

Podcast Script:
“Alternative Adolescence”
Addiction 2 Fiction Podcast

*Oprah episode: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2099095963727069>

*Music:

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1VmCskrwEs5dyFKzB9fweg?si=d6bf71d91ded4d91>

Episode Transcript

- ❖ *Intro music*– Eccentric song
- ❖ *Alexandra*– Welcome to Fiction Addiction: where the only prescription to fill your avid reader needs is more fiction. I’m your host, Alexandra Morar, and for today’s dosage, we will cover *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. As we cover a topic of “Alternative Adolescence,” we will explore how a story of childhood innocence can take a turn for the worst and reveal the tragedy of painful upbringings and betrayals. Joining us today is special guest, Oprah Winfrey.
- ❖ *Oprah Recording*– Hello everyone.
- ❖ *Alexandra*– Oprah interviewed Morrison a few years ago, so our Fiction Addiction team felt she would be perfect for this episode. So, curl up in a cozy chair, put on some fuzzy socks, grab a mug of hot cocoa, and sit back as we enable your addiction with today’s real-life fiction.
- ❖ *Music*– Eccentric song
- ❖ *Alexandra*– Disclaimer: Unfortunately, with Oprah’s busy schedule, she was not able to complete her visa process to travel to Belfast and actually join us for today’s episode. Instead, we are borrowing from her 2000 interview with her book club and author Toni Morrison herself. However, I am sure that as soon as she hears this episode, she will join for the next one.
- ❖ *Alexandra*– *Trigger warning: Some of the themes discussed today may be sensitive to some listeners, especially within a younger audience. We will be focusing on themes of dysfunctional families, rape, and incest. Please fast forward through the episode at your discretion.
- ❖ *Alexandra*– Thank you so much for joining us today Oprah! I always watched your show as a kid and was amazed by some of the stories of the

guests you interviewed. I noticed in your bio that *The Bluest Eye* is actually one of your favorite books. Why is that?

❖ **Oprah-** Toni Morrison, I, I really do think it's a national treasure. And there's not a time where I have not been enhanced by the language. I love this language where the girls say all the time, this is after Maureen had said, "you're ugly you're ugly" and "I'm cute I'm cute," and all the time we knew that Maureen was not the enemy and was not worthy of such intense hatred. The thing to fear was the thing that made her beautiful and not us.

❖ **Alexandra-** Wow, I love that line. I thought this line was just beautiful and comforting, "So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die."

❖ **Alexandra-** Now that we shared some of her words, Oprah, can you tell us a little about who Toni Morrison was?

❖ **Oprah-** Author Toni Morrison, she passed away at eighty-eight years old. She was the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature. She influenced countless writers and readers around the world. She was a master of words, and had a profound impact on me. One of the greatest lessons that I'd love to share, she talked about children, and how **what children are really looking for is: do your eyes light up, does your face light up when they enter the room? It's really that simple and the ultimate way to validate them as human beings.** I carry that lesson inside my spirit, along with Toni's remarkable, gorgeous, epic works.

❖ **Alexandra-** Throughout the novel, I felt Morrison's writing style was creative and profound. For instance, with the chapter titles, the letters are all jumbled together, showing how frustrated Pecola would have felt. When she hears her parents fighting, and curls up in a ball in her bed to shut out the world- I thought Morrison's imagery described the situation perfectly. As the reader, I could feel her pain, and it took me back to my own childhood.

❖ **Alexandra-** Just to keep our listeners up to speed, I am going to give a brief overview of the book. *The Bluest Eye* takes place during the Great Depression in Lorain, Ohio- which I actually grew up in Ohio, so I tried to imagine the characters in my hometown. Morrison illustrates the lives of Pecola and her somewhat adopted sisters, all in the adolescent years, as they navigate peer relationships, a dysfunctional family, and struggles

with appearance and fitting in. Topics of beginning menstruation, facing racism and bullying, living in poverty, and having a father figure abuse his power all shape the girls' lives and development.

❖ **Alexandra** – So Oprah, the point I want to highlight first is with puberty. Many tweens encounter issues with peer relationships, appearance, and self-esteem during this time. We see Pecola wanting blue eyes– because that is what is “cool,” or beautiful at the time. I remember wanting to be taller when I was younger, or even to have blonde hair. Why do you think appearance plays such a role with puberty? And especially during this time period?

