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***The Color of Water***  
BY JAMES McBRIDE



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ISBN 978-1-60389-209-4  
Item No. 302899

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pre-Reading

### Research

**Objective:** Researching a civil rights issue

#### Activity

As you read this book, you will come across numerous references to social injustices based on race, gender, religion, etc. Although many strides have been made in the fight for civil rights and equality, racism is still prevalent around the globe today.

- I. Choose a current civil rights issue—in the U.S. or abroad—that you feel needs to be addressed immediately. You may choose a topic that is based on race and/or gender. Once you have chosen your issue, use the library, Internet, or both to answer the following questions:
  - A. Why is this a problem?
  - B. Who is affected by this problem and how?
  - C. How long has this issue been a problem? Give a brief history of the issue.
  - D. What are the government(s) and/or major organizations doing to address it? Has any legislation been passed recently or in the past? Provide a brief timeline.
  - E. In what other countries does this problem exist? How are they dealing with it?
- II. Now, support your answers with any of the following visuals:
  - A. Create a collage with at least four photos. If the photo is symbolic, write a short sentence that explains its meaning and how it relates to the problem.
  - B. Provide a single image that shows the range of people who are affected.
  - C. Sketch a timeline of the issue, from its beginning to the present.
  - D. Show the countries that are affected on a map.

Attach your visuals to a large piece of poster board. Or, as an alternative, create a 3-D visual that answers the same questions. For example, you may choose to use a shoebox or other container that filled with items.

Suggestions: You may create these visuals by using markers, colored pencils, colored paper, and/or computer-based graphics—clippings from magazines and websites are also an option.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Dead****Journal Entry****Objective:** Writing a journal entry**Activity**

Once the author's mother married a black man, they considered her to be "dead." She says, "My family mourned me when I married your father. They said *kaddish* and *sat shiva*. That's how Orthodox Jews mourn their dead." She then describes the rituals and rules that they follow after a loved one passes.

Write a journal entry about a loss you've experienced; you may choose to write about a relative, friend, pet, etc. What rituals and rules did you observe during this mourning time? Why did you do these things? Where did these traditions come from? How do these activities make you feel?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Black Power

##### Fund Raising

Objective: Performing research  
Fundraising for charity

##### Activity

As a child, McBride had the opportunity to go to camp because of charitable donations that were made through a real institution, which still exists, called "The Fresh Air Fund." Although James didn't fully appreciate or enjoy the experience, the foundation provides a great service to many inner-city kids.

- I. Using the library, the Internet, or both, conduct some brief research on the Fresh Air Fund. Answer the following questions:
  - When, where, and why was it created?
  - What is its main mission?
  - How many children does it help each year?
  - What does sponsorship/donations provide?
  
- II. You should then create a brochure about the Fresh Air Fund (or another charitable organization that helps children, if your teacher permits). You can hand-draw and/or use a computer to create the brochure. All brochures should have at least three photos or drawings, the organization's mission statement, and a testimonial from someone involved in the charity.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Shul  
10. School****Poem****Activity**

A “found” poem is a poem made up entirely of phrases or quotations found in the text. Go back through this chapter and make up a found poem of your own. The poem could tell the reader something about McBride’s emotional state, but this is not necessary; it may be totally unrelated to the action of the story, which is one of the best parts of writing a found poem.

Your poem should be at least 10 lines long. The lines do not need to rhyme, but they certainly may. You can arrange the phrases in any way you like and change the punctuation, but do not deviate from the actual words used in Chapters 9 and 10. Give the poem a title, which may or may not come from the book. Below is an example taken entirely from Chapter 8.

**The Food She Cooked**

Little money and little food, constantly hungry.  
Devour the big lumps inside that caught in your teeth!  
Your teeth will fall out;  
A solitary toothbrush would cover five sets of teeth—  
Gone—  
Mysterious diseases:  
I got my nose nearly broken.  
The sighs all through the house—  
A Third World country—  
Out of control, scavenging for food—a precious grilled cheese,  
A cold cup of coffee, peanut butter, lost in the sauce.  
It was a real problem.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Chicken Man****Figurative Language****Objective:** Using figurative language**Activity**

When James's stepfather died, his mother would play her favorite gospel hymn: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." According to him, "she played each note separately, as if they had no connection to each other, and they echoed through the house and landed on the walls like tears." In this sentence, the author uses both personification and simile to describe the notes.

Personification and simile are two types of figurative language that authors use to make their writing more interesting. Create your own sentences that use figurative language in the spaces that follow. Try to create as many sentences about music as you can—you can talk about the sound itself, the way the words or notes make you feel, the melody created by a mixture of instruments, a particular artist or group, etc.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 19. The Promise

### Prejudice

**Objective:** Understanding another race

#### Activity

In this chapter, when Rachel first meets Dennis's family he encounters Aunt Candis. Candis is descended from slaves; in fact, her grandparents suffered under slavery. Her shock at seeing Rachel, a white woman is apparent in the story when she says "...I've never had a white person in my house before, and I've never been this close to a white person before."

This situation would, obviously, have been more common in 1940: many cities were segregated, as were the Armed Services, all professional sports, schools, etc. Fortunately, Aunt Candis became close friends with Rachel and didn't allow the past to interfere with her feelings for any friend of Dennis's, regardless of skin color.

Compose a short letter to Candis, as if you were Rachel; in it express how you feel about the reception you received, what expectations you had before meeting her, what you might have felt about Candis because she accepted you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 25. Finding Ruthie

### Death Issues

**Objective:** Planning your funeral  
Discussing personal beliefs

#### Activity

In this final chapter, James and Ruth discuss her will and burial plans. As they discuss the various places in which she's lived, James asks, "Where should we bury you then?" Frustrated, she says, "Bury me *here*, bury me *there*, what are you trying to do, kill me?"

Although death is not something most people like to think about, it is important that your loved ones know your final wishes. Make a list about your own funeral arrangements. Some of the things you might want to address:

- Songs to be played at the funeral
- What type(s) of flowers do you want?
- How should your body be displayed at the funeral?
- Where you want your remains to be placed?
- Any special arrangements should be mentioned.

Now, write a will. You may start it as follows:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, being of sound mind do bequeath \_\_\_\_\_

Be sure to name all of the individuals you want to leave items and/or money to. Many families feud over a loved one's belongings and by creating a will, you minimize the chances for hurt feelings and fights.