

**EDUCATION**

THE APOLLO THEATER STUDY GUIDE

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A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

**TA-NEHISI  
COATES**

**BETWEEN  
THE WORLD  
AND ME**



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# BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME

BY RICHARD WRIGHT, 1935

And one morning while in the woods I stumbled  
suddenly upon the thing,  
Stumbled upon it in a grassy clearing guarded by scaly  
oaks and elms  
And the sooty details of the scene rose, thrusting  
themselves between the world and me....  
There was a design of white bones slumbering forgottenly  
upon a cushion of ashes.  
There was a charred stump of a sapling pointing a blunt  
finger accusingly at the sky.  
There were torn tree limbs, tiny veins of burnt leaves, and  
a scorched coil of greasy hemp;  
A vacant shoe, an empty tie, a ripped shirt, a lonely hat,  
and a pair of trousers stiff with black blood.  
And upon the trampled grass were buttons, dead matches,  
butt-ends of cigars and cigarettes, peanut shells, a  
drained gin-flask, and a whore's lipstick;  
Scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the  
lingering smell of gasoline.  
And through the morning air the sun poured yellow  
surprise into the eye sockets of the stony skull....  
And while I stood my mind was frozen within cold pity  
for the life that was gone.  
The ground gripped my feet and my heart was circled by  
icy walls of fear-  
The sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the  
grass and fumbled the leaves in the trees; the woods  
poured forth the hungry yelping of hounds; the  
darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the witnesses rose and lived:  
The dry bones stirred, rattled, lifted, melting themselves  
into my bones.  
The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into  
my flesh.  
The gin-flask passed from mouth to mouth, cigars and  
cigarettes glowed, the whore smeared lipstick red  
upon her lips,  
And a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that  
my life be burned....  
And then they had me, stripped me, battering my teeth  
into my throat till I swallowed my own blood.  
My voice was drowned in the roar of their voices, and my  
black wet body slipped and rolled in their hands as  
they bound me to the sapling.  
And my skin clung to the bubbling hot tar, falling from  
me in limp patches.  
And the down and quills of the white feathers sank into  
my raw flesh, and I moaned in my agony.  
Then my blood was cooled mercifully, cooled by a  
baptism of gasoline.  
And in a blaze of red I leaped to the sky as pain rose like water, boiling my limbs  
Panting, begging I clutched childlike, clutched to the hot  
sides of death.  
Now I am dry bones and my face a stony skull staring in  
yellow surprise at the sun....



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## INTRODUCTION

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This Resource Guide was created to integrate the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates and the subsequent theatrical production into classroom curriculum.

The Guide is comprised of short essays, along with resources and lesson plans from educators Tatesha Clark and Benton Green. Each lesson in the Resource Guide references themes discussed in the book. Lessons and activities are aligned with [Common Core Learning Standards](#) and can be used to link to Arts, English Language Arts, and Social Studies curricula or as stand-alone endeavors.

While the lessons were written for grades 9-12, they can be adapted for an older or slightly younger population. Lessons and activities are differentiated for a variety of student populations. Many vary in levels of [Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge \(DOK\)](#) so that learning is accessible at various student levels. Lessons are shaped around hands-on learning and collaborative group activities that allow students to work closely with one another and the lesson facilitator while providing opportunities for them to make connections between societal issues raised in Coates' writing and their own personal experiences.

The Guide provides supporting resources and references. These are inclusive of literature and poetry, film and video, works of art and music, and a review and interview with Coates. You are also invited to visit the [Apollo Digital Stage](#), an interactive digital blog. Here, you can consider events and people relevant to *Between the World and Me* and share your own thoughts on the book and production.

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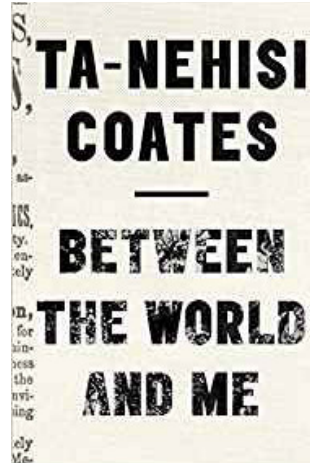
**"BUT RACE IS THE CHILD OF RACISM, NOT THE FATHER. AND THE PROCESS OF NAMING 'THE PEOPLE' HAS NEVER BEEN A MATTER OF GENEALOGY AND PHYSIOGNOMY SO MUCH AS ONE OF HIERARCHY. DIFFERENCE IN HUE AND HAIR IS OLD. BUT THE BELIEF IN THE PREEMINENCE OF HUE AND HAIR, THE NOTION THAT THESE FACTORS CAN CORRECTLY 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." (P. 7)**

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

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In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* offers a powerful framework for understanding our nation's history, the idea of race, and current events. Published in 2015, the book is structured as a letter to Coates' teenage son, Samori. Moving from Baltimore's Westside to

Howard University, New York City, and Paris, *Between the World and Me* addresses what it means to inhabit an African American body in today's society.



