FOR THE TEACHER

ACTIVITY 1

Key terms for reading
Ta-Nehisi Coates: *Between the World and Me*

Essential Question:

1. What privileges are conferred or denied based on one’s identity?

Learning Goals:

1. Students will understand the meanings of key terms and concepts in Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me*.
2. Students will define and examine the key terms an author’s argument and will see how this is an important skill for deeper understanding of the argument as a whole.

Lesson Plan:

1. Ask students about historical and contemporary examples of violence against African Americans.
2. Distribute Key Terms for Reading Worksheet and give students time to answer questions independently. After 10-15 minutes, break students into small groups to discuss their answers.
3. Give students time to talk in small groups and then bring them back to a whole group discussion to continue to develop their answers.
## ON BEING WHITE

Closely read pages 5-12.

1. Explain in your own words what the following quotations mean and how they serve Coates’s larger argument.

   a. “Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world” (7).

   b. “But race is the child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming ‘the people’ has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy.” (7)

   c. “Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible—this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white.” (7)

2. From the reading, as well as your prior knowledge, what privileges are conferred or denied based on an individual’s or group’s perceived identity? Elaborate.

## THE BODY

Closely read pages 5-12.

1. How does Coates describe his own body?

2. Highlight the instances in which Coates uses the word “body.” What is the impact of the use of this word? Does the impact change for different situations in the book?

3. Coates writes about the precarious position of the Black body in America. What are some of specific examples of the dangers that face the Black body?

4. Explain what Coates means when he writes about learning to live within your own body.
# THE DREAM

Closely read pages 10-11.

1. Why does Coates capitalize the word “Dream”?

2. In your own words, explain what Coates means by “the Dream.”

3. What is your prior knowledge of the use of “dream” in American literature and culture?

4. Does Coates’s notion of “the Dream” match the qualities of your own experience?

5. Who is able to experience “the Dream” and who isn’t able to experience it?

6. Coates uses imagery and figurative language to describe “the Dream.” Identify specific examples and explain how the details work to serve his purpose?

7. Explain what Coates means by “within a country lost in the Dream.”

# THE MECCA

Closely read p. 40.

1. What is the “Mecca”? Why does Coates use this term?

2. How does Coates describe the Mecca on p. 40?

3. Describe the students who attend the Mecca. Who are some notable alumni?

4. How does Coates’s perception of the Mecca change over time?
Essential Questions:

1. Why is it important for the reader to understand historical as well as contemporary examples of violence against African Americans?
2. How does this violence shape the experience of being Black in America?
3. In particular, how do police shootings of unarmed Black men and women and the low conviction rates for these officers affect the Black community’s perception of the police?

Learning Goals:

1. Students will understand the historical context surrounding the deaths of Michael Brown and Prince Jones and how they shaped Coates’s text.
2. Students will practice close reading and annotating a non-fiction text.

Lesson Plan:

1. Ask students about prior knowledge about historical examples of violence against African Americans (e.g., lynching, murder, police brutality).
2. Provide students with excerpts for close reading (pp. 5-12 and pp. 75-88). Assign reading for homework or provide students with time to read in class.
3. Distribute “Who Is Michael Brown” Worksheet and give students time to answer questions independently. After 10-15 minutes, break students into small groups to discuss their answers. Give students time to talk and then bring them back to a whole group discussion to continue to develop their answers.
4. Assessment: you may consider asking your students to take their answers home and type up fuller responses.

Additional Teaching Resources for Reading and Discovery

Charles M. Blow, *NY Times* Op/Ed:
“Michael Brown and Black Men” 13 Aug. 2014.


WORKSHEET: WHO IS MICHAEL BROWN?

“That was the week you learned that the killers of Michael Brown would go free”

Who is Michael Brown?

1. Who was Michael Brown?

2. How does his story serve as the impetus for the writing of this book?

3. Coates writes, “That was the week you learned that the killers of Michael Brown would go free.” To whom does the “you” refer in this quotation?

4. Why does Coates include the names of Eric Garner, Renisha McBride, John Crawford, Tamir Rice, and Marlene Pinnock (p. 9)?

For Further Reading and Discovery

Charles M. Blow, *NY Times* Op/Ed:

“Michael Brown and Black Men” 13 Aug. 2014.


Essential Questions:
1. What is the impact of choosing poetry as a tool of social justice?
2. When have you read poems in a history or social studies class?
3. Why do you think most history is presented in prose and not poetry?

Learning Goals:
1. Students will contemplate the genre of poetry and its impact upon the reader.
2. Students will consider the place of poetry in a history or social studies class.
3. Students will do a close reading of a poem, both for comprehension and an understanding of the author’s purpose.

Lesson Plan:
1. Hand out worksheet 3 and a copy of Richard Wright’s *Between the World and Me*.
2. Discuss poetry as a form (see text box 1).
3. Discuss poetry in the history classroom (see text box 2).
4. After reading the poem independently (or teacher may choose to read it aloud), students will work in small groups to answer the worksheet questions. Then, they can share answers with the whole class.

