

1) Crank by Ellen Hopkins

Availability: libraries at Francis Howell Middle School, Barnwell Middle School, and all Francis Howell district high schools.

Notes: Story of a junior in high school who travels to see her dad and who becomes addicted to meth (“crank”) while visiting him. Contrast between the person she was and the person she became as a result of addiction. While the author states she hopes to deter readers from the monster that is meth – there is significant detail about substance abuse and sexual content in the book.

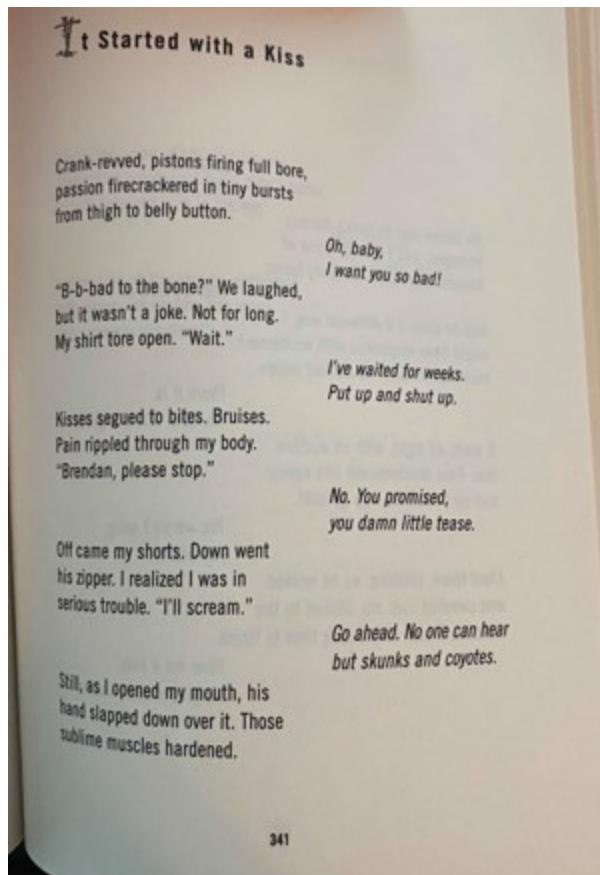
Sample pages:

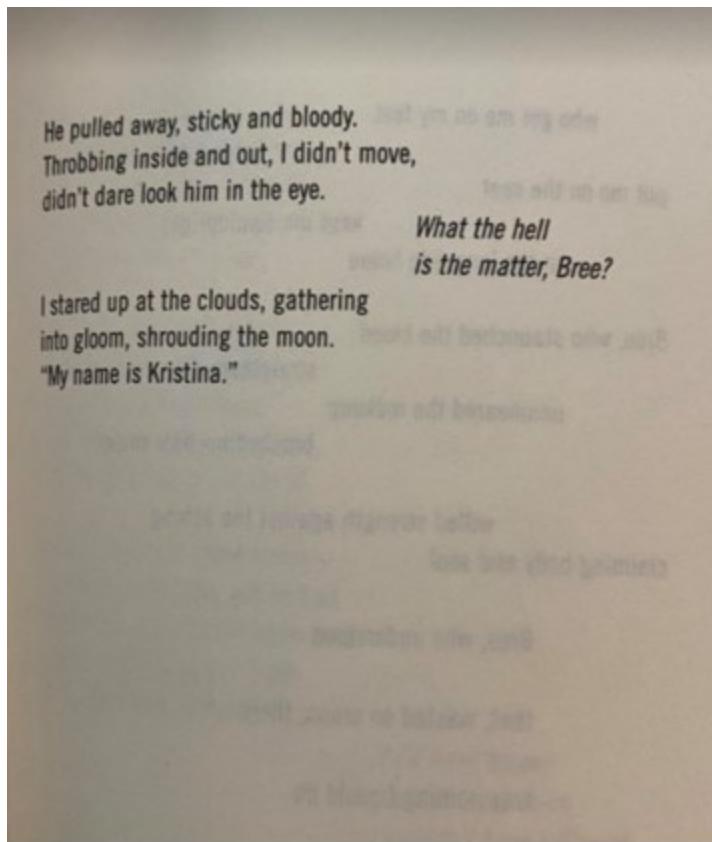
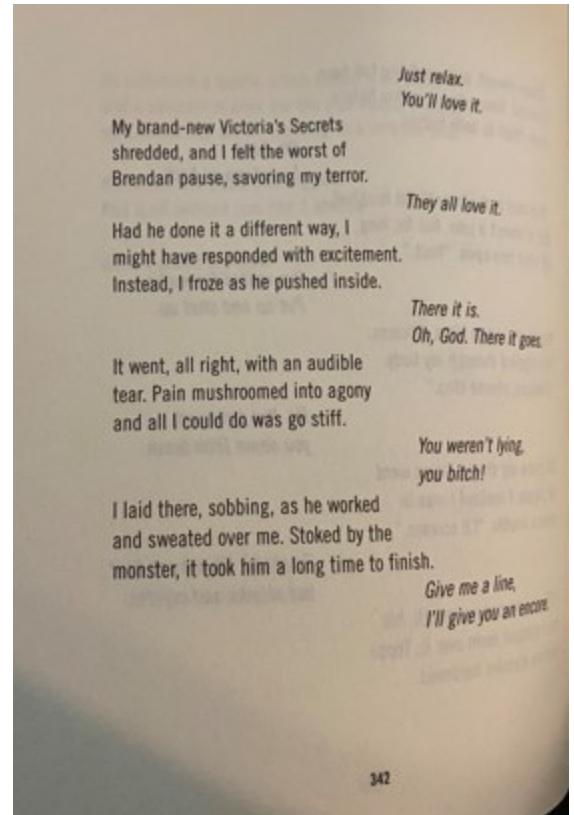
- Multiple scenes throughout the book with detailed information about substance abuse. Examples of substance abuse in the book include underage drinking, smoking cigarettes, using pot, using meth, and using ecstasy at a rave. A few examples can be found on pages 308, 379, and 426-437.
- There are various references to sex and making out throughout the book. There is a very graphic/detailed rape scene on pages 341-343.

