

THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE

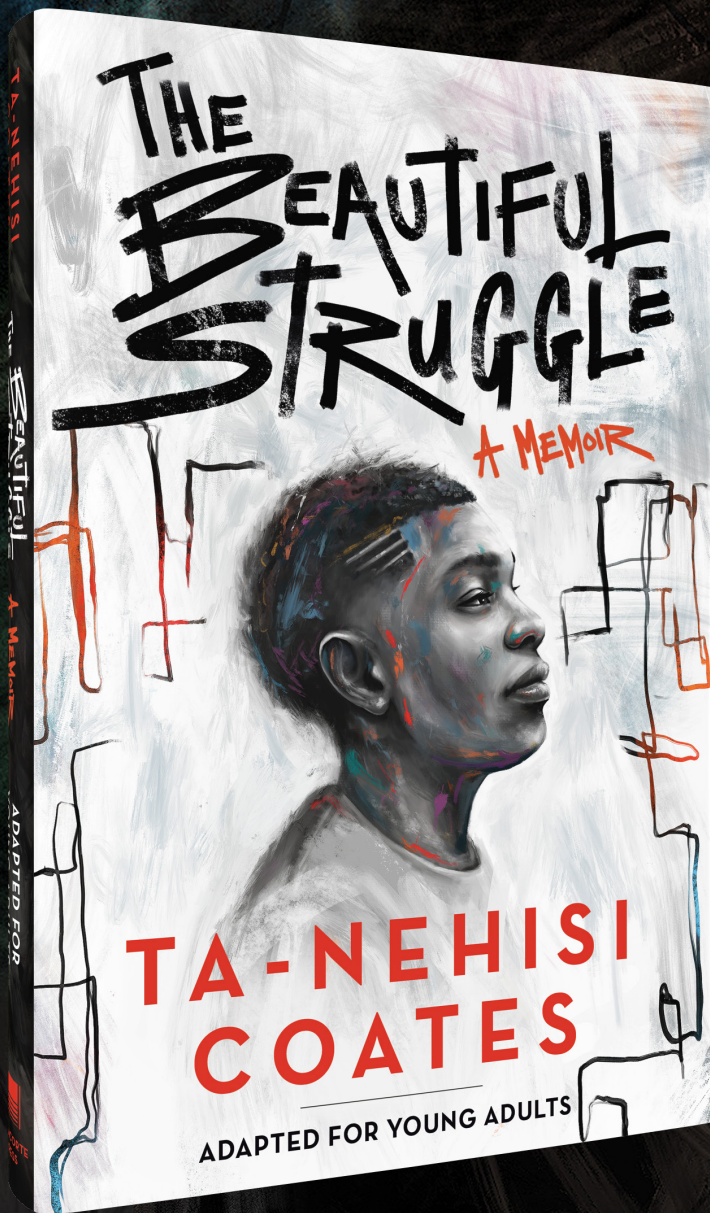
A MEMOIR



TA-NEHISI
COATES

ADAPTED FOR YOUNG ADULTS

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



ADAPTED FROM THE ADULT MEMOIR BY THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE WATER DANCER* AND *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME*, THIS FATHER-SON STORY EXPLORES HOW BOYS BECOME MEN AND, QUITE SPECIFICALLY, HOW TA-NEHISI COATES BECAME TA-NEHISI COATES.

Coates grew up in the tumultuous 1980s in Baltimore, which was known as the murder capital of America. Describing his life with seven siblings, four mothers, and one highly unconventional father—Paul Coates, a larger-than-life Vietnam vet, Black Panther, and Afrocentric scholar—Ta-Nehisi’s coming-of-age story is gripping and lays bare the struggles of inner-city kids. With candor, Ta-Nehisi Coates details the challenges on the streets and within his family, especially the eternal struggle for peace between a father and son and the important role family plays in such circumstances.

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GABRIELLA DEMCZUK



TA-NEHISI COATES is the author of *The Water Dancer*, *The Beautiful Struggle*, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, and *Between the World and Me*, which won the National Book Award in 2015. He is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. Ta-Nehisi lives in New York City with his wife and son. Visit him online at Ta-NehisiCoates.com and at [@tanehisipcoates](https://www.instagram.com/tanehisipcoates) on Instagram.

