



# Between the World and Me

Ta-Nehisi Coates

Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

### Part I

Addressing his fifteen-year-old son, Samori, Coates describes an interviewer asking him what it means to "lose his body." Specifically, the interviewer wants to know why Coates feels that "white America's progress, or rather the progress of those who believe they are white, was built on looting and violence."

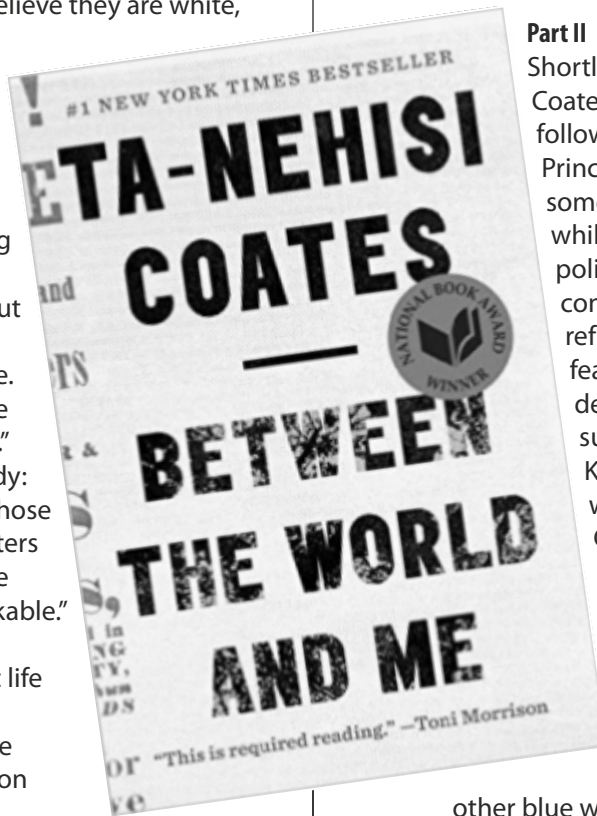
This leads Coates to explain that "race is the child of racism, not the father."

Coates describes his childhood in Baltimore, his constant fear of being hurt. Beaten at home, terrified on the streets, Coates tells his son about the violence against blacks, especially at the hands of the police. "All I know," he says, "is violence rose from the fear like smoke from a fire." The violence is centered on the body: "It does not matter if the agent of those forces is black or white—what matters is our condition, what matters is the system that makes your body breakable." Coates contrasts the fear he felt in Baltimore to "the Dream," the idyllic life white people enjoy in the suburbs, ignorant that their life is built on the legacy of slavery and the suppression of blacks.

Coates describes his early life: he rejected school, believing that schools "were concerned with compliance; ... they did not reveal truths, they concealed them." Similarly, he rejected religion. Instead, Coates read widely, especially about Malcolm X. After high school, Coates enrolled in Howard University, which he often refers to as "The Mecca," a historically black college in Washington, D.C. There, he learned "the craft of writing as the art of thinking," became interested in journalism as a career, and met many people who would become influential in his life, including his privileged friend

Prince Jones and his future wife, Kenyatta Matthew. Dropping out of college, Coates decided that "what was required was a new story, a new history told through the lens of our struggle."

Coates explains that he and Kenyatta were twenty-four when Samori was born. The child was unplanned and the couple had no plans to marry. They lived in poverty as Coates struggled to make a living as a freelance writer.



### Part II

Shortly before Samori's birth in 1999, Coates is pulled over by the police. The following September, Coates' friend Prince Carmen Jones is mistaken for someone else and killed by the police while driving to visit his fiancée. The police are freed of all blame. Coates concludes: "The truth is that the police reflect America in all of its will and fear." Coates is deeply affected by the death of his peaceful, religious, and successful friend. Coates and Kenyatta move to New York City, which broadens his vision. They visit Civil War sites, which leads Coates to conclude: "In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body—it is heritage." As a reporter, he witnesses a black family being evicted in Chicago. When Samori is six, the family travels to Paris, a trip Coates sees as "a gate to some

other blue world," a world of new possibilities. Coates says, "I have spent much of my studies searching for the right question by which I might fully understand the breach between the world and me." In France, he realizes that "for the first time I knew not only that I really was alive...but that I had long been alive." The family returns to Paris that summer.