**Ta-Nehisi Coates** is the author of *The Beautiful Struggle*, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, and *Between the World and Me*, which won the National Book Award in 2015. He is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. Ta-Nehisi lives in New York City with his wife and son. His first novel *The Water Dancer* was published in the fall of 2019.

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## ABOUT THE THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

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Co-commissioned by the Apollo Theater and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, *Between the World and Me* had its theatrical world premiere at the Apollo Theater in April 2018. Conceived and directed by Apollo Theater Executive Producer, Kamilah Forbes, the production features a cast of actors who bring to life Coates's words, along with captivating stage projections and music performed live by musician and composer Jason Moran and his trio.

Book by Ta-Nehisi Coates  
Developed and Directed by Kamilah Forbes  
Original Score by Jason Moran  
Dramaturgy by Talvin Wilks  
Dramaturgy and Adaptation by Lauren Whitehead

[Watch excerpts from the theatrical production.](#)

## RESOURCE GUIDE CONTRIBUTORS

A Brooklyn native, **Tatesha Clark** has over a decade of experience inside New York City schools. A mother, activist, and writer, Clark has spent most of her career working with families, faculty, and administrators on how to bring anti-racist practices into their school community. As a classroom teacher for many years, she has passionately integrated equity

into the daily curriculum. She has presented on this topic as well as other facets of race, equity, and inclusion at both local and national conferences. Clark currently serves as the Director of Diversity and Equity at a K-12 independent school in New York City. In this role, she supports parents, faculty, board members, administrators, and staff on how to talk to children about race and racism. She also works with these constituents on examining their own racial identities and how to develop and apply an anti-bias lens to their work in and outside of schools. When not working, you will most likely find her with a book on a beach, listening to the waves crash along the shore.

**Benton Greene** is an artist, educator, and proud father. He is the curriculum writer and teaching artist for the Apollo Video Oral History Program that has enjoyed a 10-year residency at Wadleigh School for the Visual and Performing Arts. He teaches and writes the curriculum of three programs for Lincoln Center Theater and Lincoln Center Education as well. As an actor, Greene has worked in television, film, and commercials inclusive of *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Following*, Fios and Lincoln national campaigns, *Blue Bloods*, *Grand Theft Auto V* as well as opposite Mark Wahlberg in the film *Broken City*. He has worked extensively in theater and made his Broadway debut in the Pulitzer Prize winning play *Sweat*, which was nominated for four Tony Awards.



*Clockwise from top left: Joe Morton, Jason Moran, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Michelle Wilson performing Between the World and Me.*



## SECTION I



# ON BECOMING AN ANTI-BIAS EDUCATOR

BY TATESHA CLARK

I can vividly remember preparing for my first classroom as a head teacher. I had spent most of the summer scouring the aisles of stores like Target, IKEA, and The Container Store, determined that my students would arrive in the most put together, bright, and welcoming learning space.

I labeled cubbies, folders, and table baskets. I laminated our job chart cards and filled canisters with markers, pencils, crayons, colored pencils, and paint brushes.

Exhausted, I glanced over the room at the end of that Labor Day weekend so many years ago and felt proud that I was “ready” for my students to begin the year.

The first few days of school had proceeded without much fanfare. Students had entered the space, we began to learn routines, names were memorized, and we began planning for our first field trip.

At a pre-trip meeting, I was going over our transportation route, and the topic quickly evolved into neighborhoods and where members of our class lived. I was teaching at a

predominantly white independent school in New York City and most of my students lived within walking distance. Most of my students were also white and wealthy. I was the only black teacher in the school at the time.

One of my students raised his hand and asked, “Tatesha, where do you live?”

“Canarsie,” I replied.

The student scrunched up his nose, made a quizzical head tilt, and asked, “Well, where is that?”

I chuckled and told him, “Oh, that’s in Brooklyn, the last stop on the L train.”

Another student then chimed in and said, “My dad said that poor people live in Brooklyn, and that it’s dangerous and has lots of drugs and stuff. He also said that there’s lots of apartments there with bad guys who throw things out the windows and they litter, and that’s why Brooklyn is so dirty.”

At that moment, I had all eyes of my students on me. *How* should I answer? *Should* I answer? What if I say something that offends a parent or school leadership? All of these questions and more were swirling around inside my head.

This was the first of many instances where race and class came up in unplanned ways in my classroom. Whether I was teaching reading, writing, math, science, current events, 2nd graders, or high school students, issues of identity, systemic racism, authentic American History, immigration, religious freedom, politics, and social justice found its way into my classes. I had to decide: *What kind of teacher do I want to be?*



# DEVELOPING YOUR ANTI-BIAS LENS

Students who are exposed to multicultural education see the world at a much deeper level, become adept at identifying injustice, and are able to hold multiple perspectives when learning about the world around them.

