

NYC Lab School Summer Engagement
Racial Autobiography

Welcome to NYC Lab School's Summer Engagement. Our community believes that we must build on our racial literacy skills to become responsive and responsible citizens in our changing world.

This summer, we are reading about race and writing our racial autobiographies.

Please read *ONE* of the following texts or feel free to read both if you are so inclined!

Stamped: Racism, Anti-racism and You by Ibram Kendi *OR* *Between The World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates

You have been provided with reading guides for each text to help you as you engage with the reading. *These guides are OPTIONAL.* You do not have to answer the questions. Consider reading together with a family member. If you are a struggling reader or find these selections challenging, consider using an audiobook as you read along.

This reflective process (concurrent journaling is a great idea!) will help you to author your own racial autobiography.

Be brave. Speak your truth. Reach out if you are stuck or need support.

Bjacko8@nyclabschool.org

The following guiding questions provide a structure for your writing:

Story of Self: What is your experience with race? How old were you when you became aware of race? Was it a positive or negative experience? How do you feel about what you have experienced with race so far in your life? What challenges around race have you had in your past? What choices did you make regarding those challenges?
Story of Us: What is your experience in school with students of different races? What is your experience with interactions of people of other races in your neighborhood and elsewhere in your world? Were these positive, negative, or complex encounters for you? What challenges around race do you face? What challenges do you see others in your community facing? Grades 10-12: What racial challenges do you personally face in the Lab community? Grade 9: What racial challenges did you personally face in your MS community? What challenges do you see for your friends, teachers, staff, and school leaders?
Story of Now: What actions can you personally take? What actions can your peers, your teachers and administrators at Lab take to create an anti-racist community at Lab today?

NYC Lab School Summer Reading Enrichment Guide
Between The World and Me
By Ta-Nahesi Coates
(Adapted Reading Guide)

As you read, the Coates' text please consider these guiding questions.

Part 1 (pg. 1-12)

1. Who is Coates writing to? How does this change his tone? (5)
2. According to Coates, what did the broadcaster mean by “body”? (5)
3. What does Coates mean when he says “Americans deify democracy”? (page 6)
4. What is a “conscious claim”? (page 7)
5. What does “implicit” mean? (page 7)
6. What does “indubitable” mean? (page 7)
7. How does Coates describe racism on page 7?
8. Do you agree with this description? Why or why not?
- 9.
10. What is the Middle Passage? Trail of Tears?
11. Put the following passage in your own words: “In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men”.
12. If racism is thought to “just occur”, how does that change accountability for the oppression?
13. Who does Coates mean by the “new people”? (page 7)
14. Explain what Coates means by “new people are a modern invention”. (7)
15. What dream is Coates referencing? What symbols does he use to refer to this dream?
16. Explain the following quote in your own words: “America believes itself exceptional, the greatest and noblest nation ever to exist, a long champion standing between the white city of democracy and the terrorist, despots, barbarians, and other enemies of civilization.”
17. What does “apparatus” mean?

18. Why does Coates not have the luxury of “looking away”? (9)
19. According to Coates, who has the ability to destroy his body? (9)
20. Who do these individuals represent?
21. Why was Coates’ son crying?
22. What does Coates mean when he writes, “You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body”?
23. What does Coates mean when he writes, “This is your country, this is your world, this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it”? (12)
24. Do you think this is an appropriate response to his son? Why or why not?
25. What does Coates mean when he says that the country is “lost in the Dream”? (12)

Part 2 (pg. 14-30)

1. Why is Coates afraid? (14)
2. What does the word “adamantly” mean? (14)
3. Describe the men that Coates talk about on pg. 14. Do you know similar people?
4. What were the “customs of war” that Coates is describing? (14)
5. What does Coates mean by the “vulnerability of the black teenage [body]”? (14)
6. Why was Coates’ father fearful?
- 7.
8. Why did Coates’ father beat him? (16)
9. According to Coates was discipline enough to save children?
10. Based on the description on pg. 17, during what era (60s? 70s? 80s? 90s?) was Coates a child?
11. What does Coates mean when he says “the system makes your body breakable”? (18)
12. Why does Coates see the children of Baltimore, Chicago, and Philadelphia as living in a completely different world? How does this relate to the title?
13. According to Coates, why were the young men on pg. 22 loud and rude?
14. Why did Coates stay clear of Jo Jo?
15. What is “fighting weather”? Does such a thing exist today?

16. Do you see any similarities or differences to Coates description of adolescent life on pg. 23-24 in Baltimore to what you observe in Philadelphia?
17. What is the “culture of the streets”?
18. What does Coates mean when he writes that schools aren’t concerned with curiosity but compliance?
19. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
20. What does Coates mean by “penal warehouse”? (26)
21. Do you think that school is an escape for the streets?
22. Why couldn’t Coates escape to church?
23. Contrast the “meek” of the Bible and Coates’ childhood.