### Part III

The year after Prince Jones' death, Coates visits Jones' mother, Dr. Mabel Jones, a radiologist in Philadelphia. Her family had worked in the fields, but she became a successful doctor who gave her two children the best of everything—the "Dream." Coates and Dr. Jones discuss

race relations in America, and he realizes “how fragile everything—even the Dream, especially the Dream—really is.” This story shows that even wealthy black people are affected by racial tragedy. Although Coates believes “the entire narrative of this country argues against the truth of who you are,” he urges his son to struggle for his heritage and his family, but not for the Dreamers.

### Timeline

- 1619** First African slaves brought to America.
- 1861-65** Civil War
- 1863** Gettysburg Address
- 1865** 13th Amendment abolishes slavery in the U.S.
- 1965** Civil Rights Act outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
- 1975** Ta-Nehisi Coates is born
- 1986** A boy pulls a gun on Coates
- 1995** Million Man March, Washington, D.C.
- 1999** Coates’ son, Samori, born
- 2000** Coates’ friend Prince Jones is killed
- 2001** Coates and his family move to New York City

### Author Sketch

Ta-Nehisi Coates was born in Baltimore in 1975, part of a very large family—his father had seven children by four wives. The children grew up together, living with their mothers and sometimes with their father, which may explain Coates’ emphasis on the importance of family, shown in *Between the World and Me*.

The family was deeply immersed in writing. Coates’ mother, a teacher, used writing as a learning tool, which he notes in the memoir, saying, “When I was in trouble in school (which was quite often) she [my mother] would make me write about it.” His father founded and headed Black Classic Press, which published books by African-Americans. Later, his father worked for Howard University as a librarian. As a result, many of the children attended the college for free—including Coates.

After five years at Howard, Coates dropped out without finishing his degree to start a career as a journalist. In *Between the World and Me*, Coates traces the difficulty he faced making a living and establishing himself as a professional writer. He also notes that many of his family and friends gave him money during these difficult years.

Coates’ big break came when he published an article in *The Atlantic*, a long-established and prestigious American literary and cultural magazine. *The Atlantic* subsequently

hired Coates as a staff blogger. From there, he moved up to senior writer. Among his most notable articles for *The Atlantic* are “Fear of a Black President” and “The Case for Reparations.” Coates has written for many other influential publications, including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *O* magazine.

In 2015, Coates won a coveted “Genius Grant” from the MacArthur Foundation, a no-strings-attached award of \$625,000 paid over five years.

### Critic’s Corner

After meeting with President Obama in 2013, Coates decided to write *Between the World and Me*, in part to rebut Obama’s optimistic vision of contemporary race relations in America and Obama’s call that African Americans assume more personal responsibility. Influenced by James Baldwin’s 1963 book *The Fire Next Time*, Coates uses *Between the World and Me* to recount what he sees as America’s history of institutionalized violence and repression of blacks. Coates is not optimistic about the possibility of racial equality; rather, he presents a bleak view of the continuation of white authority.

Coates sought only one endorsement for the cover of *Between the World and Me*—from Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison. That he received it and it was highly laudatory foreshadowed the acclaim the memoir would receive. Indeed, *The New Yorker* reviewer judged the book “extraordinary”; *The New York Times* said the book is “essential, like water or air.” *Between the World and Me* won the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction.

However, not all reviews were as positive. *The New York Times*’ top book reviewer, Michiko Kakutani, felt that Coates downplayed the progress that has been achieved in race relations, and found other parts of the book confusing.