However, before we can expect our students to be able to tackle these topics, we must begin the work for ourselves. Here are some tips on how to start the work of developing your own anti-bias lens:

● **Check Yourself for Bias** - As teachers, we are called on to lead with expertise and confidence. Yet, many of us have little experience with the work of unpacking our own unconscious bias and how it affects our interactions with students, staff, families, and fellow faculty members. Most educators in this country are white women, who are often leading classrooms filled with brown and black students. For white educators, this fact cannot and must not be ignored. What does it mean to lead and be responsible for a group of children who do not look like you? Where do you begin to understand and plan curriculum around the fact that your perspective, expectations, and cultural norms may be quite different than those you teach? This is not to say that we cannot teach children of different races or backgrounds than ourselves, but it is *how* and *what* we teach that must be carefully considered.

● **Professional Development** - Research professional development opportunities that will teach you more about equity and anti-bias curriculum. Since I began this work, there has been a consistent increase in these offerings across the country. Most workshops will qualify for funding from your school leadership and some may even have the ability to come in and do whole-school trainings.

● **Know Your Students and Their Families** - Getting to know exactly who your classroom is each day is a priority and will become an invaluable tool. Knowing a student's culture, religion, ethnicity, language(s) spoken at home, after school responsibilities, etc. will allow you to establish a more trusting and authentic relationship.

● **Read, and Read Some More!** - There's blogs, articles, books, podcasts, etc. dedicated to the support of helping one become more prepared to teach from an anti-bias framework.

Does your school have a book club? If not, try starting one! Commit the club to reading at least one diversity themed book this year. At my current school, we dedicate our summer reading to diversity and equity related topics, as well as podcasts and films, in order to capture as many faculty and staff members as possible, some of whom may not be readers.

The work and responsibility of being an anti-bias educator may seem daunting. It is. This may professionally be some of the hardest work you come across as it begins with a process of self-examination and reflection.

However, the more your eyes are opened to the systemic injustice and implicit biases around you that are operating within our institutions and society, the better equipped you will be to combat them. We owe it to ourselves and to our students to create classrooms where all facets of their identities are acknowledged and celebrated. It brings us back to the question that I faced early in my career- *What kind of teacher do you want to be?*

## RESOURCES

This compilation of resources will help you propel your journey to becoming an educator for social justice and equity.

Center for Racial Justice in Education: [\*Talking About Race with Students Workshop\*](#)

[\*Five Ways to Reduce Racial Bias in Your Children\*](#), by Jill Sutte, March 17, 2017

(Aimed at parents, this article also translates well for educators. References made to Coates's *Between the World and Me*.)

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, [\*Teaching about Controversial or Difficult Issues\*](#), Jinnie Spiegler, December 4, 2014

People's Institute for Survival and Beyond: [\*Undoing Racism Workshop\*](#)

Rethinking Schools, [\*Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers\*](#), Edited by Eric Gutstein, Bob Peterson, 2013

Rethinking Schools, [\*Teaching for Black Lives\*](#), Edited by Dyan Watson, Jesse Hagopian, Wayne Au, 2018

Learning for Justice: [\*Teaching at the Intersections\*](#) (Ways to begin to see your students through their multiple identities. Overall, a great website!)



## SECTION II



## AN ARTIST IN EDUCATION

BY BENTON GREENE

My family relocated to an affluent, secluded town in the California bay area from the heavily Caribbean, diverse community of East New York, Brooklyn where I grew up. This was pre-internet and my feelings of isolation in this predominantly White town seemed inescapable. I didn't see, hear, or experience a reflection of myself and my past anywhere. That exclusion was not limited to my geographic environment and extended through the textbooks, music, literature, plays, and curriculum that I ingested in school every day.

I remember watching our high school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and thinking that it certainly was not

meant for me; that there was a secret handshake that my family had not been taught when we received the keys to our new home. Many years later and a small handful of Shakespeare productions under my belt, those visceral experiences fuel my passion to use art as a tool for teaching creativity, community, healing, and cultural exploration. Curriculum creation is a beautiful alchemy of ethics, joy, and deep dives into engaging students in works of art for me with the ultimate goal of sparking student desire to explore and create.

I have had the great fortune to collaborate with brilliant directors and writers as an actor and I store every gem taught to me away, to be used in a classroom at some point in the future. My personal healing from those childhood isolations came greatly from the arts and I'm always excited to work on a project that may do the same for others. *Between the World and Me* has been the perfect storm of those aspirations.

I was invited to be a workshop actor for the production and helped in the development of the final text. It made the writing of this curriculum particularly satisfying and I'm excited to provide educators with a tool to help their students engage with this powerful, necessary work from Ta-Nehisi Coates.



# BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME: THE PATH FROM PAGE TO STAGE

BY BENTON GREENE

Upon her first read of *Between the World and Me*, the Apollo Theater's Executive Producer Kamilah Forbes knew she wanted to turn the visceral, solitary response she had into a collective experience; one in which "I could turn to my neighbor and get affirmation or I could turn to my neighbor to get support...a collective celebration and mourning process." The result is the stage production of *Between the World and Me*, which first premiered at the Apollo Theater in April 2018.

