

Approved for use in AP Language and Composition

Summary of the Work:

This text is written as a letter to the author's teenage son about the feelings, symbolism, and realities associated with being Black in the United States. Coates recapitulates American history and explains to his son the "racist violence that has been woven into American culture." Coates draws from an abridged, autobiographical account of his youth in Baltimore, detailing the ways in which institutions like the school, the police, and even "the streets" discipline, endanger, and threaten to disembody Black men and women.

Rationale:

Ta-Nehisi Coates' writing style makes his book an excellent subject for rhetorical analysis and study of argumentative writing. His sophisticated, dense, & intellectual use of literary/rhetorical devices such as repetition (anaphora), extended metaphor, anecdote, imagery, word choice, and syntax lends to his purpose in ways that challenge students as readers and inspire them writers.

This book also tackles highly relevant issues of race in the United States in a way that connects easily with young readers as it is an epistolary novel, written by Coates as a letter to his then 16-year-old son. The intimate nature of the letter form and the personal stories Coates' shares with his son evoke empathy in a way that a straight argumentative text would not.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Must read" doesn't even come close. This from [@tanehiscoates](#) is essential, like water or air.
-The New York Times

"I've been wondering who might fill the intellectual void that plagued me after James Baldwin died. Clearly it is Ta-Nehisi Coates. The language of *Between the World and Me*, like Coates's journey, is visceral, eloquent, and beautifully redemptive. And its examination of the hazards and hopes of black male life is as profound as it is revelatory. This is required reading."—**Toni Morrison**

An extraordinary forthcoming book by Ta-Nehisi Coates, in which he writes an impassioned letter to his teen-age son—a letter both loving and full of a parent's dread—counselling him on the history of American violence against the black body, the young African-American's extreme vulnerability to wrongful arrest, police violence, and disproportionate incarceration.
- The New Yorker

Noted Distinction:

- 3 Weeks on the NYT Best Seller List
- Winner of the 2015 National Book Award
- Winner of the 2015 Kirkus Prize for Nonfiction

Readability

- Lexile Score: 1090
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

The topic of police brutality is something that will be very challenging to broach in a predominately white classroom where most students will never have experienced negativity towards police officers. It will be critical for teachers using this text to highlight that Coates is not saying that the police are bad. He is arguing that the experience of African Americans is vastly different than that of your average white person.

Students might read Coates as having animosity towards white Americans. This will be something that needs to be courted gently in a homogenous classroom. Students will need to be aware that Coates is

Connection to the Curriculum:

"The AP English Language and Composition course focuses on the development and revision of evidence-based analytic and argumentative writing, the rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts, and the decisions writers make as they compose and revise. Students evaluate, synthesize, and cite research to support their arguments. Additionally, they read and analyze rhetorical elements and their effects in nonfiction texts—including images as forms of text—from a range of disciplines and historical periods." *Between the World and Me* offers students a book-length argument that they can analyze for rhetorical situation, claims and evidence, reasoning and organization,

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

(Published in 2015)

not blaming white people for the problems of African Americans, he is simply stating that white Americans have benefited from the enslavement and disenfranchisement of these people, and that events that some students might consider in the past have reverberating effects that affect minorities in the United States today.

and writing style, the four “Big Ideas and Enduring Understandings” of the AP Language Curriculum.

While the AP Language course focuses specifically on nonfiction and argument, the traditional junior level English class focuses on American Literature; this book covers all in one.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

HBO produced a film adaptation of *Between the World and Me* out in November of 2020. The book also pairs naturally with James Baldwin’s “A Letter to My Nephew.”