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

There will be many references and terms that are unfamiliar to readers who are not from the East Coast of the United States, Maryland, Baltimore, or Black Baltimore. Just as educators since time immemorial have taken pride in helping students decode Shakespeare, for example, many of the same principles will apply to reading and teaching this book. Read to experience, explore, and comprehend, and if you happen to be lucky enough to have a Black Baltimorean student (or students) in your class, consider yourself uniquely positioned to learn from those who may be the experts on many of the ideas, people, places, song lyrics, and figures of speech within the book. As with anyone traveling from their known world into one with which they are not familiar, it is imperative to preserve curiosity and reserve judgment. Step into feelings of discomfort (if you feel them), if you can no longer claim to be the expert in the room. As Frederick Douglass once famously said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” The struggle to understand and be understood, the struggle to beat the odds and assert the right to one’s existence, the struggle to be seen and to see yourself as excellent, this is the beautiful struggle many Black students in our schools experience every day. Enjoy the journey.

ON AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH

In James Baldwin’s essay “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?,” Baldwin argues that “What joins all languages, and all men, is the necessity to confront life, in order, not inconceivably, to outwit death: The price for this is the acceptance, and achievement, of one’s temporal identity.” Black English is more than a means of communication—it is a method of connection to self and to community and an assertion of humanity in a world that tries to dehumanize through colonization and, ultimately, the theft of one’s language. One of the primary ways by which this happens is in the school system through the denial of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as a valid form of expression and communication and the insistence both by systems and individuals that Black people use the language of colonizers and those who enslaved our ancestors in order to prove our humanity, our right to be seen as equal.

In a modern context, Dr. April Baker-Bell’s book *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy* takes a look at anti-Black linguistic racism and white linguistic supremacy. In an effort to reverse some of the harm that the denial of AAVE has done to individuals throughout their lives, she explains “how traditional approaches to language education do not account for the emotional harm, internalized linguistic racism, or consequences these approaches have on Black students’ sense of self and identity.” It is imperative for educators reading *The Beautiful Struggle* with their students to engage with the book while considering the role that teacher and student identities play in determining what is worthy of academic study.

Keep a journal of new vocabulary you encounter as you read. Use the internet, context clues, and other resources to help you determine what the words you read mean in context and any equivalent words that exist in your vernacular.

ON CHAPTER HEADINGS

Each chapter heading is lyrics to a rap or hip-hop song. You may be able to understand the references in the chapter headings without further research. If you do not recognize the references, find the songs and listen to them—each will shed light on the meaning of the words within the chapter.

FURTHER READING

***An African American and Latinx History of the United States*
by Paul Ortiz**

Black Language Syllabus

***Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*
by Jeff Chang and DJ Kool Herc**

Genius: Song Lyrics and Knowledge

THEMES AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT

- So much of *The Beautiful Struggle* is about the way one's environment shapes them, playing a huge part in determining who a person is and what they become. As you read, take note of the way Coates describes Baltimore and the greater Washington, DC, area. Do you know anything about these places? How do Coates's observations add to or contrast with what you know (or think you know)? Is your community similar to the ones Coates describes? How is it different? What impact does location have on an individual? In other words, consider how you would be different if you were from somewhere else.

WRITING EXERCISE: Write a "Where I'm From" poem.

FAMILY

- Family relationships drive much of the plot in *The Beautiful Struggle*, because as Ta-Nehisi encounters people and conflicts in the external world, his family remains a guiding light in how he handles them. As you read, consider the impact of family relationships on individuals, both with respect to the way we see ourselves and the way we interact with others. What impact does your family have on who you are? How is your family similar to or different from Ta-Nehisi's family or other families in your community?

WRITING EXERCISE: Write a letter to your past self or to an important family member or loved one. Reflect on the role that person had in making you the person you have become. If you could travel back in time to give your younger self advice, who would you say will be your greatest ally in the years ahead? Why?