- There are a number of very crude references throughout this book. Several of these examples can be found on pages 165, 264, 274, and 510.
- In the scene of the rave where people are doing drugs it talks about people cutting each other and drinking each other's blood (page 437).
- The main character steals her mom's bank card out of the mail to pay for her drug habit (pages 475-476).
- A discussion between the main character and her friend about the decision to adopt vs. abort contains a mention of a mom choosing to give birth and then changing her mind and killing her baby (page 513).
- The book includes a scene where the main character is receiving a Planned Parenthood consultation about her pregnancy options. It mentions that to abort her baby she would only need \$500 and would not need to tell her parents (page 490).

Screen Shots:

From the graphic rape scene





From pages describing substance abuse and being high

We Went into Her Room

Locked the door. Sat on the bed.
Robyn produced a V of crusty foil,
tapped in the last crumbs of powder.

*This little bit will go right to your
brain and won't clog your sinuses.*

Won't stay there, draining, little by
little. Oh, no. You blow straight through
the roof in one giant puff of smoke.

*It's an awesome rush. And you won't
stay awake for days.*

She handed me the stub of a Slurpee
straw and showed me how to hold it
just above one end of the V.

*When it starts to smoke, suck fast.
Hold it in as long as you can.*

Robyn held a match just below the
yellow powder. It browned, bubbled,
smoked. A waft traveled up the V.

*Here it comes. Don't let it get away.
Oh, God, that smells good!*

It tasted nasty. But it took me higher
than ever before. The monster
silhouetted in my brain.

Ecstasy Is Hard to Describe

It's like falling softly into a pool of crystal mountain water.

floating on your back circular beneath vibrant sky.

deciphering codes in the clouds spinning dizzy fast.

It isn't at all like going clear out of your head lunatic mad.

throwing yourself in front of a runaway train insane.

hallucinating black widows and black helicopters behind you crazy.

Elevation

Oh, but a whole lot more. They say people
who die from ecstasy die from overheating.

Adding speed to the mix accelerates the process
because it makes you want to dance until the sun comes up.

The music made me dance. It entered my brain,
firing spark plugs and pistons. It revved me to my feet.

