Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Color of Water

by James McBride

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The Color of Water

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify the writing conventions of memoir as a genre.
2. identify motifs in the novel and explain how they contribute to thematic development.
3. evaluate a narrator to determine the narrator's level of reliability.
4. identify conflict(s) in the text and analyze the text to explain how the author produces conflict.
5. analyze the use of literary elements such as in medias res, irony, metaphor, simile, and tone.
6. analyze the effect of word choice and sentence structure on meaning, tone, and thematic development.
7. offer a close reading of *The Color of Water* and support interpretations using evidence from the text and knowledge of literary allusions and period history.
8. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
9. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Introductory Lecture

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIR

Autobiography is the story of a person's life, written by that person. Since ancient times, autobiography has been the purview of people with important and lasting accomplishments, for the purposes of explanation, self-justification, public instruction, moral example, and entertainment. With the rise of the popular press in the 17th century, the scope of autobiographical subjects expanded to include popular celebrities and lesser persons with significant or scandalous experiences.

Memoir is a form of autobiography, typically focused on meaningful incidents within a certain time span. Memoir relies on the author's memories, feelings, and interpretations of events' significance. The memoir author is selective, not all-inclusive, and the degree of intimacy can vary widely. Historically, a famous public figure could focus on major events and participants, goals, and outcomes without disclosing much about personal or interior life. However, modern memoirs have begun to gravitate more toward their authors' personal lives, increasingly focusing on emotional honesty and analyses about singular experiences. Memoirs are less restrictive than traditional autobiographies; this gives authors the freedom to recount the events of their lives out of chronological order if they wish, and some authors rearrange these events to establish a dramatic narrative structure to create certain effects, much as a novelist would do.

Some autobiographies are confessional in nature; the early Christian bishop St. Augustine (354 – 430) authored *Confessions*, the prototypical confessional autobiography. In a confessional autobiography, private, secret, or shocking details of an author's life are revealed. St. Augustine wrote his *Confessions* to reflect on his childhood, lusty youth, and intellectual and spiritual growth leading to his religious conversion. As one of the first Western autobiographies, Augustine's *Confessions* remains influential in Western civilization.

Autobiography's value is as a record of an author's direct and intimate knowledge and perceptions. Autobiographical writers may incorporate feedback from family and friends, journalistic investigation and research to add information, verify impressions, and widen perspective. Effective memoirs expand into larger themes of history, culture, gender, or spirituality. However, authors writing about themselves may be unreliable narrators who withhold or misjudge information out of ignorance, faulty memory, bias, or self-protection. Readers should take care to examine the author's persona, the image that the writer projects to readers.

Contemporary memoirs have been met with some criticism regarding their veracity. Memoir writers have been criticized for using composite and invented characters, altered chronology, imagined dialogue and scenes, factual omissions, and subjective emphasis. Vivian Gornick, author of *Fierce Attachments* and other personal narratives, has justified these methods as art shaping material that would not otherwise interest readers. Nonetheless, James Frey's 2003 book about addiction, *A Million Little Pieces*—a book marketed as a brutally honest memoir—caused a publishing scandal when he admitted he exaggerated details for dramatic effect. Readers must apply the same critical standards to memoir as they do to other forms of literature.

CONFLICT

Conflict is essential to narrative. A story requires action, and conflict is the impetus to that action. The characters' motives and behavior should justify their actions in a believable way. Something has to be at stake to make the plot move toward a climax and sustain readers' interest in the outcome of events. Writers create tension and suspense by arranging conflict in a story.

What happens in a conflict could involve physical obstacles, verbal disagreements, or mental, emotional, and moral problems.

There are several classic conflicts in literature and drama:

- character vs. character, the most important being the protagonist against an antagonist
- character vs. self, when a character struggles with personality traits, feelings, secrets, beliefs, or conscience
- character vs. nature, in which the setting or some natural force is the challenge
- character vs. society, in which oppression, justice, or conflicting roles cause action
- character vs. the supernatural, including an unworldly force, fantasy, horror
- character vs. machine, pitting a human against a mechanical or technological threat
- character vs. fate, in which a person's will and choices are overpowered by a predetermined destiny

James McBride addresses several major conflicts in his memoir.

First, there is a very basic conflict in his family life: James must compete with 11 raucous siblings for scarce food, shelter, attention, and approval. Early in the book, McBride details the way of life in his mother's household: "kill or be killed." The reality is not so dire as that, but James's brothers and sisters hide food from one another in an attempt to make sure they have enough to eat. This conflict could be considered *character vs. character* or *character vs. society*; it is probably more appropriate to place this conflict in the latter category because it is primarily about James's struggles with the complex social structure of his mother's household; there is no clear antagonist, so to categorize this conflict as *character vs. character* is somewhat more difficult, but an antagonist is not strictly necessary for *character vs. character*. Though he describes his brothers and sisters as his best friends, he must still compete with them. Another reason this conflict can be considered *character vs. society* is that James's family is poor, and the competition between siblings would likely not exist otherwise.

James also deals with psychological conflict throughout *The Color of Water*. In any childhood, maturing boys and girls must create a separate identity apart from their parents. But young James has an internal conflict: his mother is white but he is black, and he struggles to reconcile these facts in his mind. This conflict manifests itself in embarrassment and fear. His mother's refusal to acknowledge their racial differences confuses him until he puzzles out the truth behind her life choices. Complicating James's psychological conflicts, the death of his respected stepfather distracts him from school and church and attracts him to drug use and petty crime. The reader should be able to see the *character vs. self* conflict in these struggles.

Members of the McBride family must cross social divisions of race, religion, wealth, and education in order to survive and find personal fulfillment. The family is keenly aware of their unusual standing in society; mixed-race families were very uncommon in the 1960s, and much of American society frowned upon them at best and openly persecuted them at worst. As intimated in the previous paragraph, racial conflict is central to *The Color of Water*. Throughout the book, McBride describes accounts in which racial prejudice affects his mother and the rest of his family. McBride explains the strategies various family members employ to cope with racism: some of his siblings embrace the Black Power movement, and his mother refuses to identify herself as white, preferring to say that she is "light-skinned." Although his mother is white, she is the victim of societal prejudice because she married and had children with a black man. Once again, the reader can see the *character vs. society* conflict in the McBride family's clashes with 1960s American culture.

JEWS IN AMERICA

After the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, which that state's General Assembly passed in 1786. This statute inspired the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. George Washington visited Newport, Rhode Island, in 1790 to promote the new Bill of Rights and assured the Jewish congregation there that "happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens." All states ended religious qualifications for voting and public office and stopped supporting churches with taxes.

As the territory of the United States expanded, Jewish pioneers moved too. Though they had all sorts of occupations, a common start for men was as an itinerant peddler, storekeeper, or trader. Those who survived assimilated into political and cultural life. While centuries of anti-Semitic persecution and segregation in Europe had confined Jews to distinctive communities, the openness of the United States meant Jews could disperse and integrate socially rather than cling to ancestral traditions.

On the other hand, there were so few Jews that immigrant bachelors often married outside their faith. American daily life did not match Jewish practices such as observing the Saturday Sabbath or holy days. In the 19th century the lack of rabbis, seminaries, and Jewish books eroded cultural identity, though there were charitable self-help groups. Cheap novels and early

American theater productions of *The Merchant of Venice* spread negative stereotypes of Jews. Christian evangelists petitioned Congress and state legislatures to incorporate Christian theology into laws. To counteract this, in 1859 the Board of Delegates of American Israelites formed as a national organization interceding on behalf of Jews in U.S. and foreign affairs.

By 1861, there were 150,000 Jews in the U.S., mostly in the North and West. The Civil War caused Northern and Southern newspapers to accuse Jewish merchants of disloyal and illicit dealings. After the war, wealthy Jews experienced another backlash of snobbery and prejudice that kept them out of elite social clubs and public accommodations. But Southern businessmen faced labor shortages after the war ended slavery, so 14 states joined an immigration association for the purpose of attracting foreign and domestic workers to the region.

From 1890 to 1914, mass immigration from Italy, Eastern Europe, and Russia crested, with 15 million people fleeing destitution for the vastness of American agriculture and industry. Desperate Jews were brutally driven out of the Russian empire after revolutionaries assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881. For decades afterward, anti-Jewish riots and expulsions occurred in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia.

These newcomers mostly stayed in the Eastern U.S. to work in city shops and factories. Poor, lonely Jewish girls and women were especially vulnerable to prostitution. Neglected slum children became accomplices of criminals. Social workers, journalists, and political reformers exposed corruption and set up protective agencies and schools. Radical socialists also landed in the U.S. and became involved in party politics and labor unions.

Economic recessions and urbanization provoked populist contempt for immigrants and bankers. Poor and well-off Jews alike were stigmatized as both uncouth aliens and financial conspirators who were undermining the rural American heartland. Congress and federal immigration officials began restricting entry into the country, starting with the Immigration Act of 1882, which excluded Chinese laborers. Legislation in 1885, 1891, 1907, 1917, 1921, 1924, and 1952 tightened eligibility on the basis of health, employability, literacy, and national quotas that limited the number of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe.

In the American South, foreigners as well as blacks were assaulted and lynched. The lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia was infamous. In 1913, Frank, the young Jewish factory manager of the National Pencil Co. in Atlanta, was wrongly charged with strangling a 13-year-old worker, Mary Phagan. Sensational press coverage and local mobs maligned his religion. Though a black handyman confessed to killing the girl and evidence corroborated his confession, a jury declared Frank was guilty and sentenced him to hang. Frank's lawyers appealed to Georgia's governor to commute the sentence, and sympathizers nationwide petitioned for a new trial. A Jewish lawyer in Chicago, Sigmund Livingston, created the Anti-Defamation League to challenge ugly stereotypes. In 1915, Georgia's governor altered Frank's sentence to life in prison. Within weeks, Frank was kidnapped from the penitentiary and lynched.

William S. Simmons used Frank's death to revive the racist Ku Klux Klan. The Klan originated in 1865 as a white supremacist terror group intent on undermining federal Reconstruction of the former Confederate states and ex-slaves' new rights as citizens. Through the 1920s the KKK recruited thousands of members, including top state politicians, across the South, Midwest, and West by vilifying blacks, Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. Women who behaved unconventionally were attacked too.

World War I caused more desperate Jews to flee from Poland and Russia. They were aided by American relief committees. However, the 1917 Russian revolution made officials fear that socialists and communists—who were assumed to be Jews—were spies and provocateurs insinuating themselves with workers. From 1919 to 1921, U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer led raids on union offices and leftist organizations to arrest and deport radicals such as Emma Goldman. Anti-Semitism extended to newspaper advertisements for jobs and housing that said Jews need not apply. Colleges set quotas for Jewish students.

Also in 1920, the automobile manufacturer Henry Ford began publishing anti-Semitic screeds in the *Dearborn Independent*, a newspaper he owned. Ford distributed thousands of copies of an inflammatory tract, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which claimed to reveal secret Jewish plans for global domination. "The Protocols" really was a Russian pastiche modeled on an earlier French satire by Maurice Joly, "Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu" (1864) and an anti-Semitic novel by Hermann Goedsche, *Biarritz* (1868). "The Protocols" figured prominently in German Nazi propaganda through the 1920s and 1930s as that regime seized power. Aviation hero Charles Lindbergh became a vocal admirer of Germany's new society.

By this time most American Jews made their livings in small businesses. Jewish entrepreneurs became prominent in the garment, tobacco, liquor, and entertainment industries, notably popular music and movies. By 1927, there were still only four million Jews in the United States, less than four percent of the population.

The Great Depression of the 1930s exacerbated political scapegoating and anti-Jewish discrimination in what little employment was available. Regardless of the Nazi threat to European refugees after Adolf Hitler became dictator in 1933, immigration restrictions became tighter. Members of Congress and the U.S. State Department continued to demand that people in peril present visas, character references, and ready cash, which became impossible to do. Among the refugees who did arrive here were scientists such as Albert Einstein and Edward Teller.

Because of wartime production needs, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Committee in 1941 and forbade discrimination by race or religion at defense industry and military job sites. President Harry Truman further banned discrimination in federal employment and the armed forces in 1948. Some Northeastern state governments passed similar laws.

After the war, immigration quotas remained restricted even though thousands of displaced persons were stuck in refugee camps across Europe. Consequently, the Zionist movement gained supporters to create a Jewish homeland in the ancient Palestine territory in the Middle East. Thus, Israel became a nation in 1948.

As the Cold War with the Soviet Union took hold in the late 1940s and 1950s, persistent fear of communist infiltration provoked congressional investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee and Sen. Joseph McCarthy's Senate Subcommittee on Investigations. Hollywood entertainment figures who were Jewish faced intense scrutiny, and some had their careers ruined. However, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, a Jewish machinist and his wife, were found guilty of passing atomic bomb secrets to a Soviet diplomat. The Rosenbergs were executed in 1953 for committing espionage.