HISTORY

- Ta-Nehisi develops a sharp sense of the way our understanding of history shapes the world around him. His father works to show him where he falls in the line of revolutionaries, freed and formerly enslaved people, intellectuals, and folks who who proceeded him had to fight hard to get an education. What role does history play in influencing our present?

VIOLENCE

- Consider the role of physical and psychological violence in the book. Ta-Nehisi experiences both kinds of violence at school and in his community. Many Black children continue to experience psychological violence in the school system, and corporal punishment in school is still legal in nineteen states. What incidences of school violence have you seen or heard about?

WRITING EXERCISE: Think about types of violence. If you haven't experienced any, how do you suppose that makes you different from someone who has?

EDUCATION

- Ta-Nehisi's family gives him as much education at home as he receives at school (if not more), but it is of a different kind. His parents repeatedly stress the importance of acquiring social, cultural, and ethnic education on your own because the school system is insufficient. Many young people attend culture camps so they can get a cultural education. What education have you received about yourself and your place in society from your parents? Why do you think traditional schools do not or cannot provide this type of education?

WRITING EXERCISE: Give examples of the knowledge about life and your place in it you have gained outside of traditional school settings. Who did you get this knowledge from? What do you know about your place in history? From what you've learned, what is your responsibility to yourself? To your loved ones? To society?

POWER

- At home, in the streets, and at school, Ta-Nehisi has to reconcile how powerful he is in any given situation with how much power others have over him. It is said that knowledge is power, so it could also be said that Coates's father gives him knowledge in order to empower him and help him better navigate the world. Do you think knowledge is power? Why?

WRITING EXERCISE: When was the first time you felt powerful? Who is the most powerful person in your family, class, school, neighborhood, or other community? What characteristics do they have? What do you think makes other people respect their power? Is the respect based on fear or admiration? How did this person gain respect?

ISOLATION

- At various times in the novel, Ta-Nehisi reflects on feeling that he's *from* West Baltimore but not of it. Adolescence is a time when young people typically separate from the world they have known (family and home) and begin to explore the wider world. So much of *The Beautiful Struggle* involves trying to figure out one's place in the world. What characteristics does Ta-Nehisi have that separate him from others in his immediate environment?

WRITING EXERCISE: What types of events and relationships make you feel connected to or separate from others in your community? Do you consider yourself to be someone who likes to be a part of a group? Or do you prefer to be alone? What does society teach us about isolation and loneliness? Can solitude be a good thing?

MUSIC

- A large part of Ta-Nehisi's personal awakening happens in connection to music he listens to (rap and hip-hop) and performs (as part of a drum circle). Music has always had an important role in African American communities as many musical forms traveled with enslaved people across the Middle Passage and remain to this day. When African Americans were forbidden to read or write, music was a form of communication allowed to them. Jazz, one of the only music genres that is uniquely North American, was invented by African Americans. What role does music play in Ta-Nehisi's life and story?

FURTHER READING: *Chuck D. Presents: This Day in Rap and Hip-Hop History* by Chuck D.

WRITING EXERCISE: What musical genre do you like the most? What do you like about it? Who are some of the major groups or individuals one would need to know to familiarize themselves with the genre? How do you feel when you listen to some of your favorite songs? How does music educate, enlighten, and heal?

LITERATURE

- The types of literature that Ta-Nehisi chose to read were very different from those his father chose for him. Throughout the book, there are references to Black writers of the distant and not-so-distant past—so many that Coates reveals a sort of canon of Black literature. Reading these texts will help you unpack the deeper messages within the story; however, it is possible to develop an understanding of the philosophies and intellectualism that lie beneath the surface of great works with some research. Ta-Nehisi discusses many of the thinkers who influenced him, but he also connects his writings to those of a great chain of ancestors stretching through time. From what you have read in this novel, what works would you include in an African American cultural canon?

EXTENSION: Read parts or all of *The Water Dancer*, and identify elements of history and mysticism. Analyze connections to the past and to present day. Look for connections to the themes in *The Beautiful Struggle*.