In order to lift the rich content of Ta-Nehisi Coates' groundbreaking text off the page, Forbes, a celebrated theater director, enlisted a team of collaborators to build texture and tone to birth this collective experience.

The first step was to adapt the beautifully dense book that is structured as a letter from Coates to his teenage son into a form that could be spoken from the stage and digested by an audience in one evening. *Between the World and Me* was partly inspired by the death of Mr. Coates's friend, Prince Jones, at the hands of police in Prince Georges County, Maryland. Coates writes with honesty and fullness about the terrors and injustices that many Black people face as well as the joys, institutions, and community that bind them.

Forbes worked with two dramaturges to adapt the text. Lauren Whitehead came on board as the key dramaturg, who focused on pulling out and compiling sections of text from the book and putting them together in script form. Talvin Wilks was charged with doing historical research to give a broader sense of context to the work.

Once the initial script was drafted, it was time to hear the language out loud. Forbes partnered with the Sundance Institute and brought actors into the process. They continued to edit and rearrange the script in workshops at the Institute and then in subsequent workshops in New York until the team had something that felt and sounded right.

Forbes was always clear that she wanted the performers to have scripts in front of them, for there to be no mistake that the words being spoken implicated us all, ultimately encouraging the audience to not dismiss the sometimes painful content with make-believe drama. The performers read from behind a podium with script in hand.

The next step was to add music to the tapestry. Forbes reflected, "Music has a way of teleporting you to a different emotional place." She knew the power of jazz musician Jason Moran's music and brought him into the project as the composer. What they ended up with is a trio of drums, upright bass, and Moran on piano. Unlike the orchestra in a musical where the music is heard but the musicians are not seen, Forbes placed the musicians center stage on an elevated platform. "They're intentionally ever-present because they're collaborating with the actors and the words, not backing them up," she said.

With the spoken and musical elements of the show in place, attention was turned to the visual aesthetics of the show. Michael Carnahan's set connects the worlds of text and music via a tall, blank visual backdrop on which images of Black bodies are projected by Tal Yarden's projection design. The team decided to animate still images to represent the pages of the book being brought to life. The images swirl together with lighting design and light plotting by Jane Cox and Tess James to further create tone and mood.

The final element in Kamilah Forbes' collective experience is the audience. The community of people that gather in whichever venue the *Between the World and Me* touring show is playing that night will always be who the show was created for and ultimately become the final collaborators, a collaboration that continues to develop as the show makes its way on an international tour.

## THE PATH FROM PAGE TO STAGE

Ta-Nehisi Coates  
Author



Kamilah Forbes  
Director



Talvin Wilks  
Dramaturgy

Lauren A. Whitehead  
Dramaturgy and  
Adaptation

Jason Moran  
Composer



Michael Carnahan  
Set Design

Tal Yarden  
Projection Design



# PAGE TO STAGE

## LESSON PLAN

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S):

Why adapt a non-fiction book into a theatrical production?

What storytelling elements can be used to create or aid the tone of the story?

### OBJECTIVE(S):

Students will compare the effectiveness of written versus performed mediums to convey meaning from the same source material. (DOK 2)

Students will apply the concepts they have learned to create their own theatrical interpretation of a text. (DOK 4)

### COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARD(S)

SL1-B - Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making; set clear goals and deadlines; and establish individual roles as needed.

RL-7 - Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized and or absent in each treatment.

### DO NOW: SOLITARY VS. COLLECTIVE

- Project *Aimless & On Guard, In Brooklyn* excerpt from *Between the World and Me* for class to read. Students are to read to themselves, not aloud;
- As a class, have students pick out three words/phrases that they find compelling or provocative;
- Underline the words/phrases;
- Assign the use of the following **theatrical devices** to each of the underlined words/phrases:

*First word/phrase:* Have two students say that word/phrase in **unison**.

*Second word/phrase:* Have three students **echo** the word/phrase when reached in reading.

*Third word/phrase:* Have entire class **whisper** the word/phrase when it is reached in reading.

### POSSIBLE PROCESSING QUESTIONS:

(Scribe this list on board)

1. *How did performing the excerpt differ from reading it by yourself?*

2. *What are other ways that we could have emphasized our chosen words?*

(10-15 minutes)

*Aimless & On Guard, in Brooklyn*

"We lived in a basement apartment in Brooklyn I doubt you remember down the street from Uncle Ben and his wife, your aunt Janai.

I remember borrowing two hundred dollars from Ben and it feeling like a million. I remember your grandfather coming to New York, taking me out for Ethiopian, after which I walked to the West Fourth Street subway station.

He handed me a check for \$120.

