

*These sample activities and assignments were developed by UO Composition Program Instructor and TEP Peer Mentor Avinnash Tiwari*

## 1. Questions at Issue

Learning Objectives:

- Identify through close-reading practices key terms
- Develop questions at issue (Qs@I) that critically engage those terms
- Draw on non-traditional archives of the “everyday” (lived experience, popular media, for example) to engage those Qs@I
- Engage Coates’s text on its own terms while drawing correlations and identifying differences between diverse communities

**Step 1:** As you read, take note of key terms that appear and re-appear throughout the text. How does the author introduce the term? How does the author explain or define the term and with what kinds of evidence or examples? Does the author cite proper nouns (people, texts, music, art, places, etc.) as evidence? If they are unfamiliar, do some research.

**Step 2:** Is the key term clear to you in the context of *BTWM*? Try your best to suspend judgment (do I agree/disagree with the text) and first be clear on what the text says. Then, take note of what is unclear, confusing, even contradictory. You may also want to think about the key term in another way that the text has not commented on. Now you are ready to pose your question.

**Step 3:** Engage the question by introducing some examples gathered from your everyday experiences. This could mean lived experience, or personal experience you or someone you know may have in relation to your question. You could also locate music, videos, social media, and other popular culture examples that also engage your question.

**Finally**, return to your key term: Is the key term clearer to you now? How has your understanding of the term changed or how would you add on to what Coates presents in the text? [how to write this up? journaling? multiple key terms? formal essay? social media?]

**Example:** If I were to ask a question about what is a “black body” I would locate and re-read some of those passages. After seeing the Nas quote about schools as poison for black children I might think about other hip-hop tracks. I might identify a particular track on Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly* that may help me understand the key term a bit more.

**Example:** I’m curious about what the “Dream” means for Coates. After identifying some passages from Coates especially about “redlining,” I want to offer my take on my family’s interpretation of the “Dream” when they moved to the US and bought their first home. As I think about my family’s experience coming to the States, I might see correlations and differences in terms of how the “Dream” takes shape in different communities.

## 2. Movement and Bodies-in-the-World

### Learning Objectives

- Develop both an internal and external awareness of how different kinds of bodies (including your own) move around in our social world
- Identify how social norms and expectations inform how we move in the world
- Use writing via multiple technologies to mark our growing awareness
- Develop a critically-reflexive connection to Coates's interrogation of the material consequences of race and other differences on the value of different kinds of bodies

**Step 1:** Locate and re-read different passages where Coates describes how bodies move in the world. He often points to dancing and more rambunctious movements, but also takes note of clothes and fashion styles, even haircuts. According to Coates, how do different bodies move around in the world? What informs this movement through freedom and constriction?

**Step 2:** Take note [what technology could we use?] of how you move in your daily life. What kinds of clothes do you wear and how do you style yourself depending on where you will be? How do you move in different places and at different times? How do other factors in the world determine how you move and who you move around with?

*Length of journaling could range from a week to longer.*

**Step 3:** Reflect on your collected data. Depending on length of journaling, decide on intervals where you will offer some analysis about what you see in your data. Do we find ourselves restricted in particular clothes or places? Does the way we walk or move change at times of the day and in different contexts? How are we moving when we feel safe and secure? How does our gender and race shape these interactions with the world? How does documenting our own movement change our movement and relation to our body?

*Here too, the final product could be a series of journaling, an essay, a presentation, research as part of a larger project, etc.*

### 3. Letter Writing

#### Learning Objectives

- Identify the most pressing social issues in your social world
- Develop a means to critically engage how power through difference operates at the level of lived experience
- Develop a means to engage personal is political ideology and practice
- Create a space to both interrogate power structures and imagine other possibilities
- Identify the value of different kinds of evidence
- Identify in your own writing how content and form inform one another

#### Prompt:

Some of us may have children, nephews, nieces, younger siblings, etc. that we are close to. We could also think of ourselves as our younger selves. If you were to write a letter as Coates writes to Samori, what would be the most pressing issues you would want to let that loved young person know about? How would you go about explaining it? What kinds of evidence would you use: lived experience, historical evidence, social commentary, music, pop culture, or what? Also think about the style and tone you would take? How would the way you feel about these issues inform how you write about them? How would the particular person that you imagine writing to inform how you write?

#### Possible Forms:

- journaling via social media (process of letter writing)
- physical paper letters (sealed and saved/mailed)
- presentation; reading at end of term (also social media possibilities)
- finished letter and meta-writing: interrogation of form and archive use

### 4. Class Discussion Format to Emphasize Close Listening to Peers and Text

**Goals:** Practice active-listening skills, discussion as dialogue, textual analysis

**Set-up:** Circle, texts, notebook, and writing utensil

**Process:** Begin with a prompt; printed preferred

#### Discussion format:

- The first respondent must address the prompt with close-reading analysis and conclude with a point or question.
  - Another option to begin would be to ask a student or small group to prepare a response to the prompt and present as the first response. Besides one or two close-reading analyses and points, the student or group should also have a follow-up question or two. If I integrate this into the

assignment, I ask the student or group to meet with me prior to discussion to go over their response.

- Each subsequent respondent will
  - Paraphrase the previous speaker's main point
  - Offer a related point or question and do so with a textual reference for support

**Prompt Example:**

Read (out-loud) the final paragraph of Section II, beginning with, “Michael Brown did not die as so many of his defenders supposed [and ending with] Black life is cheap, but in America black bodies are a natural resource of incomparable value” (131-2).

In this passage, Coates writes, “And still the questions behind the questions are never asked.” Are “the questions behind the questions” asked or alluded to in this paragraph? What are they?

Questions for further discussion:

- Can you describe the historical narrative moving through the paragraph? Is this history itself a way of asking those questions behind the questions?
  - Clarification questions: Which of these historical moments are unfamiliar?
- Look at the juxtaposition on the page of “Ferguson,” “Muslims,” and “Dreamers [...] quoting Martin Luther King.” Comment.
- How do Mike Brown and Prince Jones fit into this historical narrative?
- How does the passage distinguish “black life” from “black bodies”?