### Selected Other Works

*The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood* (2008)

### Bibliography

<http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/220290/between-the-world-and-me-by-ta-nehisi-coates/>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUOPM8il7bQ>

“Ta-Nehisi Coates: Between the World and Me,” Chicago Humanities Festival interview, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HjfkzVuyGk>

## General Objectives

1. To appreciate the author’s style
2. To understand the book’s title
3. To recognize the importance of family to the author
4. To grasp the author’s allusions to famous people, places, books, and events
5. To understand the author’s reason for writing this book
6. To analyze the author’s use of photographs and poetry along with text
7. To evaluate the author’s message
8. To think about the meaning of “education” and how we acquire it
9. To describe the book’s tone
10. To assess Coates’ personality

## Specific Objectives

1. To understand why Toni Morrison said this book “is required reading”
2. To evaluate Coates’ pessimistic vision of America
3. To understand why Coates emphasizes the physical safety of African-American bodies over religion and potential justice
4. To determine the causes and effects of racism
5. To understand the impact of history on the present
6. To analyze the effects of Coates’ childhood on his current views
7. To probe the effect of socio-economic class
8. To analyze the importance of reading and “The Mecca” to Coates’ development as a thinker and writer
9. To compare and contrast the author’s experiences to those of his son
10. To understand why Coates and his family decided to move to France

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Ta-Nehisi Coates’ style, present the following terms and applications to the memoir:

**Figures of speech** are words and expressions not meant to be taken literally, using language in fresh, exciting ways to help authors create their unique style and convey their main ideas. Coates uses many similes and metaphors to enrich his style. For instance, on p. 20, he uses a simile, saying death would “billow up like fog.” In so doing, he connects death to nature, perhaps to

heaven, and suggests the fragility of life. On the same page, Coates compares his country to a galaxy, stretching “from the pandemonium of West Baltimore to the happy hunting grounds of *Mr. Belvedere*.” This metaphor links Coates’ black neighborhood to the white suburbs, connecting reality to what he has seen on television.

**Point of view** is the vantage point from which a narrative is told. In *Between the World and Me*, Coates uses the first-person point of view to give his writing immediacy and make it highly personal. This point of view suits his purpose (to present his personal view of the black experience) and audiences (his son and the wider world).

**Genre** is a category of literature, such as novels, dramas, and short stories. *Between the World and Me* is a *memoir*, an autobiography. The book is also a *bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age story. Although a *bildungsroman* usually takes the form of a novel rather than a memoir, *Between the World and Me* fits this classification because it focuses on the moral and psychological growth of the protagonist from his youth to his maturity.

## The Importance of Setting

Setting plays a critical role in this memoir in that the entire book functions as an examination, and indictment, of America, not only as an idea, but also as a physical location where black bodies are in special danger. The physical setting of the book helps locate its psychic setting, whether it be the fearful Baltimore of Coates’ youth; the elusive “Mecca” of Howard University; the suburban milieu of the spurious “Dream”; the “killing fields” of the urban United States; or the “revelation” of a Paris where Coates could temporarily escape the feeling of threat that was his constant companion in America.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Novels

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
- James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*
- Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*
- Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*
- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*
- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*
- Mildred D. Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*
- Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
- Jacqueline Woodson, *After Tupac & D Foster*
- Richard Wright, *Native Son*

## Nonfiction

Marc Aronson, *Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Slavery, Freedom, and Science*  
Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the KKK: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group*  
Rick Bowers, *Spies of Mississippi: The True Story of the Spy Network that Tried to Destroy the Civil Rights Movement*  
Don Brown, *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans*  
Chris Crowe, *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*  
Steve Sheinkin, *The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights*  
Tanya Lee Stone, *Courage Has No Color: The True Story of the Triple Nickels, America's First Black Paratroopers*  
Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*  
Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

## Video/DVDs

*The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*  
*The Color Purple*  
*Glory*  
*The Help*  
*Lean on Me*  
*Malcom X*  
*Pursuit of Happyness*  
*Ray*  
*Roots*

## Websites

- [http://www.theatlantic.com/author/ta-nehisi-coates/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/23/tanehisi-coates-reparations\\_n\\_5379637.html](http://www.theatlantic.com/author/ta-nehisi-coates/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/23/tanehisi-coates-reparations_n_5379637.html)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x7HLL-T6jY>