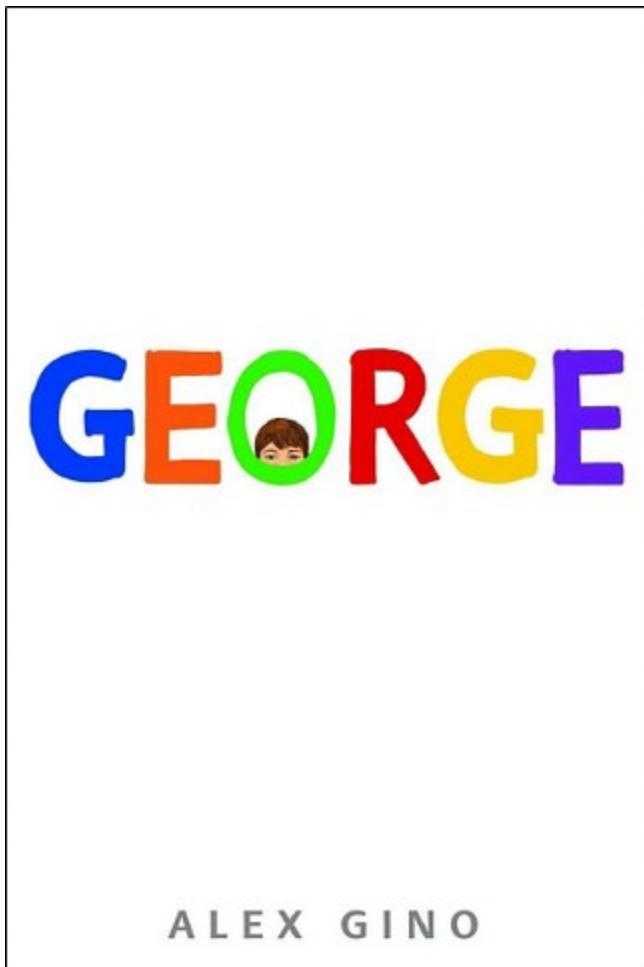
The crank was jet fuel, pumping through my veins, propulsion.
I shifted into overdrive, motor heating steadily.

I danced with guys, I danced with girls, hotter, closer,
melting together like candles in a south-facing window.

Our dance was primitive, beautiful, waves at high tide.
Our dance was sensual, sexual, and yet somehow innocent.

Spent calories orbited, raising temperatures. Some drank alcohol.
The wise drank water. It tasted as good as champagne.

And then somehow the subject of my birthday came up.
Word spread and the mood elevated beyond celebratory.



2) George by Alex Gino

Availability: libraries at Hollenbeck Middle School, Barnwell Middle School, and Saeger Middle School.

Notes: Story of a fourth grade biological male and his journey as he identifies as female and comes out as transgender to the people in his life. The story centers on the main character and best friend who audition to be in Charlotte's Web at their school. The main character struggles because they want to play the traditionally female role of Charlotte but they are biologically male. George surprises family, friends, and classmates by coming out and playing the female role of Charlotte. Francis Howell parents and community members might very well have different perspectives about the appropriateness of this book for district middle schoolers. While we all wish to be kind to others, some parents are likely to feel the book crosses some lines (explained below).

Sample pages:

- George discusses use of hormones and puberty blockers in a very flippant way that makes it sound easy peasy. There is no acknowledgement of potential side effects or potential long-term harm to individuals using these medications to block puberty or transition (Pages

47 and 104). Students can read this information in George without the awareness or consent of their parents. Parents interested in digging a bit deeper on the issue of puberty blockers and hormone use might consider reading Abigail Shrier's 2020 book Irreversible Damage.

- George crosses a line by suggesting clearing internet search history to hide searches from parents. Teens are at risk of becoming victims of online predators, and we have books in our schools that suggest hiding internet search history from parents? (Page 105)
- George crosses another line by featuring a principal interfering in the business of the family. The principal offers an open door for the fourth grade student to come talk to her when she realizes the parent might not be supportive of the child's decision to come out identifying as female. (Pages 160-161). Literature available in schools should not normalize principals and educators going around parental authority.
- The book also includes a scene in which the fourth grade biological male changes clothes in the same bedroom as his fourth grade biological female best friend (albeit with their backs turned). The biological female even gives the biological male best friend a pair of her underwear so that he has female underwear that he can wear on his trip to the zoo. Many parents would find this creepy and inappropriate. (Page 187).