When military veterans returned to their homes and black Americans migrated to industrial jobs in Northern states, discrepancies in treatment became obvious. The world had seen the horrors of racism in Germany. The Soviet Union exploited American inequality in its propaganda. Through the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. civil rights movement confronted social prejudices and segregation by organizing public demonstrations and protests. In 1950, the Leadership Conference was formed to lobby Congress and national officials. It united Arnold Aronson of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council with black leaders A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The Ku Klux Klan rallied too and committed violence against rights activists, including murder.

With the support of Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson, more federal, state, and municipal laws were enacted to empower all minorities under the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments of the Constitution. These included the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1965 Voting Rights Act, and 1968 Fair Housing Act.

Despite Jewish support of civil rights, there was another backlash within the movement among black Americans. Young blacks argued for racial pride and self-determination. Malcolm X, spokesman of the Nation of Islam, scorned integration and characterized white merchants as exploiters who caused poverty. Jewish storekeepers and landlords were resented in changing neighborhoods that had housed earlier generations of immigrants. In New York City, Jewish educators were common in public schools that became populated by black and Hispanic students. In 1967 and 1968, black teachers and parents campaigned to take over school jobs in reconfigured districts. A months-long teachers strike resulted in Brooklyn.

Civil rights leaders also criticized Zionism and the Vietnam War as oppression of foreign nations and expensive distractions from American poverty and injustice. Current Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan continues to make provocative statements denigrating Jews.

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INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

The marriage of James McBride's parents in 1942 not only flouted social prejudices, it was against the law in 31 states at that time. According to the U.S. Constitution, marriage is regulated by state authority. New York was one of the few states that never prohibited miscegenation—the legal term for relationships between men and women of different races.

In the era of slavery, masters could force themselves on captive women without penalty. Slaves were regarded as property; they had no legal rights to protect themselves and could not testify against white people in court. After the Civil War, state laws continued racial segregation and treated consensual interracial relationships as criminal behavior. The Ku Klux Klan incited fear and violence on the premise that white women needed protection from immorality and assault.

Deviating from these social norms was dreadfully risky in the South. In 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black boy from Chicago, visited relatives in Mississippi during his summer vacation. He supposedly flirted with a white woman cashier in a grocery store. Within days Till was kidnapped, beaten, shot, and thrown into the Tallahatchie River. The cashier's husband and brother-in-law were arrested. A Mississippi trial jury found the men not guilty, but they subsequently confessed to murdering the boy.

Men and women were also prosecuted for adultery and sent to jail. Interracial marriages were invalidated in segregationist states. In 1967, Richard and Mildred Loving finally ended this form of racial discrimination by challenging Virginia's miscegenation law in the U.S. Supreme Court. Richard, who was white, fell in love with Mildred, the sister of black friends in rural Caroline County, Va. In 1958 they drove to Washington, D.C., to wed. Soon afterward they were arrested and ordered to leave their Virginia home or be jailed for one year. They moved to Washington, D.C., and had children, but they missed their hometown and relatives. Mildred wrote a letter to U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who forwarded it to the American Civil Liberties Union. ACLU lawyers took the case to the Supreme Court. The court decided such laws had no legitimate purpose and violated the 14th Amendment by denying people a fundamental personal freedom "essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness."

In 1980, approximately 7 percent of American newlywed spouses had different races or ethnicities. By 2008, nearly 15 percent of newly married couples had different racial or ethnic backgrounds, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

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BLACK POWER

After World War II, black Americans' quest for civil rights gained momentum. Yet moral victories such as the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* order to integrate public schools and the 1957 Civil Rights Act on voting were ignored by those in power. The court and federal government did not set a timetable for actual change to happen, so state and local officials in the South kept up their implacable resistance to activists' appeals to end segregation.

In 1941, A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters trade union had used mass marches to sway President Franklin Roosevelt to ban discrimination in defense industry jobs. Public rallies became an organizing model for the civil rights movement.

In 1955, NAACP member Rosa Parks was arrested aboard a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama, which provoked a year-long boycott of the segregated transport system by black residents. The well-spoken young Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was asked to coordinate local clergy who supported the campaign. The protest ended when federal courts said bus segregation was unconstitutional. King then helped create the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957 to unite churches and community activists throughout the region.

In 1957, President Eisenhower sent soldiers to protect nine black students from menacing mobs after they had enrolled at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. This was a turning point in federal enforcement of integration. High school and college students dared to confront racism directly rather than negotiate. In 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, four black college students sat at a Woolworth's lunch counter and ordered coffee. The young men were told to leave, but they remained seated for hours in passive protest. For six months, hundreds of sympathetic black and white students kept up this sit-in tactic at the store until discrimination stopped. This success inspired Ella Baker to organize youth from the North and South into the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. They spread the technique of disrupting businesses, theaters, and parks by sitting at places that refused to serve black people.

In 1961, black and white "freedom riders" decided to test the Supreme Court's order to desegregate bus service by traveling from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans and entering segregated terminals. When they arrived in Anniston, Alabama, a bus was set on fire and the riders were beaten by a mob. But more riders continued the mission despite more beatings and jailings en route.

Colleges often expelled demonstration participants. Nonetheless, students kept traveling to Southern states to help organize voter registration and teach the civil rights movement's history and methods. Voting was crucial to empowering people to change the political system that sustained white supremacy.

In 1962, President Kennedy ordered federal marshals to escort James Meredith to register as the first black student at the University of Mississippi. In 1963, Kennedy had soldiers escort two black students to the University of Alabama, in a state in which the governor, George Wallace, scorned desegregation.

In 1963, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference undertook an Alabama campaign, starting with the city of Birmingham's department stores during the Easter shopping week. Because adult demonstrators could lose their jobs, the organizers put children in the sit-ins and marches to dramatize their arrests and jailing. Shocking news coverage showed police brutally breaking up demonstrations with biting dogs and fire hoses. Merchants and municipal officials agreed to integrate facilities and offer more jobs to black applicants.

The NAACP's organizer in Mississippi, Medgar Evers, was murdered in June 1963. The famous March on Washington occurred in August 1963, where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. made his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial. A few weeks later in Birmingham, Alabama, the 16th Avenue Baptist Church was bombed, killing four girls attending Sunday school. President Kennedy was assassinated in November.

In the "Freedom Summer" of 1964, church and college volunteers were recruited to register Southern black voters for that year's presidential election, especially in Mississippi, where virtually all blacks were excluded from the political system. Rights workers Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman were murdered soon after they arrived.

In 1965, marchers were attacked by police in Selma as they started a 54-mile walk to the Alabama capitol in Montgomery to rally for voting rights. TV coverage of the mayhem and deaths convinced President Lyndon B. Johnson to condemn bigotry and present Congress with the Voting Rights Act. The march to Montgomery continued with the protection of soldiers and federal agents.

Black separatist Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. As the fervent spokesman of the Nation of Islam, he had argued that the evils of white racist society were unforgivable and deserved retaliation "by any means necessary." The Nation of Islam was a religious-cultural ideology created by W. D. Fard in the 1930s in Detroit. It taught that black Muslims were the ancient favored race until they were overthrown by white Christian oppressors. Followers were expected to lead strict, moral lives to prepare for an independent nation and eventual apocalypse. The message of discipline, self-worth, cultural pride, and economic independence made it a compelling movement, but some civil rights leaders denounced the Nation of Islam (and Malcolm X) as dangerous and extremist. After making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm X changed his approach to political change, becoming staunchly opposed to racism in all forms and working with civil rights leaders. He quit the Nation of Islam, but was shot by loyalists to its leader, Elijah Muhammad.

In 1966, Stokely Carmichael became chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—popularly called "snick" as a pronunciation of its abbreviation (SNCC). In Mississippi after his 27th arrest, horrified by unrelenting violence against peaceful protesters, Carmichael urged a rally to pursue "black power." The chanted slogan and raised-fist salute spread across the country as an alternative to integration and assimilation. The proud reference to "black people" replaced the polite word "Negro" when speaking about race. Carmichael became more militant and drawn to solidarity with Africa and black nationalism. Like that of Malcolm X, this attitude was perceived as threatening and divisive to black leaders who valued whites' support for integration.

For a time Carmichael joined the radical Black Panther Party begun by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in California. They demanded an end to racial oppression, police brutality, and poverty. Black Panthers armed themselves as urban guerrillas and ran community service programs with a socialist ideology. Some spoke of revolution. But law enforcement agencies regarded them as a criminal gang that shot police and other victims.

Riots rocked cities throughout the 1960s, including New York; Newark, New Jersey; Philadelphia; Chicago; Detroit; and Los Angeles. President Johnson assigned a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the causes. In 1968, the so-called Kerner Report concluded, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." It identified police practices, unemployment, and substandard housing as the main grievances of poor, alienated minorities while white suburban residents prospered. The commission recommended government investment in job training, better schools, and affordable housing, along with more accurate news reporting by journalists, to enrich life for all.

In 1967, Thurgood Marshall, who had been an NAACP lawyer on the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, became the first black Supreme Court justice.

In 1968, King and other organizers planned a Poor People's Campaign to push President Johnson and Congress to enact social programs addressing poverty nationwide. In April, King was assassinated. Days later, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 outlawed discrimination in housing. In June 1968, Robert Kennedy, former U.S. attorney general and an advocate for equal rights, was assassinated while campaigning for president.

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Practice Free Response Questions

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #1

A literary work's tone can reveal a writer's attitudes toward a subject just as effectively as action or exposition; sometimes, tone is even more effective. Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 4 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "In 1966, when I was nine …" and ends, "… my answer is no, whatever it is." Then, write an essay in which you identify the tone of the passage and explain what the tone conveys about the speaker's feelings on the subject of the passage.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #2

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 4 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "I knew of no other white woman …" and ends, "… his face melted into a knot of disbelief and tears." Then, in a well-written essay, explain how the speaker conveys his complex attitude toward the Black Panthers and the Black Power movement in general. Be sure to reference the text in your answer, but avoid plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #3

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 6 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "I'm crying 'cause I'm happy …" and ends, "… Mommy tried and tried to make him go back, but he wouldn't." Then, write an essay in which you identify the main conflict in the passage, analyze the sources of this conflict, and explain how this conflict contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid mere plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #4

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 10 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "In this pre-busing era …" and ends, "… She got up and went back to cooking, while I wandered away, bewildered." Then, in a thoughtful, well-organized essay, explain how the author illuminates the source of the narrator's confusion. Avoid plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #5

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 21 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "I stuck around Suffolk awhile longer …" and ends, "Birdie, birdie, fly away." Then, analyze the primary symbol in the passage and explain what this symbol contributes to character development. Avoid plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #6

Authors of memoirs sometimes deliberately structure their works so that the incidents they recount come together to form a definite narrative arc, creating a more compelling story. Select a memoir of considerable literary merit.* Then, in a well-organized essay, explain what the memoir's structure contributes to thematic development. Avoid plot summary.

* *Note to the students: For the purposes of this exercise, you must choose* The Color of Water.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #7

The finality of death has long inspired insightful contemplation about life, and characters in literary works may realize important truths about themselves and the world around them when confronted with the reality of death. Choose a character from a literary work* who contemplates death or experiences the death of a loved one. Then, in a thoughtful, well-written essay, explain what this character's experience with death contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid plot summary.

* *Note to the students: For the purposes of this exercise, you must choose a character from* The Color of Water.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #8

Literature is a vehicle through which authors can address social concerns and illustrate social conflicts. Select a work of literature in which social conflict plays a prominent role.* Then, in a well-organized essay, identify a social conflict in the work and explain how the author reveals his feelings toward that social conflict. Be sure to reference the text in your essay, but avoid plot summary.

* *Note to the students: For the purposes of this exercise, you must choose a character from* The Color of Water.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #9

Characters in coming-of-age stories experience personal transformation. Often, these characters learn an essential truth or truths about themselves that helps them adapt to and thrive in the circumstances of their lives. While this may be a desirable or inevitable conclusion, these characters may also lose something through maturing. Choose a character from a work of considerable literary merit.* Then, in a thoughtful, well-supported essay, explain precisely what this character loses in the coming-of-age process. Avoid plot summary.

* *Note to the students: For the purposes of this exercise, you must choose a character from* The Color of Water.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1 – 5

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 2 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "When I was fourteen, my mother took up two new hobbies …" and ends, "Matters involving race and identity she ignored." Then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

1. In the first paragraph, the use of exaggeration in describing the bicycle has the effect of
   A. distinguishing the past from the present.
   B. evoking the narrator's emotional state.
   C. emphasizing the antique's monetary value.
   D. alluding to the dead stepfather's age.
   E. marveling that the bicycle was usable.

2. The bicycle resembles the stepfather because it is
   A. old-fashioned like his clothes.
   B. intended to be a joke.
   C. a reminder of his death.
   D. essential to the family's well-being.
   E. appreciated only in hindsight.

3. The metaphor describing preachers as "all Cadillacs and smiles" can be understood to mean they were
   A. courteous.
   B. impressive.
   C. envied.
   D. superficial.
   E. benevolent.

4. In the final six lines of the passage, which characterize the mother's role in the family, use of parallel construction has the effect of
   A. clarifying her motives.
   B. mocking her peculiarities.
   C. weakening her authority.
   D. showing her dominance.
   E. criticizing her husband.