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- bodily danger
- careers
- family
- learning
- love
- police
- prejudice and racism
- punishment

- violence
- white privilege

### Motifs

- comparing life in America to life in France
- coping with the grief over the violent death of a friend
- dealing with the history of violence against black people in America
- educating oneself through reading
- establishing oneself in one's career
- finding a unique identity and voice
- giving advice to a son
- protecting one's body against harm
- rejecting religion and faith
- understanding the impact of the past on the present

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the book. Explain the meaning of each. Section and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. *Between the World and Me* (title)  
(The title comes from Richard Wright's 1935 poem of the same name. The poem presents the speaker's response to stumbling upon a lynching. The body is referred to as "the thing" in the excerpt Coates cites. The inclusion of this excerpt at the beginning of the book introduces Coates' primary theme: America's long heritage of violence against the bodies of black people, especially black men.)
2. As for now, it must be said that the process of washing the disparate tribes white, the elevation of the belief in being white... [was achieved] through the pillaging of life, liberty, labor, and land; through the flaying of backs; the chaining of limbs...and various other acts meant, first and foremost, to deny you and me the right to secure and govern our own bodies. (I, p 8)  
(In 2013, President Obama encouraged African Americans to assume more personal responsibility. Disagreeing, Coates subsequently met with Obama privately to discuss their different visions. This statement summarizes Coates' view and the thesis of this book.)
3. What is "The Dream"? (I, p. 34)  
(*"The Dream"* refers to the American Dream, our set of founding beliefs in democracy, freedom, equality, and opportunity. It is the belief that anyone can get ahead with hard work. Coates believes the Dream applies only to whites.)
4. "Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus?" (I, 43)  
(Nobel Laureate Saul Bellow made this remark to

*suggest that Africa had not produced any great writers. The comment angers Coates because of the implication that Tolstoy matters because he was white.)*

5. What was required was a new story, a new history told through the lens of our struggle. (I, 44)  
*(Coates believes that one way to achieve racial equality is to recast history and literature through the black experience rather than the white experience. Others find this proposal narrow and incomplete.)*
6. Perhaps being named “black” had nothing to do with any of this; perhaps being named “black” was just someone’s name for being at the bottom, a human turned to object, object turned to pariah. (I, p. 55)  
*(This is one of the few times in the book that Coates acknowledges the universality of racism, hatred directed at virtually all ethnic, religious, and socio-economic groups at one time or another.)*
7. The thing to understand about Prince Jones is that he exhibited the whole of his given name. (I, p. 64)  
*(Killed by the police in error, Coates’ college friend Prince Jones symbolizes Coates’ belief that no black man is safe in America, as Prince, a kind and hardworking young man, the son of privilege, was killed nonetheless.)*
8. Shortly before you were born, I was pulled over by the PG County police. ... (II, p. 75)  
*(The police pull Coates over, examine his license, and release him without explanation. This incident adds to his thesis about the fear that black men face for their bodily safety and foreshadows the tragedy of Prince Jones’ death at the hands of the police, a case of mistaken identity.)*
9. But oh, my eyes. (II, p. 116)  
*(Coates is using eyes symbolically as windows into the soul, to show that he has long tried to look at the world deeply. What he saw has hurt him.)*
10. Your mother had taken many pictures, all through Paris, of doors, giant doors. ... (II, 117)  
*(The doors symbolize a new beginning for Coates and his family. Several notable black American writers, including two twentieth-century literary figures who had a major influence on Coates—Richard Wright and James Baldwin—relocated to France, where they found a degree of artistic latitude and freedom from prejudice that was unavailable to them in America. Coates is following in their steps.)*