❖ **Oprah** – I have seen it and have felt it, I have even felt it. The thing that struck me the most is that anybody who allows themselves to be defined outside of their own personal vision for themselves, that that is a form of insanity, and look what the world has done to women. You see young girls now, fourteen, fifteen years old already have plastic surgery.

❖ **Alexandra** – Peer relations are so finicky as well. The ice cream scene with the girls and Maureen made me laugh, but then saddened my heart. Maureen just wanted friends, and yet Pecola and her sisters were so quick to push her away.

❖ **Alexandra** – Along with peer relationships, family relationships play quite an impact on development in this time of a person's life. Pecola wants to disappear– how many other children feel this way? From your past TV show, Oprah, I remember the stories of Clayton Moss and Danielle, the girl in the window, facing child neglect and abuse. I wish Pecola could have been on your show.

❖ **Oprah** – It's because if you were a child as I was, where you don't feel loved, and never felt any love, and when it happens to you, as I say to my friends with daughters and young sons, don't think it's going to be the horrible rape falling unconscious that you see with Chooley and Pecola the first time. A lot of times it's so subtle. For me, it started with a nineteen-year-old cousin playing footsies. You know? And so you're thinking, “He likes me, he likes me.” For me, it started with me following my uncles around every time they came to visit me, “He likes me, he likes me.” That does not mean you are asking to be raped, but you want the closeness. Just like Pecola thought that at least I was touched.

❖ **Alexandra** – I think *The Blues Eye* alludes to the need of an earlier sex education for children. I know many parents, especially Christians, shy

away from this topic, which only reinforces a stigma and adds to the likelihood of experiencing sexual assault. I want to take a moment to recommend current and prospective parents the children's book *Who Made Me* by Malcolm and Meryl Doney. Seeing how Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia react to Pecola having her menstruation for the first time, does show the humor and wholesomeness intertwined with childhood innocence. Yet, educating children on this topic early seems to be more beneficial.

❖ **Oprah-** Many women carry the guilt of it and the shame of it, because what did I have to do with it? Because sex felt good, because it felt good.

❖ **Alexandra-** As a final point, Oprah, I want to bring up how Morrison does not only focus on adolescent struggles, but does incorporate more adult themes. For instance, with Paulina, she yearns for more intimacy and actual love from her husband, but instead just receives abuse and coldness from Cholly. And so I think spouses, especially wives, should read this book as either a way to relate or perhaps motivation to improve a current situation. I don't want to undermine or forget about Paulina's struggles, we just didn't have enough time today to dive into her story. But I do want to shine light on how this is far too common of an issue amongst women.

❖ **Oprah-** And that's what's so powerful about *The Bluest Eye*. It's why you know, I feel like I would have done my job, I can retire if I get the whole country to read the book. Because I think it is a way of saying to the world: this is what we're talking about. When people, "Racist? I'm not racist, that doesn't exist." Or, "What are you talking about?" To be able to see the world through the eyes of Pecola, that that is what so many of us have seen. And that's why it is so exciting to go into a bookstore, Border's, which is right across the street from me, and to see Pecola displayed. Redeemed, redeemed. It will change the world.

❖ **Alexandra-** Thank you so, so much for being part of our podcast today Oprah. You have been a huge inspiration in my life, so it really is a dream come true getting to share stories with an audience together. As a thank you gift, I would like to gift you with your very own box of Jaffa Cakes and a gift card to Maggie Mays. Listeners, thank you all so much for joining today's episode on Alternative Adolescence. Before we end, I do want to share a few book recommendations I found to have similar stories to *The Bluest Eye*:

- ***Out of My Mind*** by Sharon M. Draper- Melody suffers from cerebral palsy, but is a genius. When she enters the high school's honors class, rejection and bullying are thrown her way.
- ***The Glass Castle*** by Jeanette Walls- Walls suffered extreme poverty growing up, as well as neglect and instability from her parents. Her memoir and movie line up with Pecola's heartbreak and provide a story of hope.
- ***Motorhome Prophecies*** by Carrie Sheffield- I actually was able to meet Carrie last spring, she is a phenomenal role model for young women and girls. In her book, she describes her childhood experience in a cult while living in a mobile home, with a sibling that tried to rape her and a father that claimed to be the world's next savior. Through her pain and faith journey, she provides inspiration for us all to push through the hard times.
- ❖ **Alexandra-** Well, I guess that cuts us off for today. If your fiction cravings were met, hopefully we will see you next time on Fiction Addiction. Have a good read.
- ❖ **Music-** Eccentric song