... I didn't always have things, but I had people---*I always had people. I had a mother/ father, who I would match against any other. I had a brother who looked out for me all through college. I had The Mecca that directed me. I had friends who would leap in front of a bus for me. You need to know I was loved, that whatever my lack of religious feeling, I have always loved my people...*" (p.108)

## MAIN ACTIVITY:

## PAGE TO STAGE PROCESS

### Facilitator Instructions to Class

"Today we're going to investigate the process of adapting a non-fiction book into a theatrical performance. The text you just read is an excerpt from the stage adaptation of *Between the World and Me* by award-winning writer Ta-Nehisi Coates. Kamilah Forbes, the Apollo Theater's Executive Producer and the stage adaptation's Director, worked with musicians, dramaturges (briefly define dramaturgy), and video and set designers in a collaborative process that created this new theatrical production."

### NEXT STEPS

Play clip of Ms. Forbes' vision for creating the theatrical production;

- Organize class into groups of five to six;
- Handout one copy of the essay, *Between the World and Me: The Path from Page to Stage*, which outlines the production collaboration process, to each group.

## FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS TO CLASS

“In your groups you are going to bring another selection of text from *Between the World and Me* to life using your creativity to accomplish the Director’s goal of “making it feel like a collective experience”. You can use any of the theatrical devices we listed or used before or others from your own imagination. You will have time to read the essay, *Between the World and Me: The Path from Page to Stage*, once you have read the text you will be performing.”

## NEXT STEPS

- Offer further suggestions of theatrical devices such as use of rhythm, sounds to punctuate ideas, or use of physicality (gestures, movement, facial expressions);
- Model each of the theatrical devices for the class, if time permits;
- Handout Excerpt and Production Roles sheet.

## FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS TO CLASS

“Read your excerpt from the script and discuss as a group. What do you think the tone of the piece is? What words or phrases do you want to emphasize? How can you make the text theatrical?”

## NEXT STEPS

- Write or project the three questions above on the board;
- Give students five minutes to discuss and answer in their groups;
- Go over the Production Roles listed below as a whole class:
  - Director - Offers suggestions and ideas to help guide the project from the written text to an engaging theatrical reading. A lead collaborator but not “the boss”.
  - Stage Manager - Responsible for keeping rehearsal focused to the task of performing the reading. Part time keeper, part symphony conductor.
  - Performer/Talent - These individuals will be reading the text and using their imagination and theatrical devices to engage the audience.
  - Dramaturg - Responsible for doing research and adding context to the creative process. They offer suggestions to the choices of theatrical devices used.
- Have groups cast a director, a stage manager, performers, and a dramaturg;
- Give following tasks to Stage Managers and Dramaturges:

## FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS TO STAGE MANAGERS AND DRAMATURGES

“Stage Managers, you have 15 minutes to organize this reading. Please give time check-ins to your group every five minutes. Dramaturges, please read through *The Path from Page to Stage* essay and report back to your groups with further information on how the professional production brought the show to life.”

## FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS TO DIRECTORS AND PERFORMERS/TALENT

“Directors and Performers, begin to make choices about how you want to tell the story in the text. Create at least three theatrical devices you may use and start rehearsing. You can build on these ideas as the Dramaturg pulls in additional information from the essay.”

- Assist groups as needed;
- Have Stage Managers check in after 15 minutes to report progress;
- Give five additional minutes to groups to finalize their preparation if needed;
- Have those groups that feel comfortable perform their reading. The class can be supportive by counting each group in with “3, 2, 1 action”. It is not necessary for all groups to perform.

(30 minutes)

## DIFFERENTIATION:

- The diverse skill sets required for each Production Role promotes student decision-making and empowerment;
- The use of video and written text supports varied learning styles;
- Students self-select how they will create their theatrical renderings and what the process will be.

## ASSESSMENT:

- You can show the video of excerpts from the theatrical production so that students can see how the actors interpreted passages from the book.

Possible processing questions:

1. What similarities or differences did you notice between your readings and the professional production?
2. What theatrical elements (sounds or visuals) did you notice?

(10 minutes)



# RACE, THE DREAM, AND THE BODY

## LESSON PLANS

### DAY 1: "RACE, THE CHILD OF RACISM"

#### GRADES 9-12

#### COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARD(S):

RH-2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S):

Why does Coates think racism created race?

What examples does he use to support his claim?

#### OBJECTIVE(S):

Students will interpret text and formulate an argument supporting or rebutting Coates's statement, "But race is the child of racism, not the father." (DOK 2 & 3)

Students will apply concepts from related activities to develop a logical argument on the idea of race. (DOK 4)

#### DO NOW: PRIVILEGE AND RACE

- Have students count off by 3's;
- Hand out green wristbands to the 1's, red wristbands to the 2's and blue wristbands to the 3's, then have students put them on;
- Hand out 3"x 5" cards to class;
- Have students list the numbers 1-6 on front of cards.

Teaching Artist/Classroom Teacher: "We're going to play a game. You must follow the rules of the game in order to play.

#### HERE ARE THE RULES:

I'm going to show you a slideshow of six items. Write down the names of these items next to their number if you know the answer. Nobody is to speak the answer out loud. If you speak out an answer, *all* of your answers become invalid. Any questions?