WRITING EXERCISE: If you were trying to introduce someone to your culture for the first time, what three books would you encourage them to read? Try to think in broad historical terms—which books represent the evolution of your cultural or ethnic group, outlining both hardships and opportunities? Among African Americans, how is writing an act of resistance, a move to reclaim one's power?

CHAPTER 1

“There lived a little boy who was misled . . .”

- What does our education system teach students about Africa and African Americans? Do students in your school district begin their studies with slavery? Do they learn about any important intellectual, scientific, or socio political contributions people of the African diaspora have made? Why do you think this is?
- What does Ta-Nehisi mean when he talks about “J. A. Rogers, Dr. Ben, and Drusilla Dunjee Houston, great seers who returned Egypt to Africa and recorded our history, when all the world said we had none”? (p. 7)
Activity: Research these people and discuss why society might erase the contributions of certain people from formal education.
- “They took one look at West Baltimore and understood that they were the best of it. So they walked like they were all that mattered, like they had no time.” (p. 8) Who are *they*? What do these sentences reveal about them, and about West Baltimore?
- How does Ta-Nehisi’s family confirm stereotypes about African American families? How does the information revealed in chapter 1 disrupt these stereotypes and force the reader to reframe what they may think they know?
- How is Ta-Nehisi’s life affected by his familial relationships? **Activity: Gather information about and quotes from each family member as you read. Create a chart to display the information. Make inferences about the impact their relationship with Ta-Nehisi has on his character.**
- How and why is Howard University considered a “Mecca”? (p. 18) **Activity: Read the chapter “The Third Change: Mecca and the Death of Mythology” in *Between the World and Me*. Research the word Mecca. What does it mean, both literally and figuratively? Create a T-chart comparing Mecca to Howard University, using the framing: “Mecca is to Muslims what Howard University is to African Americans.” Can you think of any places in your culture that are comparable? Where do young people in your family go to develop into adults when they leave home?**
- What was the “war on drugs”? Was it really a war? Who started it? Did anyone win? Consider its impact on Black people in America on Ta-Nehisi and his community. **Activity: Using resources available to you, research and create a timeline of the war on drugs. Focus on its sociopolitical impact. Which drugs were prominent in Baltimore in the 1980s? Look at incarceration rates. Was one race incarcerated more than another in this time? Why? Make inferences about the impact of incarceration on family structures and a community’s ability to make economic gains.**

CHAPTER 2

“Even if it’s jazz or the quiet storm . . .”

- “This is what beef is: Baltimore was too primitive for gangs, everything relied on natural or man-made borders.” (p. 25) Refer to the map of Baltimore at the beginning of your book. Compare that map to what Ta-Nehisi reveals in chapter 2 and the “Judgmental Map of Baltimore.” What do you notice? How do you suppose Coates learned the rules of who can or cannot go where, and why? **Activity: Search for your city on the Judgmental Maps website. Do you think the map is accurate? Why or why not? Create your own map of your city, including the unwritten rules of who lives and travels where. Discuss your findings with your peers; do they agree or disagree? Are the rules different for different people? Why or why not?**
- “Bill’s logic was taken from the Great Knowledge, the sum experience of our ways from the time Plymouth Rock landed on us.” (p. 27) *The Beautiful Struggle* has many references to famous words spoken by well-known African Americans from across all echelons of society. Most of them are sprinkled throughout the text as quotes, passing references, figures of speech, or apostrophes. In this particular instance, Coates refers to a famous speech by Malcolm X entitled “The Ballot or the Bullet,” in which he says, “We didn’t land on Plymouth Rock; the rock was landed on us.” **Activity: Read “The Ballot or the Bullet,” exploring any references you don’t understand, and write an analysis of the speech. Write a response to the question: Which is more powerful, the ballot or the bullet? Why? Consider anything you know about the history of voter suppression and our current political climate.**
- What is “the Great Knowledge”? How does Ta-Nehisi describe his father’s philosophy of life? What is your philosophy of life? How much do you agree or disagree with the statement that “No matter what Civilization says, academic intelligence is overpraised and ultimately we are animals”? (p. 28)
- “Everyone moved as though the same song were playing in their heads. It was a song I’d never heard.” (p. 29) What makes Ta-Nehisi feel separate or different from others in his community? Do you feel you are generally like other young people in your community? Why or why not?
- The classes at Ta-Nehisi’s school are named after Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington, Carter G. Woodson, Thurgood Marshall, and others. **Activity: Research these people and determine what was remarkable about their lives. Find excerpts or clips of speeches they gave and words they wrote. Create a visual using a picture of them and Thinglink or another visual annotation tool. Present your work to the class. Compare this with your notes about what you learn about Africa and African Americans in school. What observations can you make? How does learning about the positive contributions of African Americans change your self-image or the ideas you have about African Americans?**
- “They saw Lemmel as a barracks, themselves as missionaries called to convert us to the civilized way.” (p. 31) How was Ta-Nehisi’s education supposed to “civilize” him?
- “You could see she came from somewhere hard like Walbrook Junction, that she’d risen off the block, even if the block had not risen off her. But she was a philosopher.” (p. 31) What do you learn about Ta-Nehisi’s teacher, Ms. Nichols, from this description? Who do you consider your most influential teacher? Why? **Activity: Write a description of that teacher using the shell that Ta-Nehisi provides for you above: “You could see that they came from . . . that they had . . . even if . . . But they were . . .”**
- What is “fight season”? (p. 35) Does it occur at your school or in your neighborhood? If so, when? What usually makes it happen? What are the types of “beef” young folks in your community have with one another? Is there beef between schools or neighborhoods? What are its origins? Do you believe it’s true that “fists could equalize it all”? (p. 38) Why do you think young Ta-Nehisi thought so?