TEXT BOX 1: WHY POETRY?
Why might a writer choose to write a poem or tell a story to convey an example of violence? How does a poem or story differ from a statistic?

TEXT BOX 2: POETRY IN HISTORY CLASS?
Does poetry have a place in a history or social studies class? How could poetry contribute to our understanding of history? Why do you think poetry is not often read in history classes?

ADDITIONAL TEACHER RESOURCES FOR READING AND DISCOVERY
Bernstein, Joel. *60 Minutes*. “The Rosewood Massacre.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7scd7wwwsAc
“Florida Terror” from the PBS documentary *Freedom Never Dies*. 
http://www.pbs.org/harrymoore/terror/index.html
The title of Coates’s book *Between the World and Me* is taken from Richard Wright’s 1935 poem of the same name.

Directions: on a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions about Richard Wright’s poem “Between the World and Me.” Be prepared to share your answers in a class discussion.

Reading Comprehension

1. What is the “thing” the speaker “stumbled suddenly upon”?

2. Retell the story in the poem in your own words.

3. What do you know about lynching in America?

4. How does the poem “Between the World and Me” promote social justice?

5. Why do you think the author chose this particular format to convey that purpose?
Essential Questions:
1. What can “white picket fences” symbolize in American culture?
2. How can we connect *The White Picket Fence* to Coates’s notion of “the Dream”?

Learning Goals:
1. Students will learn how to apply the rules of rhetoric and effective writing to works of art.
2. Students will compare and contrast how a work of visual art and a work of non-fiction address the concept of the American dream.

Lesson Plan:
1. Build on Activity 1 and the key term of “the Dream” in Coates’s text.
2. Arrange students into small, even-numbered groups.
3. Provide students with copies of Prevard’s *The White Picket Fence* (in color, if possible) and the Visual Rhetoric Viewing Guide. Project the image onto the board.
4. Define rhetoric for your students (see text box 1)
5. Ask about white picket fences (see text box 2)
7. Give students 15 minutes to discuss the painting in groups, then ask students to come to the board to label some details they found in the picture.
8. With approximately 10 minutes left in class, bring the small groups back to a whole group discussion to share ideas and continue labeling details.

**TEXT BOX 1: DEFINING RHETORIC**
The art of effective and/or persuasive writing or visuals, while establishing the speaker’s credibility, providing specific details and evidence, and appealing to the audience’s emotions.

**TEXT BOX 2: WHITE PICKET FENCES**
What, if any, prior knowledge do you have about “white picket fences” as an image in American culture? What can “white picket fences” symbolize?

**ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCES FOR READING AND DISCOVERY**
“The White Picket Fence: Defining the American Dream”: explore symbolism connected to the American Dream in this video from the documentary *Dream On*.
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/dream-on/resources/dream-on/
**VISUAL RHETORIC VIEWING GUIDE**

Use these questions as guides for observing and discussing the pictures. You do not have to answer them all. Imagine you are answering the questions for someone who cannot see the picture.

### WHAT IMAGES AND DETAILS APPEAL TO OUR:
- Emotions?
- Logic?
- Common experiences?

### COMMUNICATE WHAT YOU SEE
- Observe it.
- What do you see?
- Write it.
- Be as specific and as literal as possible.
- You don’t have to understand the image to describe it.

### VIEWING QUESTIONS
- What do you see?
- What is it about?
- To what does it relate?
- How is it composed?
- What details matter?
- What materials do you think it is made out of?
- What style cartoon is it? Realistic? Surreal? Exaggerated?
- What colors?
- What is the focal point? Is there a focal point?

### WHAT IS THE ARTIST’S THESIS?
- What is the artist’s purpose?
- What details lead you that conclusion?

### FOR FURTHER READING AND DISCOVERY

“The White Picket Fence: Defining the American Dream”:
Explore symbolism connected to the American Dream
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/dream-on/resources/dream-on/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT DO YOU SEE?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Work in small groups and examine Kelley Prevard’s <em>The White Picket Fence</em> <a href="https://kelley-prevard-9tmn.squarespace.com/warten/">https://kelley-prevard-9tmn.squarespace.com/warten/</a></td>
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- Use the Visual Rhetoric Viewing Guide to lead your small group discussion.
- Be prepared to stop and report out observations in whole-group discussions.
- You should work collaboratively on the ideas, but please have your written work represent your own thoughts and efforts.

1. What, if any, prior knowledge do you have about “white picket fences” as an image in American culture? What can “white picket fences” symbolize?

2. What do you see in the painting?

3. Identify specific objects in the picture and then describe their significance. Why does Prevard include them in her painting?

4. In your own words, tell the story of *The White Picket Fence*. 