## Comprehension Study

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Who does Coates identify as his audience? What does he say his purpose was in writing *Between the World and Me*?  
*(On p. 9, Coates says that his audience is his fifteen-year-old son. Coates says he wrote the memoir because his son has recently seen many media reports of black men killed by police officers.)*
2. According to Coates, why do some young black men wear extravagant clothing, such as large jewelry and puffy coats?  
*(Coates sees these garments as armor against the fear the men face daily, a show of control against danger.)*
3. What does Coates see as the greatest difference between himself and his son?  
*(Coates says he practiced the culture of the streets because it was all he knew, while his son has some friends who follow these rules, but the rules are not as essential to his son as they were to Coates. Coates says that he spent all his time just trying to survive, which his son does not have to do.)*
4. What is Coates’ Mecca?  
*(His Mecca is Howard University, a prestigious, historically black private university located in Washington, D.C., which has produced numerous leaders, especially in government, business, and the arts, since its founding in 1867. Famous graduates include U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison, U.S. Congressman Elijah Cummings, and U.S. Ambassador Andrew Young. “The Mecca” is the university’s nickname, a reference to its historic role as a haven for some of the best and brightest black students and faculty in America.)*
5. How does Coates feel when he and his family go to France?  
*(He feels for the first time that he is truly “alive,” and that he has always been alive. It is a major turning point in his life.)*

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What purpose do the poems serve in the book?  
*(The poems suggest the long history of racism against blacks in America and echo Coates’ themes and call for action.)*
7. Coates writes: “Mistakes were made. Bodies were broken. People were enslaved.” What does he accomplish by using the passive voice?  
*(In the passive voice, the subject receives the action, and individual responsibility is deflected and denied. The speaker is often unnamed, as is the case here. By using the passive voice, Coates suggests that the guilty were*

*left unidentified, so no one was blamed or punished. The guilty were let off the hook—his thesis in this book.)*

8. Why does Coates end the book with his interview of Prince Jones' mother?  
*(The interview shows the fragility of life for everyone—those who believe in the Dream and those who feel betrayed by it.)*

**Questions 9-10 (Critical Level)**

9. Coates says that no matter how poor he was, he always had "people." Who are "people" to Coates, and why are they so important to him?  
*(To Coates, "people" are anyone who helps him, friends as well as family. Since Coates feels that he cannot depend on society to help or even protect him, he relies on his private support network.)*
10. Why do you think Coates wrote this book?  
*(Despite his pessimism about the legacy of racism in the U.S., the publication of this book suggests that Coates believes changes can be made and life improved for all Americans.)*

**Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)**

11. Create a new title for *Between the World and Me*. Justify your choice.
12. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss whether the American Dream is valid for all Americans.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art/Music**

1. Coates includes photographs in the book. Imagine you were writing a book about your life. Choose six photos you would include about yourself, and include a caption for each one.
2. Coates and his family visit France and later move there. Make a travel brochure to entice people to visit France. What are the top tourist destinations? Why are they popular?
3. Create a new cover for *Between the World and Me*.
4. Illustrate the poem that appears on p. 73 of the book.

**History/Social Studies**

1. Learn more about historically black colleges such as Howard University. Then choose one of these colleges and create a brochure for prospective students.
2. Coates' father was a leader in the Black Panther Party. Create a PowerPoint presentation on this organization, including its history, important members, and current status.

3. People have criticized Coates for not acknowledging the strides America has made in achieving greater social equality. Make a timeline showing at least ten entries that trace progress in achieving equality from America's founding in 1776 to the present.
4. On p. 40, Coates lists many famous people who graduated from Howard University, including Thurgood Marshall, Ossie Davis, and Toni Morrison. Select one famous alumnus and report on the person's life and achievements.
5. Coates studies the Middle Passage, one of the transport legs of the old slave trade, during which Africans were transported in slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean. Prepare a report on the Middle Passage, including an explanation of why Coates is so interested in it.

**Language Arts**

1. Ta-Nehisi Coates says that his name is Egyptian and means "land of the black." His son is named for Samori Ture, an African chief who fought French colonists. Give yourself a new name that you believe reflects your heritage, personality, and goals. Explain the reasons for your choice.
2. Coates wrote *Between the World and Me* as a letter to his son. Write a letter to your future children, in which you explain the world as you see it. Include specific information to support your assertions.
3. Coates learns by reading. List ten books that you think everyone should read. Next to each entry, write a brief justification for its inclusion on the list.
4. Coates' mother forced him to write as a punishment, an exercise that Coates says taught him to think clearly. Write an essay about something you did wrong and the lessons you learned from it.
5. Coates writes, "I have spent much of my studies searching for the right question by which I might fully understand the breach between the world and me." Write a few of the questions he might ask and explain why they are valid.