5. The narrator's diction in this passage can best be characterized as
   A. abstract.
   B. precise.
   C. poetic.
   D. informal.
   E. elevated.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6 – 10

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 6 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "Rev. Owens's sermons started like a tiny choo-choo train …" and ends, "Water doesn't have a color." Then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

6. In the first paragraph, several similes imply that the Rev. Owens's preaching style is
   A. loud.
   B. abrupt.
   C. fluent.
   D. euphonious.
   E. inspired.

7. In the second paragraph, the comparison of Mommy's opinions of ministers to a wine connoisseur is an example of
   A. allusion.
   B. antithesis.
   C. analogy.
   D. metaphor.
   E. paradox.

8. In the third paragraph, the phrase "Sweet Liberty" can best be understood to mean
   A. religious belief.
   B. self-indulgence.
   C. moral superiority.
   D. joyous expression.
   E. relief from oppression.

9. As the passage progresses, the tone shifts from
   A. bewilderment to disappointment.
   B. wariness to confrontation.
   C. subjectivity to objectivity.
   D. sarcasm to tolerance.
   E. parody to idealism.

10. The conclusion that "God is the color of water. Water doesn't have a color" can be understood as a
    A. supernatural mystery.
    B. verbal irony.
    C. universal truth.
    D. poetic analogy.
    E. sharp rebuke.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11 – 15

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 10 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "Music arrived in my life around that time …" and ends, "… zooming from room to room, my circuits blown." Then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

11. In the first paragraph, the image of the boy in the mirror represents
    A. creative improvisation.
    B. psychological conflict.
    C. social criticism.
    D. unattainable goals.
    E. comic relief.

12. The allusion to "the guys in the movies" in the second paragraph implies that
    A. growing boys want exciting heroes.
    B. each generation has new role models.
    C. popular culture weakens family bonds.
    D. teenagers have unrealistic expectations.
    E. media images are racially biased.

13. Mommy reacts angrily to the phrase "tragic mulatto" because
    A. it implies that people of mixed race are flawed.
    B. her son used the phrase out of context.
    C. it is irrelevant to her as a white woman.
    D. she raised her children to ignore racial differences.
    E. her other children refer to themselves as black.

14. The pun about "human beans" is intended to
    A. mock ignorance.
    B. personify innocence.
    C. relieve tension.
    D. ignore logic.
    E. express playfulness.

15. The last paragraph about the bedroom closet contributes to the unity of the passage in which of the following ways?
    A. As a parallel to the anxious boy in the bathroom
    B. As an indication of the narrator's vivid imagination
    C. As a contrast showing the brothers' different attitudes
    D. As evidence justifying the narrator's appraisal of his family
    E. As a comic repetition of childish mischief and misunderstandings

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16 – 20

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 15 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "Well, the kids in my high school were excited and giggling …" and ends, "… caught a Greyhound bus for New York the very next day." Then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

16. In the first paragraph, the phrase "that business" refers to
    A. Ruth's unpopularity.
    B. an abortion.
    C. hostile parents.
    D. an arranged marriage.
    E. moving away.

17. In the first paragraph, the phrase "my home life wasn't perfect" is an example of
    A. euphemism.
    B. epithet.
    C. understatement.
    D. antithesis.
    E. imagery.

18. One can infer that Tateh gave Ruth the money for her cap and gown because
    A. Mameh pleaded with him to stop the quarrel.
    B. he realized the march was separate from graduation.
    C. Ruth's assumption that he was uncaring is wrong.
    D. he wanted Ruth to keep living in Suffolk.
    E. being a graduate would improve her marriage prospects.

19. Which sentence represents the climax of the main action in this passage?
    A. "Well, Tateh and I argued about the cap and gown for a long time, and at one point I got so mad I revealed my plans to go to New York after graduation."
    B. "'You can participate in the march,' he said, 'but don't go into that church.'"
    C. "As we approached the church I started to shake and sweat, and just before we reached the church doorway, I stepped out of line."
    D. "'Frances, you go on in,' I said."
    E. "I walked home sobbing in my cap and gown and caught a Greyhound bus for New York the very next day."

20. Each of the following sentences foreshadow Ruth's climactic decision EXCEPT
    A. "So I decided to go to the graduation ceremony for her, because Frances was my best friend and I would do anything for her."
    B. "You know my parents were so old-fashioned European in their ways it wasn't funny."
    C. "He was still my father, and I was still a teenager living in his house, and he could still pull off his belt and beat the mess out of me when he wanted, so what could I do?"
    D. "Of course my parents wouldn't go to that gentile graduation, so I put on my cap and gown and walked the six blocks to Suffolk High School alone and waited for Frances in the parking lot."
    E. "I was ready to turn around and run home by the time she showed up."

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21 – 25

Carefully read the passage, from Chapter 20 of *The Color of Water*, that begins, "It was seven a.m. when I arrived in town …" and ends, "His own wife was scared of him." Then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

21. In the first paragraph, the phrase "sugar days" can be understood to mean
    A. pleasant atmosphere.
    B. historical importance.
    C. economic prosperity.
    D. architectural interest.
    E. dominant industry.

22. In the first paragraph, the use of a sentence fragment to describe the town has the effect of
    A. indicating the author's indifference.
    B. depicting a quick impression.
    C. increasing the incident's pace.
    D. creating a secretive mood.
    E. skipping over irrelevant details.

23. The dialogue in this passage has the effect of
    A. thwarting the author's purpose.
    B. verifying the authenticity of events.
    C. exposing the unreliable narrator.
    D. introducing a comic element.
    E. creating tension and suspense.

24. Eddie Thompson's tone when speaking about the Shilsky family can be characterized as
    A. authoritative.
    B. sentimental.
    C. discreet.
    D. objective.
    E. resentful.

25. Overall, the passage presents the narrator's visit to his mother's hometown as a
    A. lucky coincidence.
    B. conclusive investigation.
    C. shocking reappraisal.
    D. significant revelation.
    E. discouraging disappointment.

Answers with Explanations

1. The attitude of the first-person narration colors the meaning of the anecdote. The vintage bicycle does allude to the past (A) and probably appealed to the elderly stepfather for that reason (D). But that is not why the bike upset the narrator. Its monetary value and function were irrelevant to him when he was an embarrassed teenager (C, E). **Remembering the bicycle reminds the narrator of how he felt at the age of 14 (B).**

2. After the bike is introduced with exaggerated humor, the narrator describes his elderly stepfather's personality and idiosyncrasies with respect and affection. The stepfather was essentially a serious man with thrifty habits who supported a big family, so saving the castoff bike probably was not a joke (B). His death looms over the family regardless of the bicycle (C). While riding the bicycle helps the mother cope with grief, the children want nothing to do with it. So it is an overstatement to say the bike is essential (D). Hunter Jordan was a loving Daddy to all the children, so eliminate (E). **The best answer is the bicycle's similarity to the stepfather's old-fashioned clothes (A).**

3. The image of preachers as "all Cadillacs and smiles" has a sarcastic tone. While smiles suggest courtesy (A) and Cadillacs are expensive automobiles, the narrator and his widowed mother clearly do not admire them (B). The preachers are seen as opportunistic status seekers pursuing the attractive but poor widow, not as desirable or kindly benefactors (C, E). **The emphasis on their cars marks them as superficial (D).**

4. Examples of Mommy's child-rearing tactics are laid out in parallel construction. They show her methods but not her motives (A). Her assorted job titles are exaggerated, but her practical advice is not mocked (B). Her multiple responsibilities broaden her authority rather than weaken it (C). The narrator describes his stepfather affectionately, so this is not an implied criticism (E). **These examples show his mother's dominance (D) as commander-in-chief at home.**

5. The bicycle anecdote lets the narrator make concrete observations about his family. Only the last sentence in this passage speaks of the abstract concepts of race and identity (A). Overall, his tone is inclined toward exaggeration rather than precision (B) with a few poetic similes and metaphors (C). The word choice is simple and colloquial, not elevated formality (E). **His diction is informal and idiomatic (D).**

6. The similes in the first paragraph compare the Rev. Owens's preaching to a train, a stutterer, and a barrage of bullets. So what do these diverse images have in common? They refer to shifting tempo from slow to fast, not volume or loudness (A). Fluent means smooth and expressive (C). Euphonious means pleasant sounding (D). Inspired means moved by an idea or divine guidance (E). The mimicked dialogue suggests the Rev. Owens is groping for his thoughts. **The word that matches the imagery is abrupt (B).**

7. The passage establishes that Mommy is a devout churchgoer who knows a lot of ministers. She could be called a connoisseur, a person with expert knowledge and discerning judgment—like a wine specialist would have. An allusion is a tangential reference to something else, such as another literary work (A). An antithesis presents contradictory ideas, whereas this comparison highlights similarity (B). A metaphor is a poetic phrase likening two different things (D). A paradox also is a contradiction (E). **An analogy is a comparison that explains or clarifies (C) as this one does.**

8. Readers can assume that the churchgoers are religious believers (A). But the question asks about the source of their exuberance. Self-indulgence (B) implies selfish desires, whereas the narrator says they are inspired by Jesus. The happy women are not acting like they are morally superior to others (C). The humorous tone of the passage does not convey a sense of oppression (E). **The best answer is joyous expression (D).**

9. The passage alternates between humorous observations and serious statements that affirm religious ethics. The humor arises from mimicry and exaggeration. The narrator's mockery is not as strong as the words bewilderment, wariness, and sarcasm (A, B, D) imply. He is a member of the congregation himself, not a confrontational outsider. The narrator presents his devout mother and his own religious faith in positive terms, not disappointment or tolerance. The whole passage is emotionally subjective, not factually objective (C). **But the tone switches from parody to idealism (E).**

10. In the conclusion, the narrator's mother tells her son how she understands the nature of God in relation to mankind. She is explaining theology, not compounding a mystery (A). Though she contradicts her son's notion that God must favor black or white people, her reply itself is sincere, not ironic (B). Universal truth implies that everyone thinks the same way, which is not the case—as young James's bias toward black people indicates (C). The tone of Mommy's reply is didactic, not a harsh criticism or rebuke (E). **Her comparison of the spirit of God to clear water is a metaphor, a poetic analogy (D) that her son can understand.**

11. The narrator recalls how books and music let him briefly forget his boyhood worries. Talking to his mirror image as if it were an imaginary boy shows creativity (A), but the narrator says this was another "escape from painful reality." He is confused and unhappy, but he is not blaming society or lamenting unreachable goals (C, D). His problem is he does not know what to think about himself. He remains anxious regardless of his brothers' mockery (E). **His uncertainty about whether he is black or white is a psychological conflict (B).**

12. Like a lot of teenagers, the narrator compares himself to movie actors who are more exciting role models than his family (A, B, D). The passage makes clear that he still loves and respects his mother and other relatives (C). **The issue for James is that the hero roles are played by white actors (E), which makes a black teenager feel that he is not like them.**

13. Define the phrase "tragic mulatto" first to understand its impact. A mulatto is a person of mixed race, especially someone with a black parent and a white parent—for example, the narrator in this passage. "Tragic" means extremely sad, especially due to a personal failing. Although her son cannot put the words in context in the book he read (B), this characterization is very relevant to the white mother of biracial children (C). Even if Mommy avoids talking about race (D), as the subsequent joke shows, and big brother David decides he is black (E), **the phrase implies that there is something fundamentally wrong with being biracial (A).**

14. Mommy's joke about beans is meant to teach her son that humanity is more alike than different. In context, this gentle humor is an example of wisdom, not ignorance or innocence (A, B). While the wordplay does ignore literal definitions and logical reasoning (D), it has a deeper meaning than mere amusement (E). **Mommy wants to ease her son's anxiety about race (C).**

15. Unity in a passage arises from repetitive elements, connections, or emphasis. The incidents involving the locked bathroom, talking to Mommy, and the brothers' prank have a common theme of adolescent anxiety, uncertainty, and estrangement. There is a degree of truth in choices (B), (C), (D), and (E). **But venting anxiety in the bathroom is the closest parallel (A) structurally and psychologically.**

16. Young Ruth has a lot on her mind in this passage besides graduation. The beginning establishes that she is unpopular (A). Later on, the passage develops her conflicts with her parents (C), her rejection of arranged marriage (D), and her intention to move back to New York (E). **But immediately after the phrase "that business" in line 6, Ruth the narrator refers to her abortion (B).**

17. Review the definitions of literary terms to see which best applies. A euphemism is an indirect or pleasant phrase used in place of harsher direct expression (A). An epithet is a descriptive word or phrase used as a name (B). Understatement depicts something as being smaller or less significant than it really is (C). Antithesis is a statement contrasting opposites (D). Imagery refers to descriptive language or literary devices (E). **Because the entire passage shows that Ruth's home life is really miserable, the correct answer is understatement (C).**

18. Ruth's Jewish father is adamantly opposed to the graduation ceremony because it is held in a Protestant church. The passage says that her mother has little influence (A), so whatever she said must have suited her husband. Separating the march from the graduation ceremony (B) is Tateh's concession to Ruth; it is not the reason he gives her the money, however, because he has ulterior motives. Tateh's consistently harsh attitude indicates Ruth's characterization of him is correct (C). The passage says he thinks her marriage prospects are more important than graduation (E). **After her brother Sam left home, her mother became ill, and Ruth reveals her plan to go to New York, his most important motive is keeping her in Suffolk to run the store (D).**