NYC Lab School Summer Reading Enrichment Guide
Stamped: Racism, Anti-Racism and You
By Ibram Kendi and Jason Reynolds
(Adapted from *Stamped* Educator Guide)

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Introduction)

1. Read the following two sentences from the beginning of the introduction: “To know the past is to know the present. To know the present is to know yourself” (p. ix). What does Kendi mean when he writes this quote?
2. How will you locate yourself in the work of antiracism as you read and discuss this book?
3. How might learning about the source of racist ideas help you to know the present and yourself?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapter 1)

1. Discuss each of the three positions: assimilationist, segregationist, antiracist. How do people, past and present, demonstrate their imperfections by embodying ideas from one or more of these positions?
2. Reynolds has given Gomes Eanes de Zurara the title “World’s First Racist.” In doing so, Reynolds spotlights the power of the written word and how it can be used as a force for evil. How is history much more than simply a recording of dates and facts that are significant only to the past?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapter 2 and 3)

1. In what ways is racism woven into the fabric of American institutions? Where do you see evidence of this today?
2. Zurara’s book *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* and Cotton Mather’s book *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* are symbols of the power and consequences of writing. How does what we read influence our views of the world?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapters 4 to 10)

1. Evaluate the following statement: “Racism is the bedrock of the USA.” How are the forming of our nation’s government and the policies and practices of today emblematic of this statement?
2. Create a chart that helps you track and analyze the ways race influences social, economic, and political conditions for African Americans. Note examples of the ways racism is embedded in the policies and practices of America. consider the messages they’ve learned about race from the media, their family, community, school, and peers.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapters 11 to 13)

1. At the beginning of *Stamped* and in chapter 13, Reynolds asserts, “Life rarely fits neatly into a box. People are complicated and selfish and contradictory.” Who are some of the complicated political figures, past and present, and what makes them complex?
2. Reynolds uses the following simile to describe racism: “Freedom in America was like quicksand. It looked solid until a Black person tried to stand on it. Then it became clear, it was a sinkhole”

(p. 108). He also uses the following metaphors and descriptors: “racist roadblocks,” “racist loopholes,” “potholes,” and “political and physical violence working to break the bones of Black liberation” (p. 109–110). In what ways is racism embedded in practices, policies, and laws? What parallels can you draw between the past and present ways racist roadblocks, potholes, and loopholes continue to persist?

3. Reynolds names the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments each as an example of a “big deal” that is far from a “done deal” (p. 110). What does he mean by this? What else needs to be accomplished to get to a “done deal?”

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapter 15 and 16)

1. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington had distinct strategies and approaches to Black liberation. What does liberation mean to you? In what ways are some approaches to liberation in fact not always liberatory?
2. Reynolds discusses *The Souls of Black Folk* by Du Bois and Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness.” “A two-ness. A self that is Black and a self that is American” (p. 124). In what ways might people feel as if their identity is divided? In what ways might people feel as if their identity is unified?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapter 18 and 19)

1. Marcus Garvey spotlighted the issue of colorism, its origins, and the dangers of it. Is colorism equally as destructive as racism?
2. Reynolds demonstrates how racist ideas in the fields of science and mathematics—from eugenics to the creation and purposes of IQ and standardized tests—have been created and used to oppress Black and Brown people. How do we decide what to believe about a scientific claim?
3. *Stamped* traces Du Bois’s complicated stance on race and racism. In what ways do assimilationist, segregationist, or antiracist stances show up in your daily lives?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapters 20 to 23)

1. When describing Black political movements such as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Reynolds states, “The shift went from fighting for civil rights to fighting for freedom. The difference between the two is simple. One implies a fight for fairness. The other, a right to live” (p. 175). In what ways do you make a distinction between *fairness* and *life*?
2. Racism is so embedded in our lives that even everyday expressions that might seem *innocuous* are in fact examples of the pervasive power of language and the ways words and phrases associate blackness with negativity. Examples include words and phrases such as *black sheep*, *blackballing*, *blackmail*, *blacklisting*, *black mark*, and *blackout*. Other words and phrases include *minority*, *ghetto*, *thug*, and *inner city*. Discuss the ways Reynolds sheds light on how Black people have worked collectively to resist such negativity. To what extent do all citizens of a democratic society have a responsibility to disrupt the racism that is embedded in the English language?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapters 24 to 27)

1. In *Stamped*, Reynolds exposes and debunks the myths of several master narrative themes such as: America is a meritocracy and anyone who works hard enough can succeed; truth and justice (or law and order) should be valued; people should be colorblind. In what ways is a color blindness approach toward race not only disingenuous but dangerous?
2. Researcher and scholar Dr. Richard Milner IV argues that race is constructed physically, contextually, socially, legally, and historically. (*Rac[e]ing to Class: Confronting Poverty and Race in Schools and Classrooms*, Harvard Education Press, 2015.) How strong is the evidence that Reynolds and Kendi present to support Milner's assertion?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (Chapter 28)

1. How has your racial consciousness been challenged or changed as a result of reading *Stamped*?