**Mathematics**

1. Coates says, "Fully 60 percent of all young black men who drop out of high school will go to jail." Make a bar graph showing the earnings of high school dropouts, high school graduates, and college graduates over a twenty-year period. What conclusions can you draw from the graph?
2. Coates discusses the Civil War. Using a map of the United States, show the dollar amount of destruction in each affected state. Which states were most deeply affected?

3. How much does it cost for someone to attend Howard University for a year? Make a spreadsheet showing the cost of several private versus state colleges.
4. Coates says that his family was poor. How much does it cost to raise a child from birth to age 18 today? Find out and display your findings on a poster.

## Science

1. In Part III, Coates says that his eyes hurt him. Make a display showing how to care for your eyes.
2. Coates talks about ancient Africa. On a chart, show the fruits and vegetables we now eat that originally came from Africa.
3. Coates says the need to always be on guard uses up a great deal of energy. In a pamphlet, explain how energy is created in the body. What is the chemical process?
4. Coates talks about the foods he believes are served in the "other world": pot roasts, blueberry pies, sundaes. On a chart, show the foods that teenagers should eat for optimal nourishment.

## Speech/Drama

1. In Part II, Coates recounts a scene in which a white woman pushes his young son and urges him to move faster. Role-play this scene and try various ways to handle the situation to defuse the tension, yet achieve fairness.
2. Someone once said, "A self-taught man usually has a poor teacher and a worse student." Debate whether or not people are better off teaching themselves, as Coates largely does, or being taught a formal curriculum in school by a trained teacher.
3. The mother of the murdered black teenager said, "You have every right to be you. And no one should deter you from being you." Explain who you are and how you express your unique personality.
4. Coates has done many interviews. Imagine that you could interview him. Working with a partner, role-play the interview, taking turns asking and answering questions.
5. Speaking as Coates' son, Samori, react to your father's message in this book. How do you feel about what he is trying to teach you?

## Student Involvement Activities

1. Coates rejects what he was taught in school as useless. Design a curriculum that you believe will best serve you in your future.

2. Coates has a difficult time establishing himself as a journalist and writer. What fields are most promising for the future? Find the top five jobs in terms of factors such as safety, income, job security, and prestige.
3. Coates says, "Not all of us can always be Jackie Robinson—not even Jackie Robinson was always Jackie Robinson." Explain the allusion and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being "Jackie Robinson."
4. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated before he could enact his plans for Reconstruction. Write an alternate history of the United States, in which Lincoln lived and was able to put his plans for Reconstruction in place. How might the U.S. be different today?

## Alternative Assessment

1. Coates very much enjoyed studying at Howard University, and the college shaped his thinking. Research three colleges that you would like to attend, explain why, and list the requirements for admission to each.
2. Visit Coates' blog at <http://www.theatlantic.com/author/ta-nehisi-coates/>. Read several entries. What do they add to your understanding of *Between the World and Me*?
3. Choose or write a new poem to open any of the three sections of this book.

## Vocabulary Test

Complete the chart by writing a synonym and an antonym for each word from *Between the World and Me*.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Synonym</b>	<b>Antonym</b>
1. banal		
2. whims		
3. inviolable		
4. atrocities		
5. amoral		
6. exoneration		
7. angst		
8. esoteric		
9. vertigo		
10. erudite		



## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 Points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Baltimore         | A. the famous black baseball player who broke the sport's "color line" |
| _____ 2. Black Panthers    | B. Coates' friend who is killed by the police                          |
| _____ 3. Howard University | C. people who believe they can get ahead through hard work             |
| _____ 4. Jim Crow          | D. where Ta-Nehisi Coates was raised                                   |
| _____ 5. Prince Jones      | E. Coates' son   |
| _____ 6. Samori            | F. a black writer who had a great influence on Coates                  |
| _____ 7. New York City     | G. an organization Coates' father helped found                         |
| _____ 8. Jackie Robinson   | H. repressive laws against blacks in the post-Civil War South          |
| _____ 9. James Baldwin     | I. where Coates and his girlfriend move after their son is born        |
| _____ 10. Dreamers         | J. where Coates met his future wife                                    |

### Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the word or phrase that completes each of the following statements correctly.