19. The climax is the most intense and decisive point in a story's main action. Prior incidents explain characters' motives and create conflict. After the climax, events resolve themselves to a conclusion. So it is important to realize that the passage is mainly about Ruth's graduation. Her wish to please her friend Frances competes with her intention to return to New York and her parents' objections. Sentences (A) and (B) contribute to the rising tension over Ruth's choice to attend the ceremony. Sentences (D) and (E) occur after her resolve fails. **The critical moment of decision is in sentence (C) when Ruth does not enter the church and defy her parents.**

20. Remember, the climax is the turning point in the action that leads to the story's conclusion. Students who mistakenly think the climax is Ruth's departure on the Greyhound bus might choose sentences (C), (D) or (E), if they reason that the graduation ceremony merely delayed her exit. Some might choose sentence (B), thinking that Ruth's wish to please Frances overrides her parents' old-fashioned objections. **Actually, Ruth's domineering parents prevail over her friend Frances, making sentence (A) the exception to Ruth's obedience.**

21. The key to this question is to think about the connotations the phrase "sugar days" gives to a deserted, old industrial town. How might sweetness or pleasure be applicable in context? An industrial site is not pleasant (A). The town seems ordinary, not historically significant (B) or architecturally interesting (D). The reader does not know what the town's primary industry was and cannot assume that sugar was made in Suffolk (E). **The most fitting answer is bygone economic prosperity (C).**

22. The sentence fragment is a deliberate grammatical error used for stylistic effect. In terms of meaning, it is a hasty generalization about the deserted town. The narrator's careful comparison of his map to local landmarks shows he is not indifferent (A), in a hurry (C), or ignoring details (E). He is openly searching for family connections, not being secretive (D). **The best answer is (B), depicting a quick overall impression.**

23. Read just the lines of dialogue to see what they contribute to the passage. Eddie Thompson's initial laughter and hesitation might momentarily stymie the author (A), but then he tells James McBride a lot about his family. The reader should not assume that Thompson has the authentic version of events, though (B). McBride the narrator admits he does not know anything about his Suffolk relatives, so he is not unreliable (C). Thompson's laughter implies tension or irony, not comedy (D). The actual dialogue is tragic. **The conversation creates tension and suspense (E) as James McBride waits to hear what Eddie Thompson knows about the Shilskys.**

24. Eddie Thompson's speech is characterized by hesitation and understatement. His status as the Shilskys' neighbor gives him credibility, but he does not assert himself as an authority (A). While he is surprised to meet a grandson, he is not overly emotional or sentimental about that family (B). His positive and negative opinions are apparent, so his speech is not strictly objective either (D). Even though Rabbi Shilsky was a mean bigot, Thompson indicates they got along, so he does not express any lingering resentment (E). But Thompson hesitates to criticize Shilsky because his listener is the rabbi's grandson. **So, he chooses his words discreetly (C).**

25. Overall, the passage describes a planned visit with a serious purpose. Meeting Eddie Thompson right away is more than a coincidence (A). It is one result of the narrator's investigation of his mother's past. The narrator tells readers that later he discovered his mother's original Yiddish name, so this trip is not conclusive (B). Since the narrator knew almost nothing about the Shilskys, he is not revising his opinion of them (C). He succeeded in getting information, so he was not disappointed (E). **What he hears is a revelation (D).**

The Color of Water

Chapters 1 and 2

1. The memoir begins with a supposed interview in which the author's mother talks about her family history. Explain the irony of her first statement, "I'm dead."

   The narrator employs verbal irony when she says, "I'm dead." The fact that she is alive is apparent after reading the rest of the chapter, in which she explains that her former *identities, Ruchel Dwajra Zylska and Rachel Deborah Shilsky, are dead. The rest of her family has disowned her, and they performed the same rituals (saying kaddish and sitting shiva) that they would have for someone who actually died; the narrator is "dead" to her family, but she is not literally dead.*

2. Who is the narrator of Chapter 1? Who is she addressing?

   The narrator of this chapter is a woman formerly known as Ruchel Dwajra Zylska and Rachel Deborah Shilsky. She does not mention her current name in this chapter. She was born an Orthodox Jew in Poland in 1921.

   She is addressing her son. This fact is revealed when she says, "My family mourned me when I married your father."

3. What does the narrator's diction reveal about her attitude toward the interview?

   Clearly, the narrator is not particularly interested in the interview and does not wish to answer her son's questions. The narrator's use of short sentences indicates impatience with the questioning, as do phrases such as "hurry up" and "over with." She refers to the interview as "this foolishness," conveying to the reader that she does not believe the interview is a worthy project.

4. How does the narrator characterize her father in this chapter?

   The overwhelming impression the narrator gives is that her father was harsh, tough, and clever. She describes him as a "fox," and many cultures view foxes as exceedingly cunning creatures. When the narrator says that her father's clothing was "like his uniform," this conveys that her father was a no-nonsense type of person, very strict, very serious. Interestingly, the narrator does not give any indication that her father was a loving or nurturing person. This characterization is obviously incomplete, but the reader should expect the narrator to expand upon these thoughts in future chapters.

5. Who is the narrator of Chapter 2?

   The narrator of this chapter is James McBride, the author.

6. In describing his stepfather, McBride says, "He took no guff and gave none." Paraphrase this idiom describing Daddy's character. What kind of man is he?

Guff is insolent or nonsensical backtalk. Daddy did not tolerate foolishness or disrespect. This old-fashioned diction fits Daddy's "old-timey" appearance and reliable personality.

7. Why does the narrator's mother choose riding the bicycle over driving her deceased husband's car?

The narrator has presented only limited information about his mother and the bicycle. However, students should be able to infer that one of the narrator's mother's reasons for riding the bicycle is that it was given to her by her deceased husband, and riding it reminds her of him. The bicycle is a sentimental keepsake.

Though students will not know this yet, the bicycle also establishes a motif that McBride will develop throughout the novel: the power of motion to dispel pain. Later in the book, it will become apparent that McBride's mother uses movement and action in order to stave off negative feelings and bad memories. Though this motif has not been firmly established at this point in the memoir, students should be instructed to examine its development throughout the book.

8. Analyze the following quotation from Chapter 2 and explain what the metonymy within conveys about the preachers:

> It was clear that Mommy was no longer interested in getting married again, despite the efforts of a couple of local preachers who were all Cadillacs and smiles and knew that she, and thus we, were broke.

The primary contrast in this quotation is between the "broke" McBride family and the wealthy local preachers. The preachers know that McBride's mother has no money and 12 children, and the quotation implies that they are leveraging this knowledge in an attempt to convince McBride's mother to marry one of them.

Describing the preachers as "all Cadillacs and smiles" conveys that they are wealthy and eager to please McBride's mother. In this context, "Cadillacs" is used to represent the concept of wealth; hence it is being used as a metonym.

9. How does the narrator characterize his mother in Chapter 2?

Overall, in this chapter McBride characterizes his mother as unorthodox and strange. Part of this strangeness, in McBride's opinion, is his mother's complete indifference to nearly everything occurring around her that does not directly concern her children. She does not worry, as McBride does, that she is in danger because she is a white woman in a predominantly black neighborhood. She does not socialize, and she does not discuss her past.

McBride's mother is also characterized as bold, determined, and stubborn to an extent. McBride mentions that when he was a boy his mother would "go up to some pretty tough dudes and shake her fist in their faces when she was angry," showing that she is not afraid of confrontation. McBride mentions that she was intent on "forcing [her children] into college through sheer willpower, and she "refused to learn how to drive."

10. Chapter 2 is not structured chronologically; explain how this structure affects Chapter 2's development.

This chapter begins at an important time in McBride's life: he is 14, his stepfather has just died, and his mother is left to raise her 12 children alone. Beginning the chapter at this point allows McBride to establish several conflicts that will persist throughout the novel:

- *The McBride-Jordan family lives in severe poverty.*
- *McBride's mother must raise her twelve children on her own.*
- *The McBride-Jordan siblings must compete for love and attention.*

Because McBride establishes these conflicts at the beginning of the chapter, the reader's understanding of the rest of the chapter is shaped by these conflicts. Had McBride structured this chapter in chronological order, these conflicts would not have been established early in the chapter and would not have been developed to any extent.

Chapters 3 and 4

1. Explain the conflicts that McBride's mother establishes in Chapter 3.

   The conflict between McBride's mother's father and the rest of her immediate family is established in this chapter. Her father, Fishel Shilsky, constantly threatened to send the rest of the family back to Europe. She also states that her father was a neglectful husband at best, saying that "once he got [to America], he was done with her."

   She also establishes the conflict between her religion and her personality. She tells James that she is "no expert" in Kosher practices, and her explanation of the Sabbath focuses on the ways in which it restricted her. She clearly chafed against these restrictions, as she mentions: "Even as a girl, I was a runner. I liked to get out of the house and go. Run. The only thing I was allowed to do on the Sabbath was read romance magazines." Her family's Judaism also does not help her to understand and cope with the death of loved ones—such as her Grandfather Zaydeh—as her family "didn't talk of death."

2. What does the choice of words—the **diction**—contribute to Mommy's characterization?

   The diction is colloquial. Mommy's vocabulary is simple, and she uses words such as "ain't"; this helps establish an informal register. The informality of her speech suggests a limited level of education—though this should not be taken to mean her level of education, ability to speak, or intelligence is deficient.

   Some of her sentences, especially when questioned about her childhood, are short, bordering on curt. This likely indicates that she is uncomfortable talking about her past, though it could also indicate that she is easily irritated.

   The sentence structure uses introductory phrases and inversion to focus attention and emphasis, such as: "See, my mother's family had all the class and money. Tateh, I don't know where his family was from"; "For me that was the hardest thing"; "But you know, I felt they were burying him too quick"; "Why he'd spit I do not know." These inversions also suggest a regional dialect or someone who learned English as a second language.

   Imperative statements help reveal her authoritarian upbringing: "No mixing it up. No pork, either—no pork chops with potato salad, no bacon and eggs, forget all that. You sit your butt down and eat what you were supposed to, and do what you were supposed to." In her family, "[y]ou obeyed, period."

3. Chapter 3 does not follow Chapter 2 chronologically. What effect or effects does the author's manipulation of narrative structure have on the text?

   Chapter 3 is very similar to Chapter 2 in that both chapters describe the childhoods of their respective narrators. This parallel structure invites the reader to compare both characters' childhoods and examine similarities and differences between the two. This narrative strategy also has the effect of making these two narratives seem intertwined rather than two separate stories.

4. In Chapter 4, what can you infer about Mommy's attitude toward race and skin color from the way she answers James's questions?

   Mommy clearly does not believe that skin color is of particular importance; she rejects the false dichotomy of "white" and "black," preferring not to categorize herself or her children in this way. Instead, she states that she is "light-skinned." When James asks her if he is adopted, she responds that she is his mother, but she does not explain why she and James have different color skin and therefore does not address the true source of James's confusion. This issue is unimportant to her; it is more important that her children attend church and work hard in school.

5. James McBride's childhood impressions of the Black Power movement are contradictory. What positive attributes does he perceive?

   Despite James's fear, he observes that the Black Power movement has style, youthful energy, and cultural relevance in art and music. James likes the "liberation colors" in which residents would paint "[p]ublic buildings, statues, monuments … even trees." Though the Last Poets' songs were aggressive and contained "in-your-face poetry," James feels their music is interesting, describing the vocal lines as "fascinating." The drag racers are exciting, and he describes Black Power's driver in very positive terms.

6. What are James McBride's negative impressions of the Black Power movement? What is the source of his information, and what does James imply about the veracity of this source?

Young James is worried that the "young black militant leaders" of the Black Power movement will hurt or even kill his mother. He is scared of the power they apparently hold over (or inspire in) "hundreds and hundreds of angry African-American students."

However, James receives all of his information about the Black Power movement from news reports anchored by white people, and he admits that he "had swallowed the white man's fear of the Negro … whole." The fact that McBride mentions these two circumstances is important; the reader can infer that McBride now believes these news reports may have been sensationalized in order to provoke such a fearful reaction. Indeed, at the end of the chapter, McBride writes, "I had no idea who the Panthers truly were. I had swallowed the media image of them [the Black Panthers] completely." The Black Panther at the end of the chapter does not appear to be a violent man, but James fears him anyway because of what he has heard from the media.

On the other hand, one cannot ignore the fact that there were violent aspects of the Black Power movement; the murder of black nationalist Malcolm X was just one of many killings during this divisive period. Ironically, Malcolm X was shot by black assailants after he quit the Nation of Islam, a group whose members believed in racial separation. Further adding to James's fears, he witnesses his mother being mugged by two black men. In this context, James's fears have some justification.

7. How does McBride's depiction of the Black Panther father near the end of Chapter 4 challenge the media's depiction of the Black Panthers?