If you're wearing a blue wristband [raise your hand], you can only answer even numbered questions. If you're wearing a red wristband [raise your hand], you can only answer odd

numbered questions. And if you're wearing a green wristband, you can answer all of the questions. Any questions...?"

#### SHOW SLIDESHOW [IMAGES CAN BE TAILORED TO FIT CLASS]

#### Tally scores and process experience:

Describe how that game made you feel?

How might you feel if you had a different color wristband?

(15 minutes)

#### MAIN ACTIVITY: SMALL GROUP TEXT ANALYSIS

The author, Ta-Nehisi Coates, writes "But race is the *child* of racism, not the *father*." (p.10)

What do you think he means?

How could the game we just played relate to this quote [ideology]?

- Divide class into three groups using wristbands;
- Handout one quote below from the text to the three groups;
- Each group interprets their quote and prepares a statement of how it relates to "But race is the *child* of racism, not the *father*.";
- Give groups 10 minutes to prepare with help of CT and TA;
- Have each group choose a spokesperson/people to read quote to class and another to read statement.

#### QUOTES

"But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body." (p. 14)

"At the onset of the Civil War, our stolen bodies were worth four billion dollars, more than all of American industry, all of American railroads, workshops, and factories combined, and the prime product rendered by our stolen bodies—cotton—was America's primary export." (p. 124)

"The enslaved were not bricks in your road, and their lives were not chapters in your redemptive history. They were people turned to fuel for the American machine." (p. 88)

(15 minutes)

### **DIFFERENTIATION:**

Group members have specialized tasks such as scribe and spokesperson to accommodate different student engagement styles.

### **ASSESSMENT:**

Have a spokesperson from each group share responses and discuss as a class.

*(15 minutes)*

## **DAY 2: "THE DREAM"**

### **GRADES 9-12**

#### **COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARD(S):**

RH-2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

#### **ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S):**

Why does Ta-Nehisi Coates believe "the American Dream" is harmful to Black people?

Why does he use the phrase "people who believe they are white"?

#### **OBJECTIVE(S):**

Students will interpret text and make observations on the use of the terms "the American Dream" and "the body". (DOK 2)  
Students will analyze text and images in order to construct an argument of their own. (DOK 3 & 4)

### **DO NOW: GALLERY WALK**

Write the following quote on the board, "Historians conjured the Dream. Hollywood fortified the Dream. The Dream was gilded by novels and adventure stories." (p.126)

Place 6-8 images (suburban homes, people in front of nice cars, working class people, fast food workers, smiling families, etc.) around the room and have students walk and view all images.

After students have returned to their seats, hold up the images one at a time and ask students to stand if they think the image represents "the American Dream". Discuss each image.

*(10-15 minutes)*

### **MAIN ACTIVITY:**

Play two videos of actors reading the passages below. Define key words and have students give initial feedback to passages. Have students count off and work in groups of four. Hand out large print copies of the passages to the groups: one quote to half the class, the second quote to the other. Have groups

make observations about the text and create a "list of inquiry" for anything they have questions about or find interesting.

### **PASSAGES**

"[forgetting]...is yet another necessary component of the Dream. They have forgotten the scale of theft that enriched them in slavery; the terror that allowed them, for a century, to pilfer the vote; the segregationist policy that gave them their suburbs. They have forgotten, because to remember would tumble them out of the beautiful Dream and force them to live down here with us, down here in the world. I am convinced that the Dreamers, at least the Dreamers of today, would rather live white than live free." (p. 173)

"White America is a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control our bodies. Sometimes this power is direct (lynching), and sometimes it is insidious (redlining). But however it appears, the power of domination and exclusion is central to the belief in being white, and without it, "white people" would cease to exist for want of reasons." (p. 53)

*(15-20 minutes)*

### **DIFFERENTIATION:**

Group work allows students having a difficult time with text to listen and participate on a level of their own.

### **ASSESSMENT:**

Have two categories written on smartboard; "The Dream" and "People Who Believe They Are White". Have groups share out and scribe responses under the different categories. Finally, have students physically draw connections on board with arguments of how categories relate.

*(10 minutes)*

## **DAY 3 — "THE BODY"**

### **GRADES 9-12**


#### **COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARD(S):**

W-1(e) - Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.









RL-7 - Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized and or absent in each treatment.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S):**

What does Coates mean by “the black body”?

Why might Coates structure [write] this book as a letter to his son?

**OBJECTIVE(S):**

Students will synthesize an argument using source materials on “the black body”. (DOK 4)

Students will apply the concepts they’ve learned to create their own letters of advice. (DOK 4)

**DO NOW: LISTEN AND REFLECT**

Play a version of “Strange Fruit” with lyrics by Billie Holiday or Nina Simone. Distribute the lyrics to the group. ([Click here](#) to link to an NPR piece on the song that includes the lyrics.) Have students jot down what they heard and analyze lyrics. Share out as a class.

