

LHS 9th Grade Advanced & Honors English Suggested Summer Work

The Color of Water by James McBride will be assigned as part of the 9th grade honors and advanced curriculum. Reading it, or a portion of it, in advance, would give you a head start, but it is not a requirement that you read this in advance of the 2019-2020 school year.

Here is a quick overview of what it's about!

While growing up, James McBride never knew where his mother had come from. When he asked her if she was white, she simply replied that she was "light-skinned", triggering a long-standing confusion about his own racial identity. McBride alternates between telling his life story and the life story of his mother, Ruth, who runs away from her overbearing father, washing her hands of her Jewish heritage. In her new life, she finds happiness with Dennis, an African American man with whom she has eight children.

If you choose to read, here are some questions to ponder:

1. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A GENRE: What makes autobiography a special genre? How does an autobiographical narrative account differ from a fictional narrative account? What is the fine line between fact and fiction, accuracy and embellishment? How reliable and objective is the author when writing about himself or those close to him?

2. PROTAGONIST?: Who is the protagonist, James or his mother? Explain your reasoning.

What does the title and subtitle tell us?

3. ORGANIZATION: Why do you think McBride chose to organize his book as such? Are the alternating chapters, and therefore alternating voices, effective for you?

4. MULTICULTURALISM: In this book, what does it mean to be white? Jewish? Black?

What are the pivotal moments in James McBride's life? Make a list of at least five.

5. HEROISM: Is Ruth McBride a hero? Has her past influenced her present? How has it influenced her identity?

James writes: "Mommy's contradictions crashed and slammed against one another like bumper cars at Coney Island..." (29). What are these contradictions and what effects do they have on her children?

6. What are some major themes in the book?

7. What does the epilogue reveal?

Here are some other suggested titles that can prepare you for the work you will do this year:

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lee's coming-of-age- novel is told through the eyes of Scout Finch, a young girl who grows up in Maycomb, Alabama, in the 1930s. The reader learns about her father Atticus Finch, an attorney who hopelessly strives to prove the innocence of a black man unjustly accused of rape; and about Boo Radley, a mysterious neighbor who saves Scout and her brother Jem from being killed.

Stockett, Kathryn. *The Help*. Aibileen, a black maid, is beloved in the book for her quiet handling of adversity (the death of her son and various racial mistreatment) and her warmth and compassion. She works with Skeeter Phelan, a young white woman, to help tell the story of black maids in the South in the 1960s and infuses her character with both morality and accountability.

We look forward to having you next year! Have a great summer --- we hope you enjoy some of these great books as you "read"-lax and recharge for your freshman year!