When James first sees the Black Panther father, he does not know that the man is actually a Black Panther. Lacking this knowledge, James sees the man in positive terms; McBride writes that he "seemed outstandingly cool" and that his son "was very handsome, well dressed, and quite refined."

In contrast, the media depicts the Black Panthers as an angry, potentially violent group, one that does not seem cool or refined. In describing the media's coverage of Black Panther rallies, McBride writes that the leaders of the movement are "militant," "screaming to hundreds … of angry African-American students." "[M]ilitant," "screaming," and "angry" all suggest potential violence. The Black Panther father at the end of the chapter does not express any of these traits.

Chapters 5 and 6

1. What elements link Chapter 5 to Chapter 4?

In Chapter 4, James asked his mother about her extended family, but his mother gave limited answers to his questions, especially those about her mother and father. Chapter 5 is presented from James's mother's point of view, and she provides detailed information about her parents. McBride has structured the narrative so that the two stories—his and his mother's—appear to be intertwined.

2. What is the narrative function of Chapter 5? Explain your answer.

   This chapter functions mainly as exposition. James's mother presents him with information about her parents—information for which James had asked in the previous chapter.

   However, given the fact that this memoir presents the life stories of two people—James and his mother—one could also argue that the primary function of this chapter is to further develop Mommy's character. This chapter reveals the reasons for Mommy's reluctance to tell young James about her past: her experiences with anti-Semitic prejudice and her sexual abuse at the hands of her father.

3. Compare the values of Mommy's parents with the values she teaches her own children.

   Fishel Shilsky pursued money while Ruth McBride-Jordan scorns materialism. Her father was abusive while she emphasizes love and family unity. Her father quit being a rabbi, while Ruth cherishes Christian ideals. Her father disregarded education while she insists on academic excellence. Her parents remained outsiders in America whereas Ruth makes friends regardless of race.

4. How is McBride's mother's need to stay in constant motion developing into a motif?

   In Chapter 2, McBride writes about his mother's habit of riding an old bicycle. This habit formed shortly after her husband, James's stepfather, died. In Chapter 3, McBride's mother tells him that she feels more comfortable when in motion; she says that the "hardest thing" about the Sabbath was "sitting tight." She liked to "get out of the house and go. Run." In Chapter 5, she explains that she enjoyed running as a child, and that she "was always a running-type person."

   Shortly after this explanation, she reveals that she "had something to run from": her father, who terrorized her with sexual abuse. This places the earlier mentions of running or motion in a new context, as it is becoming clear that McBride's mother stays in constant motion to avoid being overcome by severe emotional trauma.

5. How does Chapter 6 function as comic relief?

   The first half of Chapter 6 is full of humorous elements, such as Mommy's horrible singing, Rev. Owens's sermons, churchgoers getting "the spirit," and Richie transforming into the Incredible Hulk. This section comes directly after Mommy's painful revelations about her father's predatory behavior, so the first half of Chapter 6 is a great contrast; the humor in Chapter 6 helps relieve the tension developed in Chapter 5.

6. Explain the symbolic connotations in the metaphor "God is the color of water."

   Students may explain, as Mommy did, that water is colorless and transparent. Water is essential to life. Water refreshes and cleanses. Water is colorless, so color has no significance to the universal creator. Mommy believes that religion can sustain people spiritually regardless of how they look.

7. Explain the function of Chapter 6's title, "The New Testament."

Chapter 5 was titled "The Old Testament." In the Christian faith, the Bible is made up of two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains books from the Jewish Bible, but arranged in a different order, while the New Testament is largely concerned with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Chapter 5 details some of James's mother's experiences with Judaism, while chapter 6 details the McBride-Jordan family's experiences in church after James's mother's conversion to Christianity. Therefore, the title "The New Testament" is used to indicate the change in subject matter from Judaism to Christianity.

Chapters 7 and 8

1. Why is Tateh's attitude toward his black customers ironic?

As McBride's mother explains, Tateh "thought black folks were always trying to steal from him." She then goes on to inform the reader that Tateh "was charging them [black customers] a hundred percent markup on his cheap goods," meaning that Tateh was selling his wares for twice the amount he had paid for them. McBride's mother implies that Tateh was overcharging for his goods by a large amount; she construes this as stealing. If Tateh believes that black customers are always trying to steal from him, but he is actually stealing from them by overcharging for his goods, this is ironic.

2. Read the following quotation from Chapter 7 and explain how the ideas it presents contributed to McBride's mother's personal development:

> Tateh hated black people. He'd call the little children bad names in Yiddish and make fun of their parents, too. "Look at them laughing," he'd say in Yiddish. "They don't have a dime in their pocket and they're always laughing." But he had plenty of money and we were all miserable.

At this point in the memoir, it has been established that McBride's mother does not consider material wealth necessary or even important to living a good life. This quotation reveals that these ideals were impressed upon her at a young age. Her family was not at all poor, but they were unhappy—largely because of her father, who mistreated her mother and sexually abused her. The reader can infer that Tateh's cruelty has caused McBride's mother to develop ideals opposed to those of her father.

3. In Chapter 8, how does the author create humor in the paragraph about his brother Dennis?

McBride uses hyperbole in listing Dennis's achievements, describing them as "heights we puny mortals could only dream of achieving," which were "trumpeted and crowed about by Mommy in every corner of the house." After this grand introduction, however, McBride informs the reader that "Dennis had finished college" and "gone to Europe," hardly earth-shattering accomplishments; this juxtaposition creates humor.

McBride also uses apostrophe; he addresses his brother although Dennis is not present. These highly dramatic calls to Dennis are incongruous with the rather mundane subject matter of the paragraph, and this incongruity helps establish a humorous tone.

4. Explain the causes of Helen's conflict with her family.

Helen, at age 15, is establishing her identity; she is becoming very interested in changing society and fighting oppression. She has become "the epicenter, instigator, and protagonist" of conversations held by the "Big Kids" about "changing the system" and "the revolution"; previously, she was "a peripheral figure in these discussions."

However, her approach is unacceptable to Mommy. Helen's rebellion involves leaving school—rejecting the "white man's education"—as well as no longer playing piano in the church choir. The reader knows from previous chapters that Mommy insists that her children do two things: go to church and work hard in school. Helen does neither; she rebels against her mother's rules because she can no longer reconcile them with her own personality.

5. Read the following quotation from Chapter 8 and explain how the author's diction reflects how the protagonist experiences the events portrayed.

> More commotion. I heard the boys downstairs saying, "All right, break it up. Hold her, Billy, wait—" *Boom!* Laughter by the boys, an agonized cry by Rosetta. "Oh, you're gonna get it now!" *Whomp!* Helen's scream. Another tussle. The sound of furniture flying, David shouting, a lamp breaking. More laughter and cursing … A vehement argument ensued, and I heard Helen declare she was leaving. Suddenly the boys got serious.

The protagonist, James, is not in the same room while the fight is happening, and therefore cannot see or hear everything that is occurring. To reflect this, the author uses sentence fragments to evoke this same disjointed feeling in the reader.

*The switch from sentence fragments to complete sentences at the end of the paragraph indicates a shift in tone. The fight has been described in a humorous manner up to this point; the author has used words such as "*Boom*" and "*Whomp*" to inject a bit of levity. However, the change in structure reveals that what was once considered a humorous fight will have serious consequences for the McBride-Jordan family.*

6. How does Helen's experience in Chapter 8 parallel Sam's experience in Chapter 7? How does the connection between these two chapters reflect the structure of the book as a whole?

Like Sam, Helen runs away from home as a teenager—Sam was about 15 years old, according to Mommy, and so is Helen when she runs away. Sam rebelled against his father's strict and unforgiving rules and treatment, and Helen also rebels against her mother's rule. However, Sam was emotionally abused by his father; McBride presents no evidence that Helen was emotionally abused by Mommy.

At this point in the book, students should realize that, for the most part, the even-numbered chapters parallel or develop ideas introduced in the odd-numbered chapters. Chapters 7 and 8 are no exceptions to the rule, as Sam's experiences in Chapter 7 are very similar to Helen's experiences in Chapter 8. Students can expect this pattern to continue throughout the rest of the book.

Chapters 9 and 10

1. What is the effect of the narrator's use of polysyndeton at the end of the first paragraph of Chapter 9?

Toward the end of the first paragraph, Ruth describes her father's butchering of a cow: "The cow would shudder violently and blood would spurt down his neck and through his nose into a drain in the cement floor and he'd die."

Multiple uses of the conjunction "and" in short succession help to convey Ruth's horror at the grisly scene. Although Ruth is an adult remembering this event, the use of polysyndeton lends a childlike tone to the retelling. Clearly, this event was traumatic if Ruth, a grown woman, describes it in a childlike manner. Polysyndeton also causes the pace of the paragraph to increase during its most important event; the pace of the passage in the preceding sentences is somewhat slower.

2. Ruth says that people were a "better kind of poor" years ago. What does that mean?

In Ruth's day, poor people had resources and abilities to sustain themselves in ways other than relying upon the cash economy, such as farming, hunting, and fishing. Because so many people were poor, economic disparities were less visible.

3. In Chapter 10, explain how James's confusion about the existence of Jews produces dramatic irony.

James is confused about the existence of Jews; he thinks that "Jews were something that was in the Bible." He tells his mother that he does not know that Jews are still around; this is ironic because his mother is Jewish and he has no knowledge of this fact. The reader, though, knows this from previous chapters, making this an example of dramatic irony.

4. What does the "boy who lived in the mirror" represent to James?

The "boy who lived in the mirror" represents a life that is the complete opposite of James's; it is the life that he desires to live instead of the life he currently lives. As McBride writes, "The boy in the mirror didn't seem to have an ache. He was free. He was never hungry, he had his own bed probably, and his mother wasn't white."

McBride's emphasis on the mirror boy's freedom is especially important. The mirror boy represents a specific type of freedom: freedom from his confusion about his racial identity. As McBride writes of the mirror boy, "his mother wasn't white." James's mother's whiteness causes him pain and confusion, something that the mirror boy does not suffer.

5. Explain the symbolic significance of the mirror.

James and the mirror boy are separated by the mirror, a physical barrier between them and their individual worlds. The mirror boy is James's opposite, calm and relaxed while James is confused and angry. The mirror represents James's lack of self-knowledge; he wants to be "free" like the mirror boy, but he cannot merge his life with that of the mirror boy without knowing about his family's past.

6. Explain what "tragic mulatto" means.

A mulatto is a biracial person, especially someone with one black and one white parent. Tragedy is an event of great suffering and destruction, a catastrophe. In literature and drama, a tragedy deals with serious matters and has an unhappy ending, and the protagonist is destroyed because of a personal failing. This type of protagonist is a "tragic hero."

The implication here is that being biracial is a personal flaw that dooms a person to unhappiness. That is why Ruth McBride reacts angrily and tells her son to stop reading the book in which he saw the words.

7. Explain how Chapter 10 develops the idea that racism is harmful.

One way McBride develops the idea that racism is harmful is through confronting racism directly. He does this throughout the chapter, exposing several ways in which racist attitudes harm him and his family:

- *His teachers grade his work more harshly than they grade the work of white students.*
- *As the only black student in his class, he is singled out during history class. The history book contains only one page on "Negro history"—indicating that the established authorities on history have marginalized African-Americans. Further, his classmates believe that he can dance well simply because he is black. James pleases them by dancing for them at school, but he feels that they are pleased by the spectacle, not because they actually like him.*
- *The phrase "tragic mulatto" angers James's mother because it implies that there is something inherently wrong with James.*
- *The police arrest Richie on suspicion of drug possession; McBride believes that Richie was arrested because he was carrying a large sum of money. He writes, "But to the cops, he was just another black perpetrator with a story, and he was arrested and jailed." Richie's lawyer advises Richie to plead guilty even though there is no hard evidence that Richie did anything illegal.*
- *James becomes ashamed of being seen in public with his mother.*
- *The grocery store owner is disgusted to see that a white woman is the mother of a black child.*

The other way McBride shows that racism is harmful is by contrasting his attitude as an adult with his attitude as a child. His attitude as an adult adheres closely to the idea his mother tried to teach him while he was a child: race is unimportant; he is a member of one race, and that is humanity. The joke about the teacher and the beans is an attempt to impress this idea upon James. Toward the end of the chapter, McBride explains his current stance on race: "I don't belong to any of those groups. I belong to the world of one God, one people."

Chapters 11 and 12

1. Explain the factors detailed in Chapter 11 that prevent Ruth from assimilating into American society.

   In the first paragraph of the chapter, Ruth says, "… I wanted the same things any teenage girl wants. I wanted love, nice clothes, a date. I never had that." Ruth cannot secure these things for two main reasons:

   - *Ruth is Jewish, and many of her peers are racist. When she auditions for a dance musical, "some of the girls [make] … a fuss over having to dance next to a Jew." Ruth drops out of the musical. She is not liked by her classmates, and she implies that they do not like her because they are prejudiced. Further, she was not asked out on dates by any of the boys in her school. Thus, when Peter does not judge her for being Jewish and offers her attention and affection, she is quick to reciprocate.*

   - *Ruth's father is strict and domineering. Ruth wants "… to be like them—American and WASP and going around in style, going dancing," but her father will not allow this. He will not buy her fashionable clothing, preferring to purchase "the cheapest things he could find." Her father also makes her work in the store whenever she is not in school, so she cannot have any sort of social life.*

2. In the paragraph beginning with "I loved that boy …" and ending with "… and you never will," what is Ruth's attitude toward the South, and how does her diction convey this attitude?

