydia Diamond TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison was first published in 1970. Her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, received harsh criticism and poor sales, to which Morrison equated to the main character's own reception, being dismissed, trivialized, and misunderstood. Morrison continued on to write 10 more novels, the last of which was published in 2015. Her collection is now highly regarded, known for its exquisite language and symbolism, epic themes, and captivating characters, as well as her ability to highlight the African-American experience. Her novels explore conflicts of race, sex, and class, as well as dynamics of friendship, love, and community.

The Bluest Eye (1970)

The novel, set in 1941, centers around the experience of 11 year-old girl Pecola as she grows up in Lorain, Ohio. The world labels her as "ugly" due to her family, mannerisms, and dark skin. Pecola longs for the blue eyes she associates with whiteness, and will do anything in her power to get them. The book deals with topics such as racism, incest, and child molestation, though at its heart is a story simply about the desire to belong.

Sula (1973)

The novel centers around the Bottom, a black neighborhood in post World War I Ohio. The story centers around families of Nel and Sula, two children in the neighborhood. Nel's family is stable, though rigid, and is deeply concerned with social conventions. Sula's family is very different, viewed by the town as eccentric and loose. The two girls are inseparable, until a traumatic accident when Sula causes the untimely death of a neighborhood boy. The trauma continues for Sula when she watches her mother burn to death in another accident. Nel follows a conventional path into adulthood, while Sula is independent and disregards social conventions. After 10 years apart, the two return to Bottom, but the town rejects Sula and everything she embodies. The community comes together around their hatred for Sula, but after her death it falls apart once again.

Song of Solomon (1977)

The story centers around Milkman Dead, born in Michigan shortly after a neighborhood man flung himself off a rooftop in an attempt at flight. The novel follows Milkman from birth to adulthood, showing how the events of his early childhood caused him to be alienated from and disinterested in his home life and hometown. Milkman's Aunt, Pilate, becomes a key figure in his life when he learns how much influence she's had over his family. He goes to her to learn his family history, and meets his cousin Hagar, with whom he forms his first romantic, highly sexual connection. Milkman's relationship with his family is strained, partially because he feels so removed from his family's identity. He struggles throughout the novel to find his place in his family and his community, and to understand his family's story.

Tar Baby (1981)

This novel portrays the love affair between Jadine, a beautiful model who was sponsored into wealth and privilege, the Streets, a wealthy white family who employs her, and Son, an impoverished man who washes up at the Streets' estate. The affair between them destroys the illusions that held together the world of the estate. They travel to the U.S. to find

Canon Toni Morrison & Lydia Diamond

a place where they can both be at home. The struggle of the couple reveals the pain and compromises that confront Black Americans seeking to live and love in the United States.

Beloved (1987)

The novel is set in post-Civil War America, inspired by the story of Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery in Kentucky and fled to Ohio. The story begins in 1873 in Cincinnati, Ohio, where Sethe, a former slave, lives with her eighteen year old daughter Denver. The two used to live with Sethe's two sons, Howard and Bulgar, who ran away, and Baby Suggs, Sethe's deceased mother-in-law. Their home is haunted by a ghost, who they believe to be Sethe's eldest daughter. Paul D, one of the slaves from the plantation where the family began, arrives to bring a sense of reality to the house. He forces the spirit out in an attempt to help the family forget the past. He seems successful at first, but soon after he encounters a young woman sitting in front of the house, calling herself Beloved. Beloved stays with the family, ruining Paul D and Sethe's growing relationship and becoming deeply attached to Sethe, who comes to believe that Beloved is the spirit of the two-year-old daughter she murdered. Denver looks for help in the community, and an unaware Sethe attacks a white man who comes to the house to help. At the resolve of the novel, Beloved disappears, Denver becomes an active part of the community, and Paul D pledges his love to Sethe.

Jazz (1992)

The novel takes place in 1920s Harlem, and follows the storytelling of multiple narrators, each bringing their own view and tone. The narrator switches frequently between characters, objects, and concepts, all improvising compositions that fit together as a whole work, much like jazz itself.

Paradise (1997)

The book completes the "trilogy" of African American History made up by *Beloved* and *Jazz*, and is structured into nine sections each named for a woman impacted by the town, Ruby, and the Convent in which the book is based. With each section Morrison tells the parallel histories of the town of Ruby and the Convent just south of it, and how in 1976 the men of the town set out to destroy the Convent women, who they believe are responsible for strange events of the past year. Town meetings are held to decide what to do about the women, and the intersections of the multitude of characters are unfolded. The men are disgusted at the idea that the women do not need men, and the resolution is reached that the women must be massacred.