- How is Ta-Nehisi's status within the community altered when he decides to cry rather than fight? (p. 40)
- What does Ta-Nehisi mean when he says, "[Fruitie's] slave name was Antwan Smith"? (p. 44) See also: Urban Dictionary (Remember: This is crowd-sourced information, so evaluate the results for legitimacy.)
- What happens as a result of Ta-Nehisi's realization that he is alone? How and why does he make the discovery that he is alone in his world?

CHAPTER 3

"Africa's in the house, they get petrified"

- "The Knowledge Rule 2080: From maggots to men, the world is a corner bully. Better you knuckle up and go for yours than have to bow your head and tuck your chain." (p. 50) In essence, better to beat than be the one beaten. How does this philosophy shape Ta-Nehisi? What do we learn about his father when he passes on this Knowledge?
- "My father fought his whole life, but once he'd been like me—from the street but not of it." (p. 52) Explain what Ta-Nehisi means by this. Do you or anyone you know feel from your community but not of it?
- What is Ta-Nehisi's grandfather like? How is Ta-Nehisi's father similar to his own father? How are they different? How is Ta-Nehisi similar to and different from both of them? If you have elders in your family or community, how has knowing them shaped you?
- Why do you suppose Ta-Nehisi's father did not expect to reach thirty years old?
- "Back in West Baltimore—the landscape gutted, dead eyes all around, and hundreds of kids slain every year from gunshots and bricks to the skull and every other undignified means to their end." (p. 60) What does this passage reveal? Compare this description to one of your community. What is different? What is the same? How might environment impact an individual's view of the world and general approach to life?
- Why is Ta-Nehisi reluctant to read the "Conscious books" his father keeps pushing him to read? (p. 61) What types of books does he like to read? **Activity: Read one volume of Ta-Nehisi Coates's Black Panther comics series. Consider the world of Wakanda and the Black superhero Coates creates for a fictional world. How could the comics be seen as a response to his depiction of West Baltimore in *The Beautiful Struggle*? Create a multimedia presentation comparing and contrasting, Ta-Nehisi the young man and Black Panther the superhero. Identify any connections to Black history, philosophy, or intellectual thought that appear in the comics.**
- "They fought back with civil rights / That scarred the soul, it took the sight." (p. 65) **Activity: Look up the lyrics to "Black Is Black" by Jungle Brothers, and use a site like Now Comment to collaboratively annotate them. Then go to Genius Lyrics and see how your annotations compare to what's there.**