Screen Shots:

Mentions of hormones and puberty blockers

So George knew it could be done. A boy could become a girl. She had since read on the Internet that you could take girl hormones that would change your body, and you could get a bunch of different surgeries if you wanted them and had the money. This was called *transitioning*. You could even start before you were eighteen with pills called androgen blockers that stopped the boy hormones already inside you from turning your body into a man's. But for that, you needed your parents' permission.

"George, whatever it is, you can tell me." Mom took George's hand in one of her own, and covered it with the other. "Whatever happens in your life, you can share it, and I will love you. You will always be my little boy, and that will never change. Even when you grow up to be an old man, I will still love you as my son."

George opened her lips, but there were no words in her mouth and only one thought in her brain: No!

"I'm sorry I got the part of Charlotte." She twisted the toe of her sneaker into the blacktop pavement.

George shrugged.

"Are you mad at me?" Kelly asked.

"No."

"Good."

Kelly took a deep breath. "And I'm sorry I ignored you last week." She scratched her neck. "And you know what? If you think you're a girl . . ."

George braced for Kelly's next words.

"Then I think you're a girl too!" Kelly leaped onto her best friend and gave her a hug so big they both nearly toppled over. The openmouthed surprise and joy on George's face only made Kelly smile harder.

"So you're, like, transgender or something?" Kelly whispered as best she could in her excitement. "I was reading on the Internet, and there are lots of people like you. Did you know you can take hormones so that your body, you know, doesn't go all manlike?"

Mentions of clearing internet search to hide info from parents

“Yeah, I know.” George had been reading websites about transitioning since Scott had taught her how to clear the web browser history on Mom’s computer. “But you need your parents’ permission.”

“Your mom’s pretty cool,” Kelly said, her eyebrows lifted. “Maybe she’d be okay with it.”

George shook her head and looked down, staring at her shoelaces. Even without closing her eyes, she could see her denim bag hanging from Mom’s long finger, swinging slightly. The words *It’s not cute anymore* echoed in her mind. She told Kelly about her bag of girls’ magazines, and about Mom taking it.

“But that’s not fair!” Kelly was indignant. “You didn’t steal them! What right does she have to take them from you?”

“Sometimes *transgender* people don’t get rights.” George had read on the Internet about transgender people being treated unfairly.

“That’s awful.”

Interference of school principal into family business

Mom's face turned to stone and her mouth grew small. "Let's not talk about this right now."

George noticed Principal Maldonado heading toward them, a soft smile on her face.

"Congratulations! You were wonderful!" she said to George, then turned to Mom. "Your kid was great tonight. You just might have a famous actor on your hands someday."

"Thank you." Mom smiled politely. "He certainly is special."

"Well, you can't control who your children are, but you can certainly support them, am I right?" Principal Maldonado's earrings sparkled in the auditorium light.

"Excuse us," said Mom, searching awkwardly in her purse for some imaginary item. "But we've got to get home to dinner."

"Well, make sure the star gets extra dessert tonight!" Principal Maldonado put her arm around George. She smelled of vanilla.

"I certainly will," said Mom.

"That was beautiful, George. Really beautiful." Ms. Maldonado put her lips close to George's ear and whispered, "My door is always open," before she slipped away.

Mom took George by the hand and walked briskly through the lingering crowd. Once they were out in the hallway, the murmurs from the auditorium were quieter, and their footsteps echoed. Outside, it was dark enough that the streetlamps had turned on, but the sky still held a bit of light. Mom jiggled her keys in her palm. Neither she nor George said a word.

At home, they watched a dancing competition on television as they ate a dinner of spaghetti. Scott was

Female student giving underwear to male best friend from school

every angle she could. She faced away from the big mirror and held a hand mirror so she could see her back.

"Kelly?" Melissa stopped her friend while she was upright. "There's just one more thing."

"Melissa, stop worrying. You look perfect."