   Ruth's attitude is succinctly conveyed when she says, "It was always so hot, and everyone was so polite, and everything was all surface but underneath it was like a bomb waiting to go off." Ruth believes that there was a high level of potentially dangerous tension beneath Southern society's seemingly placid surface. She believes that people hid this tension beneath a veneer of politeness.

   In contrast to this idea, Ruth's diction in this passage is direct. She does not use euphemisms, and her descriptions of events such as the murder of Mrs. Mayfield's son are rightfully horrifying. Words like "killed," "death," and "bodies" convey the stark horror and reality of Southern life for African-Americans. Approximately halfway through the passage, Ruth says, "I always felt that way about the South, that beneath the smiles and southern hospitality and politeness were a lot of guns and liquor and secrets." "Guns" suggests the threat of violence, and "liquor" suggests the inability to control that violence. The "secrets" are murdered African-Americans, and this passage is Ruth's way of exposing those secrets and dispelling the myth of Southern life as intrinsically refined or idyllic—life may have been that way for some, but certainly not for those whom Ruth discusses.

3. When Ruth responds to Hunter Jordan's request for a date in Chapter 12 by saying, "But I got eight kids and they go to the movies too," what is she conveying to him?

   From this exchange, the reader can infer that Ruth is not simply saying, "Take my kids to the movies, too." She is indicating something larger—that if Jordan wishes to date her, he must accept her children as well. He must become part of the family; she will not date a man who will not treat her children well.

4. What might the simile comparing tearing down Hunter Jordan's house to ripping out half his arteries suggest about the effect that his home's destruction had on him?

   McBride may be suggesting that the destruction of Hunter Jordan's home was one of the factors leading to his stroke three years later. McBride informs the reader that Jordan did not feel entirely comfortable living with the large McBride-Jordan family, writing that his stepfather's "heart was back in Brooklyn." The stroke affects half his body, and the simile indicates that half his arteries were torn out. One cause of stroke is decreased blood flow to the brain, and arteries convey blood throughout the body.

Chapters 13 and 14

1. Read the following quotation from Chapter 13and explain what it conveys about Ruth's opinions on her extended family's values.

   > Now they were a funny family. They kept their feelings secret, bottled up inside them till they swelled and burst out like a water balloon you squeeze.

   Clearly, Ruth believes that her extended family's practice of bottling up their feelings is foolish and ultimately harmful. However, Ruth says this after explaining that her family were all "living high," meaning that they were wealthy. In juxtaposing the family's wealth with the harmful practice of bottling up their feelings, Ruth may be suggesting that the two are related.

2. In Ruth's opinion, what makes her relatives "American"?

   Ruth believes her relatives are "American" because they are "more about money than anything else." They are trying to integrate into American society, and they are having trouble deciding which Old World cultural practices and attitudes to leave behind and which to maintain.

   Ruth's relatives think of Ruth's family as "greenhorns" because they are not yet Americanized. In the paragraph immediately following, Ruth explains that part of what makes New York City so interesting is that there are "so many people rushing about." She wants "to rush like them," and the juxtaposition between Americanization and rushing around connects the two. Ruth's relatives are "American" because they are constantly busy and value money over anything else.

3. How does Chapter 13 further reinforce that Ruth's need to stay in constant motion is being used as a motif?

   First, the chapter is about Ruth's visit to New York City, a visit suggested after her mother's discovery of Ruth's pregnancy. The entire chapter, then, represents this motif; it presents her escape from a painful situation through motion.

   Second, Ruth is enthralled with the fact that there are "so many people rushing about," and she wishes to join them. The fact that these people are rushing around because they are busy makes little difference; Ruth has "nowhere to go," and she simply wishes to be in motion.

   Finally, Ruth explains her love for movement: "Anything that moved I liked. Speed. Trains, trolleys, skates." The elderly women who socialize with Bubeh tell Ruth that she should "stay at home and be a nice girl," but Ruth sees them as "funny old ladies."

4. How is James's attitude in Chapter 14 similar to that of Ruth's extended family in Chapter 13? How are his reasons for his actions similar to his mother's?

   Just like Ruth's extended family, James distances himself from his emotions and his connections to his family. McBride writes, "My friends became my family, and my family and mother just became people I lived with." This emotional distancing is James's way of coping with his stepfather's death.

   His reasons for his actions are similar to his mother's in that James is acting to escape his painful reality. Where his mother sought to distance herself physically from her problems through constant motion, James attempts to emotionally disconnect himself from his family's troubles.

5. How do the events of Chapter 14 parallel the events of Chapter 13?

   In Chapter 13, Ruth is sent to New York to live with her extended family. In Chapter 14, James is sent to Kentucky to live with his sister Jack. In both cases, the characters view their departure from their homes in a positive way; they are both trying to escape painful situations at home.

   Both James and Ruth work for people whom they characterize as "mean": James works for Herman, the gas station manager, and Ruth works for her Aunt Mary.

   Finally, both James and Ruth find someone whom they can admire: James admires Chicken Man, and Ruth admires Bubeh. Chicken Man gives James hard but good advice, and Bubeh listens to Ruth's troubles.

6. How does the imagery the author uses to describe Chicken Man produce humor while also conveying James's affection for him?

To create humor, McBride describes Chicken Man's apparel and behavior. McBride describes Chicken Man's hat as one "that seemed to cover his entire face," and he describes Chicken Man's pants as leaving "about two inches of sock and four inches of ankle showing." This conveys to the reader that Chicken Man's dress is not in line with the standards of the time, and this incongruity with the rest of the characters helps to create humor. McBride describes Chicken Man as "like a wandering bird lost in flight," and when ostensibly angry motorists honk at him because he is impeding their progress, he simply waves. Again, incongruity plays a large part in creating humor, as Chicken Man's response to the drivers is both endearing and amusing.

The author offers several clues to indicate James's affection for Chicken Man. The first is that Chicken Man has "laughing eyes," which suggests that Chicken Man is easygoing and that the narrator admires this trait. Though Chicken Man smells of "liquor and beer all the time," he also freely gives candy to young children. He is described as "like an angel," and the description of how he seems to appear out of nowhere suggests a sort of mystical aura that is opposed to the rather mundane truth: he emerges "from one of the ramshackle houses that lined the road a half-mile away." McBride's description of Chicken Man as "like King Tut" indicates a certain nobility of nature, wisdom, and a sobriety of thought ironic for someone characterized as a drunkard.

7. How does the scene in which Chicken Man chastises James for "flunkin' school" foreshadow an eventual change in James's character?

Chicken Man, in an uncharacteristically severe and blunt assessment, tells James that his current behaviors are at odds with what he believes about himself: that he is very intelligent and no one knows just how intelligent he is. Chicken Man essentially tells James that he cannot simply expect respect because he is intelligent; James needs to work hard to earn respect.

James dismisses Chicken Man's words as the advice of a drunk, but McBride indicates that the speech did eventually have an effect. McBride writes: "I had never heard Chicken Man talk so severely and what he said didn't really hit me, not right away." The most important part of this quotation is "not right away"; McBride writes this to tell the reader that Chicken Man's words did *eventually have a profound effect on his thought processes.*

Chapters 15 and 16

1. How does Chapter 15 affect Peter's characterization?

   Some students will assert that this chapter does little to change Peter's characterization. In this chapter, Peter tells Ruth that he loves her, but he has already impregnated another girl; his words are not in line with his actions, and he does not appear as devoted to Ruth as he claims to be. In Chapter 11, Peter also claimed to love Ruth, but he refuses to elope with her. However, his refusal was somewhat justified; he likely would have been hanged if anyone had discovered their relationship. Still, students could make the argument that his characterization has not changed.

   Other students will answer that Peter's refusal in Chapter 11 was justified, but his subsequent betrayal in Chapter 15 is not. Those students will answer that this chapter reveals Peter to be a weak-willed character and changes his characterization from faintly positive to strongly negative.

   Either answer is acceptable provided students support their points with evidence from the text.

2. Explain how the author builds reader sympathy for Ruth in Chapter 15.

   In Chapter 13, Ruth went through the very painful experience of having an abortion. In this chapter, Ruth discovers that Peter has impregnated another girl though he claims to love her. As Ruth puts it: "I went through this entire ordeal and here he was getting busy with someone else." It is clear that in Ruth's opinion Peter's declaration of love is empty, and Peter's betrayal creates reader sympathy for Ruth.

   Ruth's inability to enter the church during her graduation ceremony also builds reader sympathy. Several times throughout the memoir, Ruth's father has been shown to be overbearing and cruel. He instructs Ruth that she may take part in the graduation march, but she may not enter the church, as she would be breaking "the law of the Bible." Tateh tells Ruth not to disrespect him and Mameh, and this admonition preys upon Ruth's feelings of guilt. Ruth is unable to enter the church; she starts "to shake and sweat" and cries. The desire not to harm one's parents is nearly universal, and many readers will likely identify with Ruth at this point, developing sympathy.

3. What can you infer is the reason that Tateh gives Ruth the money for her cap and gown?

   At first, Tateh refuses to give Ruth money to purchase her cap and gown because he does not want her entering a gentile church. However, Tateh soon realizes that he needs Ruth's help to run the store because Sam is gone and Mameh has become ill. Still, Tateh does not relent until Ruth reveals that she will be leaving Suffolk for New York after graduation; Tateh is visibly upset by this and gives her the money the next day. It is likely that Tateh gives Ruth the money for her cap and gown in an attempt to convince her to stay in Suffolk and help manage the store.

4. How does McBride create suspense in Chapter 16?

In the first paragraph of the chapter, Ruth says to James, "We're going driving." This announcement seems to come with no provocation, and the reader knows it is an important announcement because Ruth has flatly refused to drive up to this point in the memoir. However, McBride does not follow this announcement with the story of the drive; instead, he spends several pages writing about the car, public transportation, and James's struggles with drugs and alcohol, among other things. The delay between the announcement of the chapter's main event and the occurrence of the event itself creates suspense.

5. How do the second and third paragraphs of Chapter 16 create dramatic irony?

In Chapter 15, Ruth explained that, as a teenager, she drove her father's car from town to town, hauling goods for sale. In Chapter 16, however, McBride writes, "Mommy had never driven before as far as I knew. She was afraid to drive." Ruth even tells James, "I hate this … You have to tell me what to do." James is unaware at this point in time that his mother actually did know how to drive and did so in her past. The audience, however, is aware of this fact, and so James's lack of knowledge becomes an example of dramatic irony.

Chapters 17 and 18

1. In Chapter 17, how does the narrator build suspense?

A few pages into the chapter, the narrator mentions, almost casually, that a "movie house" manager "thought [she] was a prostitute, which [she] almost did become." Though the reader is now aware that Ruth does not become a prostitute, interest has been piqued: now the reader must question how close she came to being a prostitute.

Part of the suspense is developed by Ruth's actions. She is evasive when discussing her new job as a manicurist with Bubeh, and Bubeh is normally someone whom Ruth trusts. The other part of the suspense comes directly from the narration. Ruth is vague when discussing the issue, stating, "I wasn't aware that [Rocky] had other plans for me," and, "… I was headed for trouble, which I found soon enough." Because she does not come out and state what exactly these "other plans" are, suspense is maintained. When Ruth finally asks Rocky about making money like his "other girls," Rocky says, "You're not ready to get out there yet. I'll tell you when you're ready. This is the first clear indication that Rocky is a pimp. The suspense is finally relieved when Ruth explains everything to Dennis; Dennis's disappointment causes Ruth to be ashamed of what she is doing, and she decides to stop talking to Rocky.

2. In Chapter 18, what can you infer is the reason that Ruth insists that David not plead guilty to a traffic violation?

   The paragraph preceding Ruth's insistence has established that Wilmington is quite different from New York in several ways, but the most important is that Wilmington appears to be highly segregated. The McBride-Jordan family is "shocked by the racial division of the city and surrounding county," and a distinct divide exists between school quality for black and for white students. McBride writes that the city has a "southern vibe," which should cause the reader to recall Suffolk and the racial intolerance of its residents. Because this information comes in such close proximity to Ruth's frantic admonition, the reader can comfortably infer that Ruth insists that David not plead guilty because she fears that he will not be treated equitably due to the fact that he is black.

3. How does the author's diction help convey James's conflicted feelings about working on the Dawson estate?

   Clearly, James believes that working on the Dawson estate is beneficial, and he is thankful for the opportunity. However, readers could make the argument that James also finds the work slightly demeaning, as if he feels he has to somehow hide the fact that he is black.