CHAPTER 4

“To teach those who can’t say my name”

- “KRS converted to Consciousness and assumed the sentinel pose of Malik Shabazz. All the world’s boom boxes were transformed into pulpits for Public Enemy.” (p. 68) What are the different types of rap, and how do they differ? Who are the Conscious rappers? **Activity: With a partner, use your resources to search for Conscious rappers and read and analyze the lyrics from one of their songs. Present your findings to your peers.**
- What is Reaganomics? How did it impact Ta-Nehisi’s community and the wider world?
- “Across the land, the masses fell sway to the gospel.” (p. 69) What was “the gospel”? Describe the way the community transformed their appearances and how that was related to their inner, spiritual transformation and reclamation of personal power.
- What does Ta-Nehisi mean when he says he “put away childish things” in response to listening to “Lyrics of Fury”? (p. 71) **Activity: Analyze the lyrics and make a connection to the Bible verse from 1 Corinthians 13:11: “But when I became a man, I put away childish things; now that I am become a man, I have done away with childish things.” How do the songs described in this chapter indicate that Ta-Nehisi is growing from a child into a man, even at the age of twelve? What aspects of his environment might make him grow up faster than other young people in other circumstances?**
- “The words were all braggadocios, but when done with the recital, even though I was alone, I felt bigger.” (p. 71) What does writing rap lyrics do for young Ta-Nehisi in terms of developing his consciousness?
- What does Coates mean when he says, “Under the aegis of hip-hop, you never lived alone, you never walked alone”? (p. 71) Do you or anyone you know listen to hip-hop? Does it make you or them feel less alone? If so, how? Why?
- What does Ta-Nehisi mean? How is it pronounced? **Activity: Read and discuss “You Know Your Name Is Ghetto If . . .”**
- “What I came to understand was the great democracy in this, and that what matters to these boys was not so much what you came to the street with but how you carried what you were given.” (p. 75) Unpack this statement. What does it reveal about the importance of confidence and personal power for individuals in Ta-Nehisi’s community? Connect this to the gifts of consciousness and knowledge that his father was trying to give him. Where did he eventually find them?

CHAPTER 5

“This is the Daisy Age”

- Ta-Nehisi had his first white teacher in this chapter, but in much of the US, many students never have a Black teacher. What does he think about his first white teacher? What characteristics does this teacher have?
- What does Ta-Nehisi mean when he describes his father as “conservative, but not in the way of the demonologists who sold us out for tenure and crumbs. More like a man who spurns the false talk of revolution for the humbler mission of resurrecting one soul at a time”? (p. 91) What is the difference between a revolutionary and a missionary? Discuss the change in Ta-Nehisi’s father from the beginning of the novel until this point.
- What events lead to Ta-Nehisi getting arrested? How does this event change him and his family’s view of him?
- “One minute we were tossing snowballs at taxis, firing up in front the 7-Eleven, speeding down side streets, and the next we’re surrounded by unholstered guns, a false move away from going down. I would always be a false move away. I would always have the dagger at my throat.” (pp. 96–97) **Activity: Make the connection between this passage and the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). Research statistics related to the STPP and the criminalization of Blackness. How do the suspension and expulsion rates of young Black men compare to those of their white male peers?**

How do enrollment rates in advanced and honors classes compare? What inferences can you make from these statistics? Present your findings to your school administration, and ask for data about suspension and expulsion rates in your school. See also: National Center for Education Statistics

- “They organized a school to educate their kids, sent them off for college credits at fourteen, and then for a bachelor’s two years later. Everyone wore dashikis and lappas, kufis and head wraps. There were no perms.” (p. 98) How might Afrocentric “freedom schools” benefit Black children? Compare and contrast the experience described with mainstream schools.
- What does Coates mean when he says, “In those years, hip-hop saved my life”? (p. 102)
- Why was drumming so important to Ta-Nehisi? How did it give him back a piece of his identity and connect him to those around him, as well as to his ancestors?

CHAPTER 6

“Float like gravity, never had a cavity . . .”