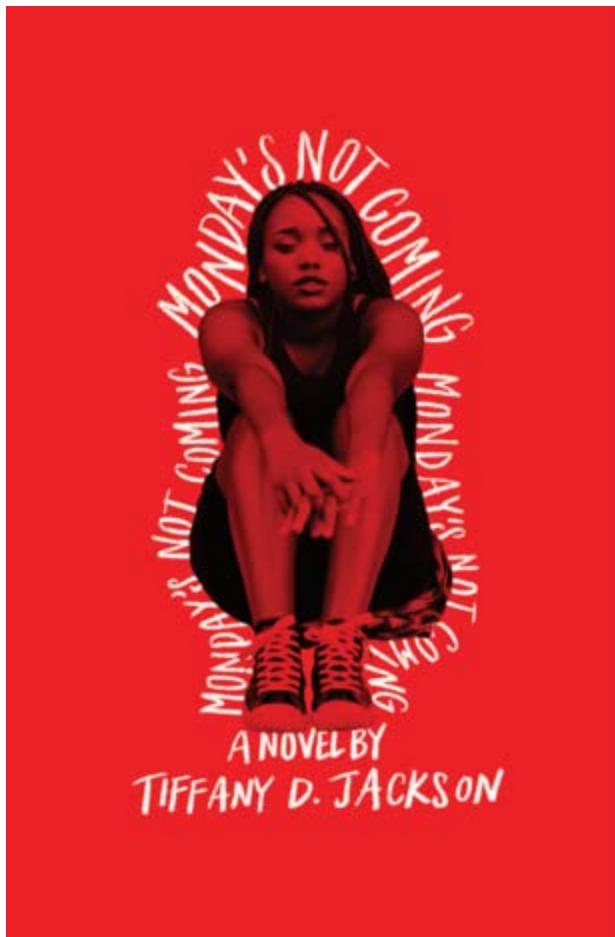
"It's just . . . I'm wearing boys' underpants." Melissa felt the wide band of elastic around her waist that held up her white boys' briefs. No one would be able to see them, but she would know all day that they were there.

"Ew! Yuck! Pull them off!" Kelly was already at her dresser drawer. She handed Melissa a pair of light-pink underwear covered in tiny red hearts. They were small and light. "You can have them. Don't worry. They're clean."

"Are you sure?" Melissa asked.

"Of course. I have too many pairs anyway."

Melissa turned around and began to take off the purple skirt.



3) Monday's Not Coming by Tiffany Jackson

Availability: libraries at Hollenbeck Middle School, Barnwell Middle School, Saeger Middle School, Francis Howell Middle School, and all Francis Howell School District high schools.

Notes: An interesting story about an 8th grade student whose best friend goes missing. It turns out that the best friend and best friend's younger brother are murdered by their abusive mother and are stuffed in a freezer in the family townhome. The book explores friendship and coming of age. It opens the reader's eyes to the fact that we often do not know a lot about the people closest to us. It was hard to put this book down as it was a very compelling read. However, there are a number of mature themes that likely make this inappropriate for middle schoolers and younger high school students.

Sample pages:

- Language throughout the book is crude (Examples: "Dyke bitch" pg. 11, "Fuck" pg. 136, "Nigga" pg. 136, "Licking your box" (a reference to oral sex) pg. 194, "A 'ho is a 'ho, I ain't gonna sugarcoat shit to make it easier for her to swallow! And, we all know you know how to swallow" pg. 287).
- Sex scene (pgs. 246-247).
- House party with underage drinking (a student as young as 8th grade drinking) (pg. 293).

- Making out and inappropriate touching involving students from 8th grade through high school (pg. 297).
- Reference to a minor “sucking dick” (pg. 299).
- Crude reference to the body of the murdered girl, “They thawed that bitch out like a fucking turkey!” (Pg. 410).
- **Screen Shots:**

Sex Scene

SNEAKERS.

“Shhh,” the boy hushed her, his voice muffled. “You making a mess.”

I tiptoed toward the door, peering through the window at the boy—his pants around his ankles—squeezed between April’s straddled legs as she lay on top of a teacher’s desk.

I swung the door wide, letting the soft light from the hallway shine a spotlight on them.

"Shit," Keith muttered, pulling up his pants and jumping off April. She scrambled to cover herself, her mouth dropping.

"Claudia?" she mumbled in shock.

Keith did a double take. "Who the hell is this?"

April wiggled off the desk, buttoning her jeans while glaring at me. "She's . . . my little sister's friend."