(10-15 minutes)

Watch [interview with Ta-Nehisi Coates about Fear and The Black Community](#). Hand out various quotes from *Between the World and Me* about the black body and have students read them aloud. Discuss as a class. Put first writing prompt on smartboard, “Why do you think Coates wrote this book as a letter to his son?” Give time for written response. Then give second writing prompt, “Write a short letter (1-2 paragraphs) to a younger person about what you think they should know about America.” This letter can be to a fictitious person and may be about school, community, police, friends, etc. It may be written in prose (paragraph) or poetry form.

**QUOTES**

“Here is what I would like for you to know: In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body—it is heritage.”(p. 127)

“Not being violent enough could cost me my body. Being too violent could cost me my body. We could not get out.”(p. 36)

“You cannot forget how much they took from us and how they transfigured our very bodies into sugar, tobacco, cotton, and gold.” (p. 89)

“To acknowledge these horrors means turning away from the brightly rendered version of your country as it has always declared itself and turning toward something murkier and unknown. It is still too difficult for most Americans to do this. But that is your work. It must be, if only to preserve the sanctity of your mind.”(p. 121)

“But you are a black boy, and you must be responsible for your body in a way that other boys cannot know.” (p. 89)

“I kept thinking about how southern Manhattan had always been Ground Zero for us. They auctioned our bodies down there, in that same devastated, and rightly named, financial district. And there was once a burial ground for the auctioned there. They built a department store over part of it and then tried to erect a government building over another part.” (p. 106)

(20 minutes)

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THEY TRANSFIGURED OUR  
VERY BODIES INTO SUGAR, TOBACCO, COTTON,  
AND GOLD.”**

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**DIFFERENTIATION:**

Students can choose their preferred writing format.

The use of audio and written text to support different learning styles.

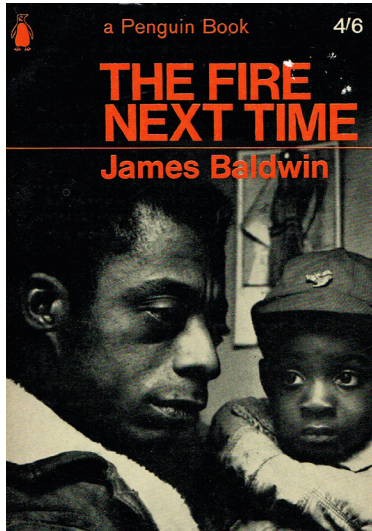
**ASSESSMENT:**

Have students who feel comfortable share their work with the class. All students hand in their letter writing.

(10 minutes)

## SUPPORTING RESOURCES & REFERENCES

### LITERARY WORKS



***The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin**  
(Inspiration, Themes, Style)  
Coates' inspiration for writing *Between the World and Me* in the form of a letter. *The Fire Next Time* addresses the themes of race, racism and the Black Body.

***Between The World and Me* by Richard Wright**  
(Inspiration and Theme)  
Wright's poem was Coates' inspiration for the title of

his book. Wright's poem speaks to the condition of the Black Body and a quote from the poem is used in the preface of *Between The World and Me*.

***The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander (THEMES)**  
Alexander writes in detail of the prison industrial complex and how it relates to race and racism. She thoroughly documents policies that created our current criminal justice system and how they lead to the destruction of the Black Body.



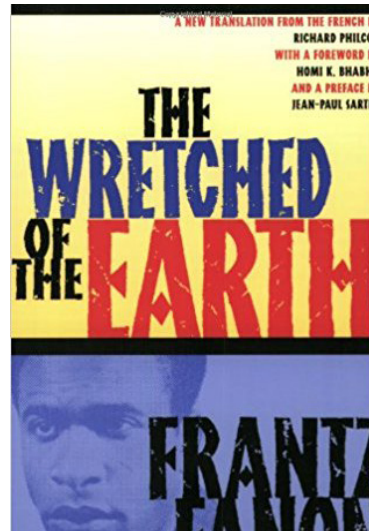
***Shake Loose My Skin* by Sonia Sanchez**  
(Themes)  
Poet Sonia Sanchez writes about many of the themes in Coates' book but through a feminist lens. Coates includes a poem from Sanchez in the preface of *Between The World and Me*.

***Beloved* by Toni Morrison**  
(Themes)  
Morrison's novel speaks of the Black Body and Black identity in the United

States. Coates' has mentioned that Morrison was the only writer he asked for a review quote.

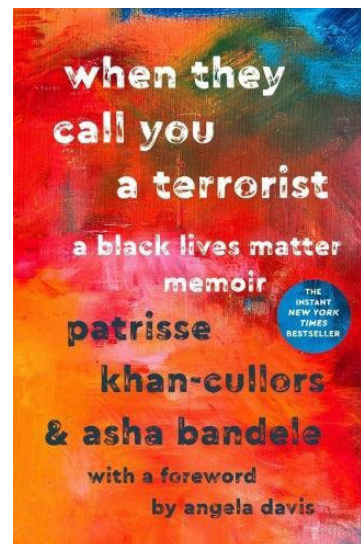
***Manchild In The Promised Land* by Claude Brown**  
(Themes & Counter-Style)

Brown's Best-Selling autobiography chronicles his childhood in an impoverished and violent Harlem. It was praised for its raw and visceral depiction of Black life in America when it was released in 1965 and was seen as a direct challenge to the style of Baldwin.