- Explain the reason people rooted in a community may not want to leave “where the struggle [is]” and why they might see that as “giving up.” (p. 111)
- What comfort did Ta-Nehisi find in the people at Sankofa? What does he mean when he says he had “hands of stone”? (p. 114)
- Have you ever been to a place where people identifying as white are the minority? What was the experience like?
- What are “the books, the work, the Ankobia initiation, the Rites, the Knowledge, Consciousness”? (p. 116)
Activity: Find a quote to explain each of the things referenced here. Explain in your own words what they are to Ta-Nehisi and what they are in your life. For example, what books do your elders expect you to read? What work do they expect you will do to increase your cultural awareness? What types of initiations exist in your culture? What are the rites that accompany those initiations? What knowledge or understanding of the world are you expected to take with you as you travel away from home? What do your elders expect you to become conscious or aware of in order to remain safe in the world?
- What happened when Ta-Nehisi’s shop teacher “cried assault”? (p. 119) How was this tied into his development of consciousness and knowledge about the way the world works for him and others like him?
- Coates’s father tells him, “You need to be conscious especially around white people. You are big, and you are a young Black man. You need to be careful about what you do and what you say.” (p. 120) What is he trying to communicate to his son? How are big young Black men seen by white people in American society? How might he have to move differently in order to stay out of jail and alive?
- Coates’s father says, “Ta-Nehisi, you are a disgrace to this family’s name.” (p. 126) Explain the impact on Ta-Nehisi.

CHAPTER 7

“Bamboo earrings, at least two pair”

- Explain the self-defeating nature of the moment when Ta-Nehisi says, “I was convinced that my high school career was so marred that I’d never really be considered for admission. So I covered with apathy.” (p. 131) How does the school system build up or break down students’ confidence in their ability to succeed?
- Why was Ta-Nehisi so attracted to Ebony? What did she represent for him?
- Was Ebony overachieving, or just achieving more than Ta-Nehisi expected for her or himself?
- Who was one of the first people to tell Ta-Nehisi that he had a gift for writing? What affect did it have on him?
- What was the “flaw that had always been theory” regarding Ta-Nehisi’s father? (p. 139)
- What does he mean when he says, “Even the general falls down, though it must be said, fallen is not how he saw himself at the time”? (p. 139) **Activity: Ask your caregiver, parent, or other trusted adult about the first time they saw their parent or caregiver as fully human, complete with all their flaws. Create questions, conduct an interview, and write a reflection about what you hear. Why is it important for us to acknowledge the humanity of those we look up to? How does this help us to acknowledge and make peace with the flaws within ourselves?**

CHAPTER 8

“Listen close as I prove my point”

- What are the four elements of hip-hop? How does mastering any of them correlate to social currency in Ta-Nehisi’s community?
- What is a “Lamba” and a “djun-djun”? Find clips of them and see if they sound familiar.
- What does Ta-Nehisi mean when he says, “Just when you master the geometry of one world, it slips away, and suddenly again, you’re swarmed by strange shapes and impossible angles”? (p. 150) How was everything Ta-Nehisi’s parents did up until this point trying to prepare him for the moment when he would leave his known world for an unknown one?
- What forces tug at Ta-Nehisi as the novel ends? How does this connect to how you feel about the thought of leaving home?

STANDARDS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.9, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

This guide was created by JULIA E. TORRES, a veteran language arts teacher and librarian in Denver public schools. As a teacher and activist committed to education as an expression of freedom, her practice is grounded in the work of empowering students to use language arts to fuel resistance and positive social transformation. Julia was given the NCTE Colorado Affiliate Teacher of Excellence Award and elected to the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE Board of Directors. Julia facilitates workshops and professional conversations about anti-bias and anti-racist education, social justice, and culturally sustaining pedagogies in language arts, as well as digital literacy and librarianship. Her work has been featured in several publications, including NCTE’s *Council Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *School Library Journal*, and Al Jazeera’s *The Stream*, as well as on PBS Education, NPR, KQED’s *MindShift*, *New York Times’s Learning Network*, ASCD’s *Education Update*, *Rethinking Schools*, and elsewhere.