"April . . . what are you doing?" I gasped, blurting out the first thought stuck on my tongue. I mean, how could she have sex with some guy in a classroom? Didn't she know what people already said about her? Didn't she know how it embarrassed Monday?

Heavy footsteps echoed in the hall and we froze. Damn, a teacher followed me. We're all going to be in trouble now, I thought. Keith held a finger up to his lips, dipping into the shadows as the footsteps grew louder. I whipped around, bracing myself, as Michael appeared.

Keith smiled, relaxing. "Oh, what's up, Mikey?"

Michael took in the scene as Keith continued to adjust his pants. His eyes narrowed.

"Are you okay?" he asked, gently touching my elbow.

"Yeah," I mumbled.

Keith chuckled and nodded in my direction. "Yo, Mikey, you robbing the cradle now?"

House Party (Involving students as young as 8th grade making out and drinking)

I felt, I couldn't help thinking that Monday had always wanted to be a part of this crowd. She wanted this life, And here I am, living it without her.

"Damn, you so sexy when you dance," a deep voice said behind us.

Megan's back straightened before she spun around. "Oh my God! You came!"

Kam grinned and she jumped into his arms.

"I thought you couldn't make it," Megan said, her face red and sweaty.

They started kissing and swaying slow. I felt silly standing there watching them, but I didn't know where else to go. The girls were back on the sofa with the boys, kissing. I mean, REALLY kissing, tongues in each other's mouths, hands up shirts, touching their mother's bras. So I stayed on the floor, next to Megan and Kam. I kept dancing, lost in the music until some boy pushed up behind me, holding my hips. I froze, looking to Megan for help. She nodded and mouthed an "it's okay."

It's cool; this is what girls do at parties, I told myself, and kept dancing—with a boy I couldn't see, the alcohol making my waist wind faster. The boy pulled me tighter to him, heat pulsing off his chest. And it felt . . . well . . . good. Like I could dance all night with him. My heart raced, wondering if it was Michael moving on me like this, touching me like this. Bet I'm not just some church girl now!

Mention of 8th Grader "Sucking Dick"

No wonder I thought he looked so familiar. "But . . . Kam's a good guy! And you're . . ."

Jacob's face tightened. "Man, whatever."

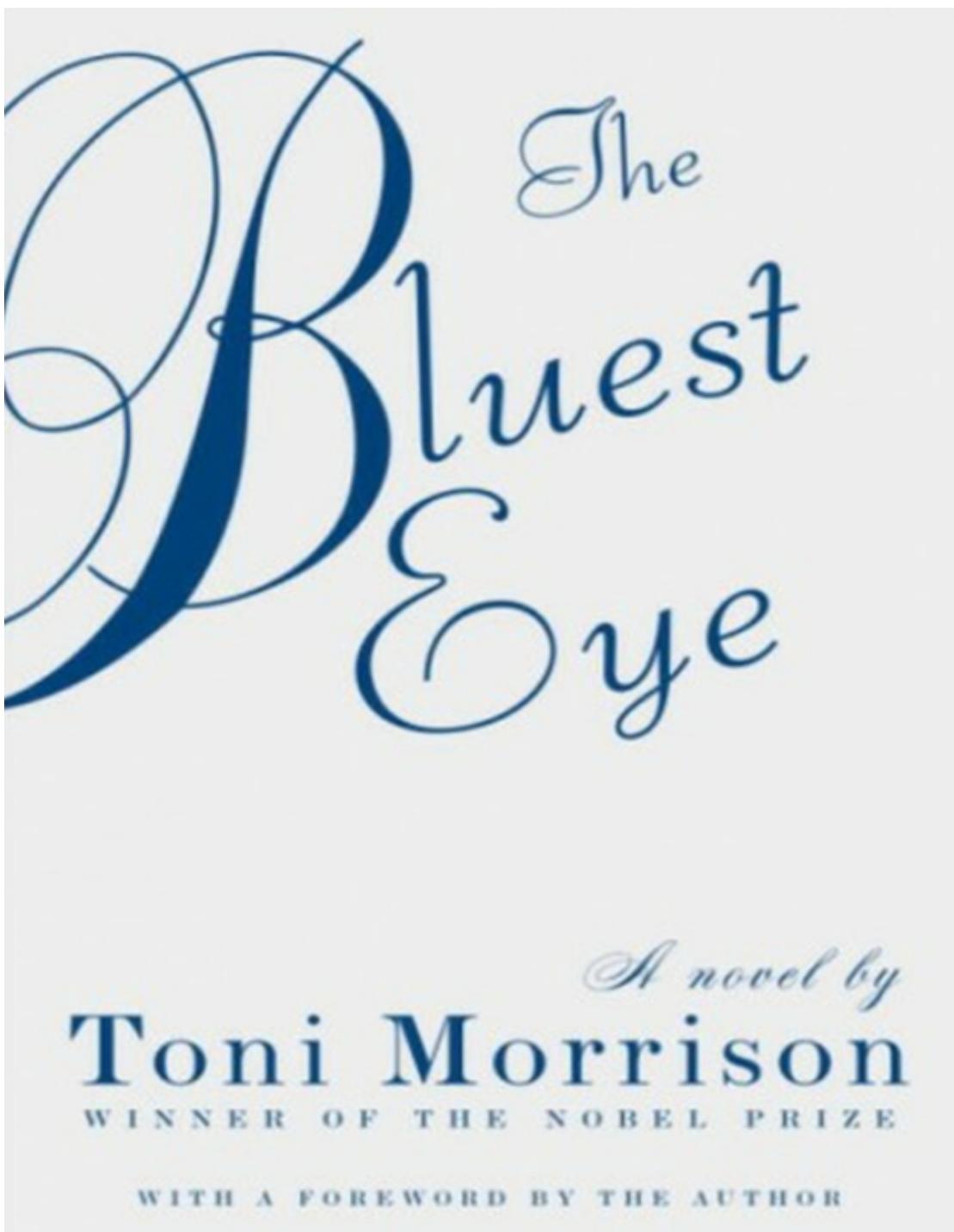
I swallowed. "You said something about you were gonna tell me the truth. What'd you mean by that?"