   Working as a butler, he serves the partygoers "quietly," as if trying to make himself as unobtrusive as possible. James "[combs] his Afro down"; the use of the word "Afro" instead of simply "hair" may signify that James feels that he is suppressing his racial identity by combing it down. Further, McBride writes that he "wasn't a total house Negro, so to speak." The term "house Negro" was coined by Malcolm X and is used to describe a black person who wants to live and work with white people because they expect their lives will be better as a result. The historical analogue is the house slave, who typically had an easier life than field slaves and was therefore not as determined to escape slavery. McBride invokes this term to justify his actions while also comparing his situation to that of a slave.

   James also describes the partygoers as "chuckling white folks" and "old-money blue bloods." "[O]ld-money" suggests that these people come from rich families, and "blue bloods" connotes royalty or being a member of the nobility. These two phrases serve to separate these upper-class people from James, who decidedly belongs to the working class.

Chapters 19 and 20

1. What does the antiphrasis in the following quotation from Chapter 19 convey about Ruth's attitude toward both her father and prevailing societal practices?

> The way Tateh treated her, they'd call her an "abused woman" today. Back then they just called you "wife."

Antiphrasis is a rhetorical device in which a word is used, often ironically, to convey the opposite of its usual meaning. In this case, the antiphrasis is found in Ruth's use of the word "wife"; she equates "wife" with "abused woman," when "wife" normally is used to describe a woman who is loved and cherished by her husband.

Clearly, Ruth's use of antiphrasis is meant to convey her negative feelings toward her father, and the catalog of Tateh's brutal actions that follows the antiphrasis confirms this. Without making excuses for her father, Ruth also criticizes prevailing Southern culture as permissive of this sort of abuse. Equating "wife" with "abused woman" indicates that spousal abuse was common and acceptable in the South at that time, but her sarcastic delivery conveys her disdain for such moral shortcomings.

2. Explain why Ruth's promise to Dee-Dee in Chapter 19 is appropriate in terms of Ruth's characterization.

Throughout her life in Suffolk, Ruth has been dominated and repressed by her father. As Ruth has already mentioned, this led to low self-esteem. Further, the reader knows that Ruth does not wish to displease members of her family; this is the reason she did not enter the church during her graduation ceremony. As a result of her upbringing, Ruth is not very assertive, and she does not know how to handle direct confrontation. The reader also knows that Ruth's preferred method of approaching problems is to escape from them, to remain in constant motion. Hence, instead of telling Dee-Dee the truth, Ruth promises that she will stay in Suffolk.

3. Explain the irony of Ruth's hostility to James's girlfriend Karone in Chapter 20.

Ruth got married young and had eight children with her first husband, Dennis. Her second husband, Hunter Jordan, accepted them all. Her hostility to a divorced woman with a child contradicts her own experience.

4. Explain the meaning of the term "sugar days" in the context of the paragraph in which it appears.

The term "sugar days" is used to refer to a time in Suffolk's history. The town's "sugar days" are over, so McBride's description of Suffolk here depicts qualities of Suffolk opposed to those it had during its sugar days. Suffolk is now "[q]uiet, empty," and there is more development occurring around the town than inside it. Therefore, "sugar days" likely refers to a time during which Suffolk's population was growing and the town was growing as well, a time during which the town did not seem quiet or empty like an "industrial site."

5. How does James's conversation with Eddie Thompson indicate that Ruth McBride-Jordan is likely a reliable narrator?

   In speaking of "Old Man Shilsky," Eddie Thompson confirms several character traits that Ruth has described:

   - *Shilsky was a racist. Thompson explains, just as Ruth explained, that Shilsky disliked and overcharged black customers. He even shot a man over a minor dispute.*
   - *Shilsky was a cruel man. Thompson describes Shilsky as "a hateful one" and "mean as a dog."*
   - *Shilsky was cruel to his wife. Thompson tells James that "Mrs. Shilsky was terrified of the old man." Thompson also confirms the story about Shilsky's affair.*

   Eddie Thompson is the first character in the book, other than Ruth, with firsthand information about the town of Suffolk. Because much of what he says matches well with what Ruth has previously said, the likelihood that Ruth is a reliable narrator increases.

6. What can you infer from the fact that Eddie Thompson points to the ground in response to James's declaration that he would like to find his grandfather?

   After Thompson points to the ground, he says, "They'd let him in down there even if the bridge was out. They'd parachute him over." First, this statement informs the reader that Shilsky is dead. Second, because Shilsky is dead, the reader must interpret Thompson's statements figuratively; clearly, a dead person is not going to parachute anywhere. Given the fact that Thompson believes Shilsky was a very bad person, the reader should be able to infer that Thompson thinks Shilsky is in Hell.

Chapters 21 and 22

1. Explain why Chapter 21 is the climax of Ruth's narrative.

   This chapter represents the highest point of action in the narrative; each chapter before it has built up to this moment. In the very first chapter, the reader learns that Ruth is "dead" to her family, and now she explains the exact reason: her father disowned her for marrying a black man. The fact that she is now disowned also means that she will not have contact with her abusive father again, and she has finally escaped him for good by the end of the chapter. Finally, this chapter also represents the highest emotional point of Ruth's narrative, as she describes being devastated by her mother's death. Afterward, she explains that she began to heal thanks to her husband and her conversion to Christianity. These various narrative threads are finally resolved in this chapter.

2. Explain the symbolic significance of "a bird who flies."

Mameh tells Ruth that "A bird who flies is special. You would never trap a bird who flies." For Mameh, a bird who flies represents freedom. Mameh has been trapped ever since the Shilskys moved to America; she has been trapped in an abusive relationship that she could not escape because she needed to be supported. The birds represent Mameh's secret wish: to escape and be free.

3. In Chapter 22, what can you infer is the reason that James feels uncomfortable when introduced to the black janitor of a Jewish school?

It is apparent from James's reaction that he regrets telling the headmaster that his mother is Jewish. What likely makes James uncomfortable about meeting Sam, the black janitor, is that the headmaster assumes that James would like to meet Sam simply because they are both black Jews. While the headmaster's intentions are surely good, James likely feels that she is treating both him and Sam like novelties—she places more emphasis on their status as black Jews than their status as human beings.

4. Explain why Chapter 22 represents the climax of James's narrative.

James's narrative has been tied together by one major theme: his search for his identity. Now that he has visited Suffolk and learned more about his family's past, he is able to put aside much of the pain he has dealt with for most of his life; he now knows who he is and where he came from. His confusion and fear about race is eradicated, as he realizes that his mother was right in telling him that race is unimportant, it is his humanity that matters.

McBride writes that "the ache that the little boy who stared in the mirror felt was gone," indicating a resolution between the two parts of his personality. James has broken through the barrier the mirror represents.

Chapters 23 and 24

1. How does Chapter 23 express the fact that racism was culturally acceptable during the 1950s?

   Ruth relates several anecdotes that show racism was prevalent during this time:

   - *A black woman punches her in the face because she, as a white woman, "don't belong here."*
   - *Dennis is beaten on the street by a group of white men.*
   - *Dennis still fears being killed for marrying a white woman.*
   - *The clerks who issue Ruth and Dennis's marriage license are rude and they do not want to complete the paperwork.*
   - *Ruth and Dennis have trouble signing a building lease because the owner does not want to rent to black people.*
   - *The doctors at St. Peter's Hospital act "cold and disgusted" when they learn Ruth and Dennis are married, and they make pointed remarks in Ruth's presence. The doctor who calls her expresses no sympathy over the death of her husband, and she was not informed that Dennis had cancer until after his death.*
   - *The man at the train station cannot believe that Ruth and Dennis were married, and he does not want to release Dennis's body to Ruth.*

2. The anniversary celebration for New Brown Memorial Church is described *in medias res*. Explain why this literary technique is suited to Chapter 24's theme.

   The theme of Chapter 24 can be summarized as a piece of advice: It is best to live in the present instead of the past. Three components of this chapter support this theme.

   First, the author includes a portion of Dennis McBride's writing. This excerpt focuses on the dangers of attempting to "reenter the past," stating that people's memories of the past are not always accurate.

   Second, Ruth's memory is described as "like a minefield, each recollection a potential booby trap." The only way Ruth can cope with her past is to not discuss it.

   Finally, Ruth begins her speech with some prepared remarks, but she soon discards these in favor of speaking her thoughts as they come to her. This method elicits a powerful response from the congregation.

   The chapter begins in the present tense, and McBride describes the action as if what is happening is happening at this very moment. Fittingly for the theme of living in the moment, "no one's complaining" even though the various elements of the celebration leave much to be desired. The attendees are making the most of what is available, living in the moment.

3. How does Chapter 24's narrative structure frame the chapter around Ruth's return to New Brown Memorial Baptist Church?

The beginning of the chapter is exposition, and it establishes the setting: "the October 1994, fortieth-anniversary gala of the New Brown Memorial Baptist Church."

The major conflict is introduced a few paragraphs later, when McBride explains that Ruth has had a bit of a falling-out with the church. When the church found a new minister, he promptly took Dennis McBride's picture down from behind the pulpit, ostensibly to hang it in a new vestibule that has not been built yet. Further, the minister treated Ruth "like an outsider, a foreigner, a white person*," and this treatment was not befitting the widow of the church's founder. This has greatly upset Ruth. Interestingly, the presentation of the conflict also takes the form of exposition.*

The sequence of events leading to Ruth's speech constitutes the rising action of the chapter. McBride explains that, "despite her personal differences with the new minister," she has decided to appear at the gala. This should indicate to the reader that the resolution of the conflict is forthcoming.

The climax of the chapter occurs when Ruth gives her speech. The highest point of emotional intensity occurs when Ruth discards her prepared speech and tells the congregation exactly how she feels about the church and how it has affected her life. After the speech, she seems revitalized; delivering the speech is a cathartic experience.

The last chapters constitute the falling action, in which Ruth tells James to "leave that man [the young minister] alone," signaling that she has forgiven him. The conflicts established in the chapter have been resolved.

Chapter 25 and Epilogue

1. How does McBride convey his disdain for his black reporter coworkers who "[wield] their race like baseball bats"?

McBride's diction in this section is key to understanding his opinion of these coworkers. First, he writes that they "marched around the newsrooms as if they were the second coming of Martin Luther King." Clearly, he is indicating that they are not *the second coming of Martin Luther King, which makes their "marching" seem more aggressive in nature.*

The simile indicating that they wield their race like baseball bats furthers the notion that these men are aggressive. "Wield" is a word that is often used in conjunction with weapons, and baseball bats certainly count as weapons. In James's opinion, these men are using their race as a tool; they claim to have "knowledge of poverty and blackness," but McBride seems to indicate that their identification with their race has been constructed in order to further their careers.

2. Explain how the following simile reflects the overall structure of the book:

> … as she laid her life before me, I reassembled the tableau of her words like a picture puzzle, and as I did, so my own life was rebuilt.

Throughout the memoir, McBride has carefully positioned pieces of information so that one chapter answers questions introduced in the chapter preceding it. In alternating narrative perspective from chapter to chapter, McBride has delivered the impression that these two supposedly separate stories are intertwined and deeply connected; his and his mother's individual experiences are depicted as similar. McBride gradually fills in information from his mother's past and connects this information to his own life, completing a sort of puzzle he has been trying to solve for years.

3. In the epilogue, how does the narrator indicate that his mother has indeed accepted her past?

The narrator explains that his mother "had no problems walking into the synagogue," and explains various aspects of Judaism "as if she were visiting a museum," indicating that Judaism holds no strong emotional power over her. McBride notes, "whoever had said kaddish for Mommy … had done the right thing, because Mommy was truly gone from their world."

In the final paragraph, she looks up at the synagogue for a moment. Considering that in the previous paragraph she had mentioned that she could have been married in the Jewish tradition, she is likely thinking about how her life would have differed if that had indeed come to pass. She looks at the synagogue for only a moment, though, before turning away and moving on; the implication is that she is satisfied. The fact that her "bowlegged waddle [is] just the same as it always was" indicates that her moment of contemplation has not changed her thinking; she has left Judaism behind permanently.

The Color of Water

Chapters 1 and 2

1. The memoir begins with a supposed interview in which the author's mother talks about her family history. Explain the irony of her first statement, "I'm dead."

2. Who is the narrator of Chapter 1? Who is she addressing?

3. What does the narrator's diction reveal about her attitude toward the interview?

4. How does the narrator characterize her father in this chapter?

5. Who is the narrator of Chapter 2?

6. In describing his stepfather, McBride says, "He took no guff and gave none." Paraphrase this idiom describing Daddy's character. What kind of man is he?

7. Why does the narrator's mother choose riding the bicycle over driving her deceased husband's car?

8. Analyze the following quotation from Chapter 2 and explain what the metonymy within conveys about the preachers:

> It was clear that Mommy was no longer interested in getting married again, despite the efforts of a couple of local preachers who were all Cadillacs and smiles and knew that she, and thus we, were broke.

9. How does the narrator characterize his mother in Chapter 2?

10. Chapter 2 is not structured chronologically; explain how this structure affects Chapter 2's development.

Chapters 3 and 4

1. Explain the conflicts that McBride's mother establishes in Chapter 3.

2. What does the choice of words—the **diction**—contribute to Mommy's characterization?

3. Chapter 3 does not follow Chapter 2 chronologically. What effect or effects does the author's manipulation of narrative structure have on the text?