***The Wretched Of The Earth* by Frantz Fanon**  
(Themes & Historical Context)

*The Wretched Of The Earth* is a discussion on the effects of a colonized people by their colonizers not only from a political or economic standpoint but the psychology that colonizing imposes on those peoples. Fanon taps his research as a psychiatrist in Algeria in the 1950s to document the mental state and emotional condition of the colonized.



***When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* by Patrisse Khan-Cullors & Asha Bandele**  
(Theme & Historical/ Feminist Context)  
The founders of the *Black Lives Matter* movement speak on racism, race, culture and feminism. Written three years after *Between The World and Me*, the memoir gives greater historical context to the themes Coates addresses in his book.





## FILM

### ***I Am Not Your Negro* by Raoul Peck**

(Themes & Visual Content)

This Oscar-nominated documentary was created using an unfinished manuscript of Baldwin's as its narrative. Narrated by Samuel Jackson, the film has interview footage and powerful visuals of Baldwin and the time period of which he wrote.



### ***13th* by Ava DuVernay** (Themes)

An Oscar-nominated documentary produced by Netflix which documents the history and relevance of the 13th amendment to today's prison-industrial complex. Heavily sourced, this documentary supports many of the claims in *Between The World and Me*.

## MUSIC

### ***Strange Fruit* by Billie Holiday or Nina Simone**

(Themes)

The *Strange Fruit* in the lyrics are the bodies of Black people being hung from the trees. Lyrics can be printed and analyzed for meaning.

## VISUAL ART

### ***Kerry James Marshall: Mastry* by Kerry James Marshall**

(Themes & Visual Aesthetic)

An art book of Marshall's critically acclaimed retrospective that premiered at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2016. Marshall's beautiful large scale paintings, sketches and multi-media work document the Black body and political events as seen by an artist who relishes in the beauty of the culture of Black peoples and also a creative aesthetic.

## CONTEXT

### Interview With Ta-Nehisi Coates about Fear and The Black Community

An interview with Coates about the creation of *Between the World and Me*. A good supporting document to aid in discussion.

### New York Times Book Review, "Between The World and Me" by Michelle Alexander

Alexander speaks critically of *Between the World and Me* and gives additional context to Coates' work.

### New Yorker Magazine, *Between the World and Ferguson*, by Jelani Cobb, August 24, 2014

Cobb discusses the Richard Wright poem and the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

## APOLLO DIGITAL STAGE

### Common Core State Standards Initiative

### Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Chart



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# CREDITS

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## ABOUT THE APOLLO THEATER

The legendary Apollo Theater—the soul of American culture—plays a vital role in cultivating emerging artists and launching legends. Since its founding, the Apollo has served as a center of innovation and a creative catalyst for Harlem, the city of New York, and the world. With music at its core, the Apollo’s programming extends to dance, theater, spoken word, and more. This includes special programs such as the blockbuster concert *Bruno Mars Live at the Apollo, 100: The Apollo Celebrates Ella*, the annual *Africa Now! Festival*, the New York premiere of the opera *We Shall Not Be Moved*, and the world premiere of *Between the World and Me*. The Apollo is a performing arts presenting organization that also produces festivals and large-scale dance and music works organized around a set of core initiatives that celebrate and extend the Apollo’s legacy through a contemporary lens; global festivals including the *Women of the World (WOW) Festival* and *Breakin’ Convention*, international and U.S.-based artist presentations focused on a specific theme; and special projects, multidisciplinary collaborations with partner organizations. Since introducing the first *Amateur Night* contests in 1934, the Apollo Theater has served as a testing ground for new artists working across a variety of art forms and has ushered in the emergence of many new musical genres—including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Among the countless legendary performers who launched their careers at the Apollo are D’Angelo, Lauryn Hill, H.E.R., Machine Gun Kelly, Miri Ben Ari, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, James Brown, Gladys Knight, Luther Vandross, and Stevie Wonder; and the Apollo’s forward-looking artistic vision continues to build on this legacy.

## ABOUT APOLLO EDUCATION

The Apollo Theater Education Program extends the Apollo’s commitment to enhancing the life of the community. The Education Program focuses on four distinct areas of learning and engagement: residencies, workshops and tours for schools; curriculum materials aligned to state and national learning standards and study guides derived from the Theater’s history; career development for teens and adults through the Apollo Theater Academy; and discussions and lectures for the public that highlight the history of the Apollo and its impact on American art, culture, and entertainment.

BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME: A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS is an Apollo Theater Study Guide published by the Apollo Theater Education Program

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