Jacob rolled his eyes. "Aight, look. Me and Monday . . . we DID do something." He took a deep breath. "She . . . sucked my dick. I didn't really want it to happen, it just kinda . . . did."

"Ew, that's nasty! You lying!"

"I swear on my moms, she did! She just kept saying she really wanna be together, was trying to come in my house and stuff all the time . . . My moms said she was too fast."

That word *fast* stuck out like a thorn threatening to pop



4) The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

Availability: Libraries at Francis Howell North High School and Francis Howell High School.
Available in print and audio formats.

Notes: This book is very well written and is often regarded as a classic. It is the story of a young black woman in the 1930's. The young woman comes from a very poor family with a drunk and

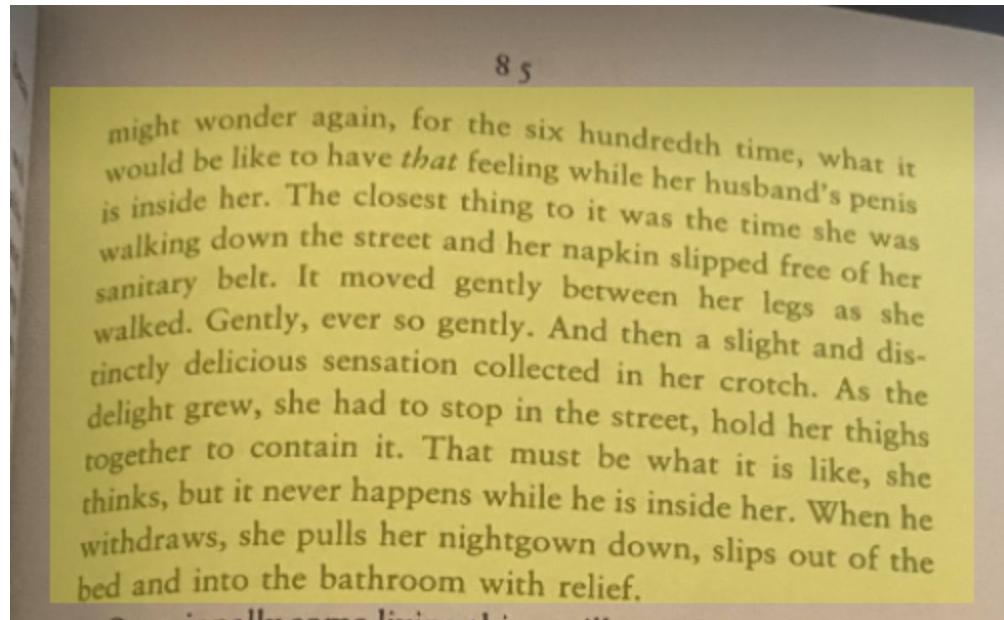
abusive father. She struggles with self-image and feeling ugly and worthless. Her feelings about herself are aggravated by the way those around her treat her and by the unjust way black people were often viewed and treated in general in that time period in the US. The book also explores the life circumstances that contributed to the dysfunction of the abusive father. This is a book that might be more appropriate for adult readers than teens due to the very graphic sexual content.