4. In Chapter 4, what can you infer about Mommy's attitude toward race and skin color from the way she answers James's questions?

5. James McBride's childhood impressions of the Black Power movement are contradictory. What positive attributes does he perceive?

6. What are James McBride's negative impressions of the Black Power movement? What is the source of his information, and what does James imply about the veracity of this source?

7. How does McBride's depiction of the Black Panther father near the end of Chapter 4 challenge the media's depiction of the Black Panthers?

Chapters 5 and 6

1. What elements link Chapter 5 to Chapter 4?

2. What is the narrative function of Chapter 5? Explain your answer.

3. Compare the values of Mommy's parents with the values she teaches her own children.

4. How is McBride's mother's need to stay in constant motion developing into a motif?

5. How does Chapter 6 function as comic relief?

6. Explain the symbolic connotations in the metaphor "God is the color of water."

7. Explain the function of Chapter 6's title, "The New Testament."

Chapters 7 and 8

1. Why is Tateh's attitude toward his black customers ironic?

2. Read the following quotation from Chapter 7 and explain how the ideas it presents contributed to McBride's mother's personal development:

> Tateh hated black people. He'd call the little children bad names in Yiddish and make fun of their parents, too. "Look at them laughing," he'd say in Yiddish. "They don't have a dime in their pocket and they're always laughing." But he had plenty of money and we were all miserable.

3. In Chapter 8, how does the author create humor in the paragraph about his brother Dennis?

4. Explain the causes of Helen's conflict with her family.

5. Read the following quotation from Chapter 8 and explain how the author's diction reflects how the protagonist experiences the events portrayed.

> More commotion. I heard the boys downstairs saying, "All right, break it up. Hold her, Billy, wait—" *Boom!* Laughter by the boys, an agonized cry by Rosetta. "Oh, you're gonna get it now!" *Whomp!* Helen's scream. Another tussle. The sound of furniture flying, David shouting, a lamp breaking. More laughter and cursing … A vehement argument ensued, and I heard Helen declare she was leaving. Suddenly the boys got serious.

6. How does Helen's experience in Chapter 8 parallel Sam's experience in Chapter 7? How does the connection between these two chapters reflect the structure of the book as a whole?

Chapters 9 and 10

1. What is the effect of the narrator's use of polysyndeton at the end of the first paragraph of Chapter 9?

2. Ruth says that people were a "better kind of poor" years ago. What does that mean?

3. In Chapter 10, explain how James's confusion about the existence of Jews produces dramatic irony.

4. What does the "boy who lived in the mirror" represent to James?

5. Explain the symbolic significance of the mirror.

6. Explain what "tragic mulatto" means.

7. Explain how Chapter 10 develops the idea that racism is harmful.

Chapters 11 and 12

1. Explain the factors detailed in Chapter 11 that prevent Ruth from assimilating into American society.

2. In the paragraph beginning with "I loved that boy …" and ending with "… and you never will," what is Ruth's attitude toward the South, and how does her diction convey this attitude?

3. When Ruth responds to Hunter Jordan's request for a date in Chapter 12 by saying, "But I got eight kids and they go to the movies too," what is she conveying to him?

4. What might the simile comparing tearing down Hunter Jordan's house to ripping out half his arteries suggest about the effect that his home's destruction had on him?

Chapters 13 and 14

1. Read the following quotation from Chapter 13and explain what it conveys about Ruth's opinions on her extended family's values.

> Now they were a funny family. They kept their feelings secret, bottled up inside them till they swelled and burst out like a water balloon you squeeze.

2. In Ruth's opinion, what makes her relatives "American"?

3. How does Chapter 13 further reinforce that Ruth's need to stay in constant motion is being used as a motif?

4. How is James's attitude in Chapter 14 similar to that of Ruth's extended family in Chapter 13? How are his reasons for his actions similar to his mother's?

5. How do the events of Chapter 14 parallel the events of Chapter 13?

6. How does the imagery the author uses to describe Chicken Man produce humor while also conveying James's affection for him?

7. How does the scene in which Chicken Man chastises James for "flunkin' school" foreshadow an eventual change in James's character?

Chapters 15 and 16

1. How does Chapter 15 affect Peter's characterization?

2. Explain how the author builds reader sympathy for Ruth in Chapter 15.

3. What can you infer is the reason that Tateh gives Ruth the money for her cap and gown?

4. How does McBride create suspense in Chapter 16?

5. How do the second and third paragraphs of Chapter 16 create dramatic irony?

Chapters 17 and 18

1. In Chapter 17, how does the narrator build suspense?

2. In Chapter 18, what can you infer is the reason that Ruth insists that David not plead guilty to a traffic violation?

3. How does the author's diction help convey James's conflicted feelings about working on the Dawson estate?

Chapters 19 and 20

1. What does the antiphrasis in the following quotation from Chapter 19 convey about Ruth's attitude toward both her father and prevailing societal practices?

   > The way Tateh treated her, they'd call her an "abused woman" today. Back then they just called you "wife."

2. Explain why Ruth's promise to Dee-Dee in Chapter 19 is appropriate in terms of Ruth's characterization.

3. Explain the irony of Ruth's hostility to James's girlfriend Karone in Chapter 20.

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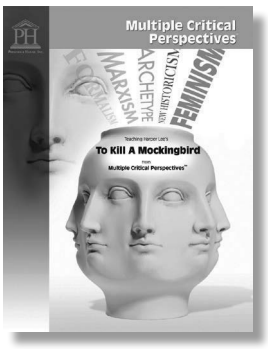

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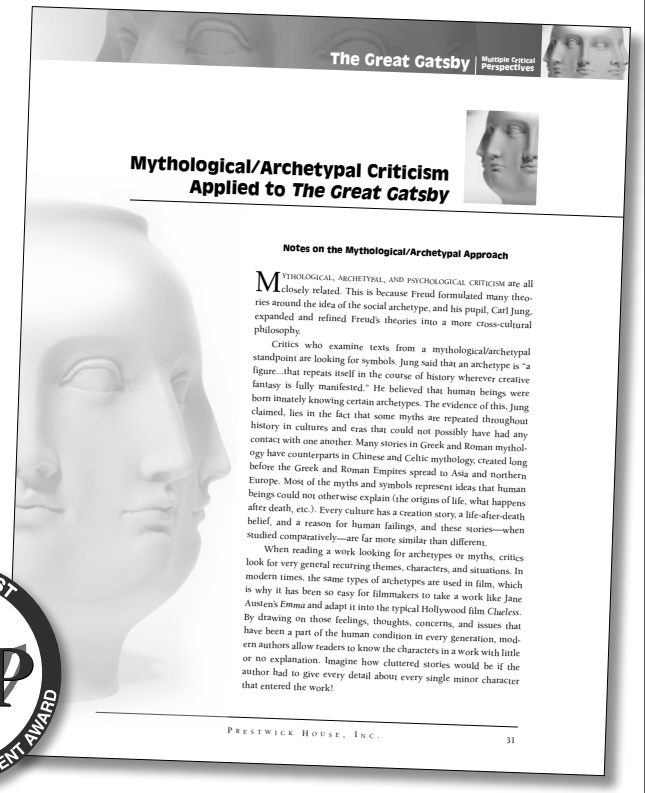
The Great Gatsby | Multiple Critical Perspectives

Mythological/Archetypal Criticism Applied to *The Great Gatsby*

Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Approach

MYTHOLOGICAL, ARCHETYPAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM are all closely related. This is because Freud formulated many theories around the idea of the social archetype, and his pupil, Carl Jung, expanded and refined Freud's theories into a more cross-cultural philosophy.

Critics who examine texts from a mythological/archetypal standpoint are looking for symbols. Jung said that an archetype is "a figure...that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested." He believed that human beings were born innately knowing certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lies in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology have counterparts in Chinese and Celtic mythology, created long before the Greek and Roman Empires spread to Asia and northern Europe. Most of the myths and symbols represent ideas that human beings could not otherwise explain (the origins of life, what happens after death, etc.). Every culture has a creation story, a life-after-death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories—when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different.

When reading a work looking for archetypes or myths, critics look for very general recurring themes, characters, and situations. In modern times, the same types of archetypes are used in film, which is why it has been so easy for filmmakers to take a work like Jane Austen's *Emma* and adapt it into the typical Hollywood film *Clueless*. By drawing on those feelings, thoughts, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, modern authors allow readers to know the characters in a work with little or no explanation. Imagine how cluttered stories would be if the author had to give every detail about every single minor character that entered the work!

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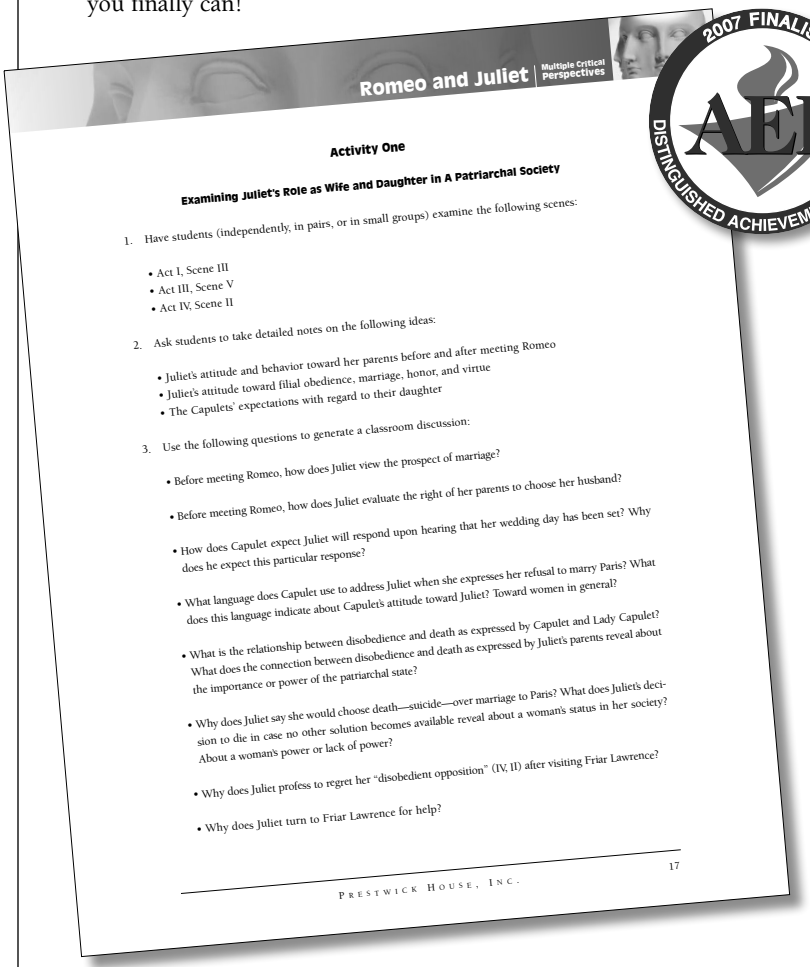
Romeo and Juliet | Multiple Critical Perspectives

Activity One

Examining Juliet's Role as Wife and Daughter in A Patriarchal Society

1. Have students (independently, in pairs, or in small groups) examine the following scenes:
   - Act I, Scene III
   - Act III, Scene V
   - Act IV, Scene II
2. Ask students to take detailed notes on the following ideas:
   - Juliet's attitude and behavior toward her parents before and after meeting Romeo
   - Juliet's attitude toward filial obedience, marriage, honor, and virtue
   - The Capulets' expectations with regard to their daughter
3. Use the following questions to generate a classroom discussion:
   - Before meeting Romeo, how does Juliet view the prospect of marriage?
   - Before meeting Romeo, how does Juliet evaluate the right of her parents to choose her husband?
   - How does Capulet expect Juliet will respond upon hearing that her wedding day has been set? Why does he expect this particular response?
   - What language does Capulet use to address Juliet when she expresses her refusal to marry Paris? What does this language indicate about Capulet's attitude toward Juliet? Toward women in general?
   - What is the relationship between disobedience and death as expressed by Capulet and Lady Capulet? What does the connection between disobedience and death as expressed by Juliet's parents reveal about the importance or power of the patriarchal state?
   - Why does Juliet say she would choose death—suicide—over marriage to Paris? What does Juliet's decision to die in case no other solution becomes available reveal about a woman's status in her society? About a woman's power or lack of power?
   - Why does Juliet profess to regret her "disobedient opposition" (IV, II) after visiting Friar Lawrence?
   - Why does Juliet turn to Friar Lawrence for help?

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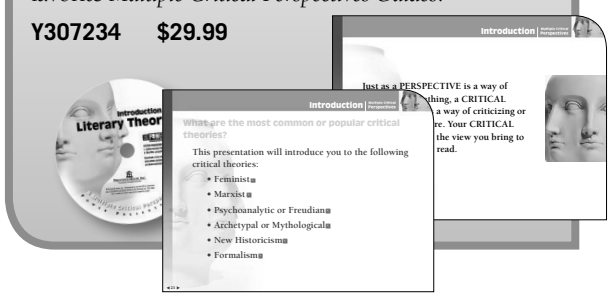

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