Love (2003)

Love tells the story of Bill Cosey, a charismatic, dead hotel owner, and the people who survive him who are still affected by his life. Christine, his granddaughter, and Heed, his widow share his mansion, yet remain sworn enemies. The story is told in split narrative, jumping back in forth in perspective throughout the book.

A Mercy (2008)

This novel is the story of mothers and daughters as well as a story of slavery-era America. The novel takes place on Jacob Vaark's rural New York farm where Florens, a slave, and Lina, a Native American woman, both work. The two, along with the farm owner and his wife, tell their stories, sharing similar experiences of being uprooted and struggling to survive in a new environment. When smallpox threatens the wife's life, Florens is sent on a journey to find a black freedman who can help. This journey is dangerous, and serves as a turning point in the young Floren's life.

Home (2012)

Home tells the story of Frank Money, a young African American veteran of the Korean War, and his journey home. Frank struggles with the transition from an integrated Army to a segregated homeland. The book was not as well received as Morrison's previous works, but explores similar themes of community responsibility and finding place.

God Help the Child (2015)

The book follows Bride, Booker, Rain and Sweetness. Bride is beautiful based on the color of her skin as well as her confidence and success. Her success causes her lightskin mother to deny her love until Bride tells a lie that ruins the life of an innocent woman. Bride loves and loses a man named Booker who has deeply rooted anger due to the childhood murder of his brother. Rain is a white child who finds Bride to be the only person she can talk to about the abuse she has suffered from her prostitute mother. Sweetness is Bride's mother who learns over a lifetime the impact that one can have on their child.

LYDIA DIAMOND

VIRGINIA STAGE COMPANY

Cannon Toni Morrison & Lydia Diamond

Lydia Diamond wrote her first play, "Solitaire", at the end of her college career. It received the Agnes Nixon Playwriting Award at Northwestern University. Her plays have received national attention and acclaim, receiving the Lorraine Hansberry Award for Best Writing, an LA Weekly Theater Award, and a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award. She has taught playwriting at DePaul University, Loyola University, Columbia College Chicago, and Boston University. She is also a Huntington Playwright Fellow and a Resident Playwright at Chicago Dramatists. Her adaptation of *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison is one of her most popular plays.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (2007)

An adaptation of *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, this play follows Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl in 1940s Ohio. Pecola is 11 years old and wants to be loved by her family and peers but instead faces constant ridicule and abuse. Pecola blames her dark complexion and prays for blue eyes, convinced that it will change her life. This adaptation deals with what led to Pecola's descent into madness and the role of her community in her demise.

Stick Fly (2008)

An Affluent African American family goes to Martha's Vineyard for the weekend where two brothers have brought their respective girlfriends to meet their family for the first time. Taylor is an academic who struggles to fit into the lifestyle of the LeVay Family and Kimber who describes herself as a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), works with inner city children, and fits in very well with the family. The couples are joined by the family patriarch and the daughter of the family's housekeeper. Over the course of the weekend tension between everyone builds as members argue over issues of race and privilege and secrets are revealed.

Harriet Jacobs (2011)

An adaptation of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. It uses theatrical elements to expose the sexual harassment and abuse that slave girls and women suffered from their masters. Lydia Diamond uses active scenes, direct address, and slave narratives in order to show the horrors of slavery. She presents the richness of African American culture and slavery's part in the culture without presenting slavery as defining African American culture.

Smart People (2016)

Lydia Diamond shows the way in which race influences human interaction and gets in the way of communication through four characters who are all associated with Harvard: a young African American actress cleaning houses and doing odd jobs to pay the bills until her recently earned M.F.A. starts to pay off; a Chinese and Japanese American psychology professor studying race and identity in Asian American women; an African American surgical intern; and a white professor of neuroscience with a shocking hypothesis, researching the way that our racial perceptions are formed. Their relationships evolve and they realize their motivations are not as pure as they thought.

The Gift Horse 2007

"The Gift Horse" explores the complexities of human interaction in love, commitment and tragedy and celebrates the resilience of the soul through the life of Ruth, a warm African American woman with a sharp sense of humor. Ruth tells the story of her college days up until her present life, taking the audience with her. Throughout the story the audience meets characters Ernesto, Brian, Noah, Bill and Jordan. These characters along with Ruth confront each other about issues that affect us culturally.

Stage Black (2008)

Lydia Diamond writes "Stage Black", a comedy focusing on characters Writer and the Normals. Writer struggles to create the perfect black play through the Normals, a typical upper-middle class African-American family. Writer struggles between her efforts to write a commercial play within the comfort zones of African-Americans and white people, and stay true to her artistic and political senses. In the midst of the play there is a coup and Writer along with other characters are killed. Grandma becomes the new patriarch and the pretty little sister, Monica, becomes the new writer.

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