Sample pages:

- The N word or variations of this are used multiple times in the book. Of course, this word was used in the historical time period the story is set in. (Pg. 13, 42, 87)
- Very many graphic sexual references and scenes throughout the book – including incest and pedophilia (Pgs. 84-85, 130-131, 139, 147-148, 162-163, 166, 178-179, 181)

Screen Shots:

Sexually Graphic Commentary



The Incestuous Rape of 11 Year Old

The Bluest Eye

respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love? His hatred of her slimed in his stomach and threatened to become vomit. But just before the puke moved from anticipation to sensation, she shifted her weight and stood on one foot scratching the back of her calf with her toe. It was a quiet and pitiful gesture. Her hands were going around and around a frying pan, scraping flecks of black into cold, greasy dishwater. The timid, tucked-in look of the scratching toe—that was what Pauline was doing the first time he saw her in Kentucky. Leaning over a fence staring at nothing in particular. The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg. It was such a small and simple gesture, but it filled him then with a wondering softness. Not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protectiveness. A desire to cover her foot with his hand and gently nibble away the itch from the calf with his teeth. He did it then, and started Pauline into laughter. He did it now.

The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. Crawling on all fours toward her, he raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke. Pecola lost her balance and was about to careen to the floor. Cholly raised his other hand to her hips to save her from falling. He put his head down and nibbled at the back of her leg. His mouth trembled at the firm sweetness of the flesh. He closed his eyes, letting his fingers dig into her waist. The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy laughter had been. The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus. Surrounding all of this lust was a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck

her—tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made—a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon.

Following the disintegration—the falling away—of sexual desire, he was conscious of her wet, soapy hands on his wrists, the fingers clenching, but whether her grip was from a hopeless but stubborn struggle to be free, or from some other emotion, he could not tell.

Removing himself from her was so painful to him he cut it short and snatched his genitals out of the dry harbor of her vagina. She appeared to have fainted. Cholly stood up and could see only her grayish panties, so sad and limp around her ankles. Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her.

So when the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her.

the contemplation of Your Body and fall deeply into the contemplation of theirs? The buds. The buds on some of these saplings. They were mean, you know, mean and tender. Mean little buds resisting the touch, springing like rubber. But aggressive. Daring me to touch. Commanding me to touch. Not a bit shy, as you'd suppose. They stuck out at me, oh yes, at me. Slender-chested, finger-chested lassies. Have you ever seen them, Lord? I mean, really seen them? One could not see them and not love them. You who made them must have considered them lovely even as an idea—how much more lovely is the manifestation of that idea. I couldn't, as you must recall, keep my hands, my mouth, off them. Salt-sweet. Like not quite ripe strawberries covered with the light salt sweat of running days and hopping, skipping, jumping hours.

The love of them—the touch, taste, and feel of them—was not just an easy luxurious human vice; they were, for me, A Thing To Do Instead. Instead of Papa, instead of the Cloth, instead of Velma, and I chose not to do without them. But I didn't go into the church. At least I didn't do that. As to what I did do? I told people I knew all about You. That I had received Your Powers. It was not a complete lie; but it was a *complete* lie. I should never have, I admit, I should never have taken their money in exchange for well-phrased, well-placed, well-faced lies. But, mark you, I hated it. Not for a moment did I love the lies or the money.

But consider: The woman who left the hotel room.

Consider: The greentime, the noontime of the archipelago.