1. Ta-Nehisi Coates addressed *Between the Word and Me* to his **(son, wife)**.
2. For much of his life, Ta-Nehisi Coates' father worked as a **(lawyer, college librarian)**.
3. One of the things Coates believes cannot help him is **(political involvement, organized religion)**.
4. The Nobel Laureate in Literature Saul Bellow asked, "Who is the **(Tolstoy, Martin Luther King, Jr.)** of the Zulus?" which Coates took as a great insult.
5. In college, Coates was shocked to learn that history was a **(unified narrative, series of factions)**.
6. Mabel Jones works as a **(doctor, housekeeper)**.
7. When he was growing up, Coates said that his house was filled with **(chaos and hatred, love and fear)**.
8. Coates says that he sees love as an **(impossible dream, act of heroism)**.
9. He concludes that the police in America are **(imposed by a repressive minority, products of democratic will)**.
10. When Coates took Samori to preschool for the first time, the toddler saw all the other children playing and **(screamed in fear and clutched his parents, ran into the group and played)**.

### Part III: True/False (20 Points)

In the space provided, mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** for false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When Coates was in the sixth grade, a young man pulled a gun on him and shot at him; fortunately, the bullet did not hit him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. As a child, Coates was whipped by his father when he misbehaved.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Coates' mother punished him for misbehaving by having him write about what he had done wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Coates took school seriously and excelled in all his studies, especially in English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Coates read very widely on his own, especially when he was in college.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Coates did not graduate from college, leaving before he earned his degree.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. In the book, Coates says that it is important to hide upsetting and violent realities from his son and from all young, impressionable children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. While in Paris, the family photographed many pictures of gardens, including several reprinted in the book.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The family returns to Paris because they all like it there, but especially so Samori can live a life without fear.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. At the end of the book, Coates asks his son to stay in touch with everyone in the family, no matter where they may be living.

### Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Choose two of the following prompts and answer in a paragraph.

1. Explain the meaning of the novel's title, *Between the World and Me*.
2. Describe the hardships Ta-Nehisi Coates faces and how he deals with them.
3. Analyze the role that Prince Jones plays in the book.
4. Argue that Coates did or did not achieve a good education.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the word or phrase that completes each of the following statements correctly.

1. Coates tells his son that above all else, he must protect his **(body, money)**.
2. Coates believes that **(religion, the American Dream)** applies to white people only.
3. One of Coates' heroes is the black activist **(Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X)**.
4. After dropping out of college, Coates decides to become a **(politician, journalist)**.
5. Coates writes *Between the World and Me* when he is **(20, 40)** years old.
6. Coates describes himself as a **(curious, passive)** child.
7. Looking back, he concludes that schools are concerned with teaching children to **(rebel against injustice, obey the rules)**.
8. Coates gets upset because all the black heroes he learns about are (nonviolent, males).
9. Samori was named after a man who (struggled against French colonizers, was killed by a police officer in Baltimore).
10. When the family went to visit *Howl's Moving Castle* in New York City, a woman (kissed, pushed) Samori, upsetting Coates greatly.

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each of the following items and explain why it is important in *Between the World and Me*.

1. Religion
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The Black Panthers
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. The Mecca
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Mabel Jones
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. France

### Part III: Motivation (20 Points)

Complete each phrase with a reason or justification.

1. Coates wrote *Between the World and Me* because \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Photos are included in *Between the World and Me* to \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Coates includes excerpts of poems in *Between the World and Me* to \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Coates says that black men wear large pieces of jewelry and long coats with fur collars because \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Coates believes that his father beat him to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Reading is very important to Coates because \_\_\_\_\_.
7. College is an eye-opening experience for Coates because \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Prince Jones' death is so traumatic for Coates because \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The family visits Civil War sites to \_\_\_\_\_.
10. At the end of the book, Coates urges Samori to struggle for \_\_\_\_\_.

### Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Choose two of the following prompts and answer in a paragraph.

1. Explain Ta-Nehisi Coates' argument in *Between the World and Me*. What are his main points?
2. Compare and contrast the life of Prince Jones and Ta-Nehisi Coates. How are they the same and different?
3. Describe "the Dream" and how Coates feels about it.
4. Read the endorsement on the back cover of the book and hypothesize why you think Toni Morrison gave it.

## Answer Key

### Vocabulary Test

Possible responses:

Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. Banal	commonplace	original
2. Whims	impulses	plans
3. Inviolable	firm, sacred, unbreakable	breakable
4. Atrocities	massacres, acts of violence	acts of kindness
5. Amoral	unethical	principled
6. Exoneration	liberation	imprisonment
7. Angst	anguish, worry	calmness, happiness
8. Esoteric	obscure, mysterious	straightforward
9. Vertigo	dizziness	steadiness
10. Erudite	studious, learned	uneducated

### Comprehension Test A

#### Part I: Matching (20 Points)

- 1. D      6. E
- 2. G      7. I
- 3. J      8. A
- 4. H      9. F
- 5. B      10. C

#### Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- 1. son
- 2. college librarian
- 3. organized religion
- 4. Tolstoy
- 5. series of factions
- 6. doctor
- 7. love and fear
- 8. act of heroism
- 9. products of democratic will
- 10. ran into the group and played

#### Part III: True/False (20 Points)

- 1. F      6. T
- 2. T      7. F
- 3. T      8. F
- 4. F      9. T
- 5. T      10. F

#### Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.

### Comprehension Test B

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- 1. body
- 2. the American Dream
- 3. Malcolm X
- 4. journalist
- 5. 40
- 6. curious
- 7. obey the rules
- 8. nonviolent
- 9. struggled against French colonizers
- 10. pushed

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. Religion is the traditional way that many people deal with heartbreak, despair, and life's injustice. However, Coates totally rejects religion.
2. The Black Panthers were a militant black organization. Coates' father was one of the founders, which suggests that Coates was influenced from childhood by his father's involvement in social justice for blacks.
3. The Mecca is Howard University, where Coates learns a great deal about life and meets two of the most important people in his life, his wife and his late friend Prince Jones.
4. Mabel Jones, Prince's mother, is a very successful doctor. She raised her children with all possible advantages and they were highly successful, yet her son Prince was still killed by the police in error. Dr. Jones represents courage and Coates' belief in the failure of the Dream for black people.
5. France is important because it holds out the promise of racial equality, which is why Coates moves there with his family.

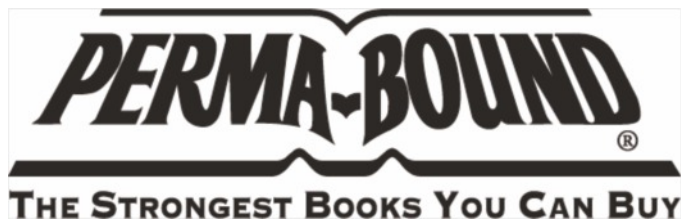
### Part III: Motivation (20 Points)

1. he wants to pass on his life lessons to his son and to the world at large.
2. illustrate important points and make the book more personal for his son.
3. recall the heritage of famous black poets, pay homage to their accomplishments, and use their work to make key points of his own about the state of blacks in America today.
4. the jewelry and coats serve as their form of armor against the world.
5. teach him to behave so that he would not get in trouble on the street.
6. it is the primary way that he educates himself.
7. he had never before seen such a wide variety of black people and he learned about love.
8. Coates felt that Jones would be safe because he had been raised according to the American Dream and had become so accomplished as well as kind and decent.
9. learn more about the history of slavery and the history of blacks in America.
10. wisdom, the memory of their ancestors, the warmth of The Mecca.

### Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.





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