

**English 3 College Prep
Summer Reading Response Questions**

***The Color of Water*
By James McBride**

Background about the book:

“As a boy in Brooklyn’s Red Hook projects, James McBride knew his mother was different. But when he asked about it, she’d simply say, “I’m light-skinned.” Later he wondered if he was different, too, and asked his mother if he was black or white. “You’re a human being,” she snapped. “Educate yourself or you’ll be a nobody!” And when James asked what color God was, she said, “God is the color of water.”...As an adult, McBride finally persuaded his mother to tell her story — the story of a rabbi’s daughter, born in Poland and raised in the South, who fled to Harlem, married a black man, founded a Baptist church, and put twelve children through college. *The Color of Water* is James McBride’s tribute to his remarkable, eccentric, determined mother — and an eloquent exploration of what family really means.”

Assignment:

- Read the book.
- Complete the Dialectical journal that follows this page. Instructions are included at the top of each section
- Watch the video created by Shante Crawford for background on *The Color of Water*. You can stop viewing at 4:36. The URL is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgPofpWShpM>
- Be prepared to discuss and/or write about the book using the dialectical journal on the first day of class.

Name _____

Dialectical Journal *Color of Water*, Chapters 1-3

Directions: Tell what you learned about the character based on the quotation.

Quotation From the Text	Page Number	Response
“ There were too many rules to follow, too many forbiddens and ‘you can’t’s’ and ‘you mustn’t’s,’ but does anyone have time to say they love you? Not in my family we didn’t.”	2	
“...I didn’t want my friends seeing my white mother out there riding a bicycle. She was already white, that was bad enough...”	8	
“As a boy, I always thought my mother was strange. She never cared to socialize with our neighbors.”	9	
“What’s money if your mind is empty?”	9	
“Matters involving race and identity she ignored”	9	
“Me and Mommy alone. It was the first time I remember ever being alone with my mother.”	11	
“...I noticed that Mommy stood apart from the other mothers rarely speaking to them...She’d quickly grasp my hand as I stepped off the bus, ignoring the stares of the black women...”	12	

“Who am I? I ain’t nobody! I can’t be telling the world this!”	17	
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Dialectical Journal *Color of Water*, Chapters 4-5**Directions:** Tell what you learned about the character based on the quotation.

Quotation	Page	What I learned...
"...Mommy refused to acknowledge her whiteness. Why she did so was not clear..."	23	
"I just want to know. Did they love you? Because your own parents didn't love you, did they? No more questions tonight. You want some coffee cake?"	24- 25	
"I thought black power would be the end of my mother. I had swallowed the white man's fear of the Negro, as we were called back then, whole."	26- 27	
"My parents were non-materialistic. They believed that money without knowledge was worthless..."	29	
"White folks, she felt were implicitly evil toward blacks, yet she forced us to go to white schools to get the best education."	29	
"I had no idea who the Black Panthers truly were. I had swallowed the media image of them completely."	36	
"He was hard as a rock and it didn't take long before the Jewish congregations figured him out and sent him on his way, so we traveled a lot when I was a young girl."	37	
"I was real conscious of that, being Jewish and having a handicapped mother. I was ashamed of my mother, but see, love didn't come natural to me until I became a Christian."	38	

Dialectical Journal *Color of Water*, Chapters 6-9**Directions:** Tell what you learned about the character based on the quotation.

Quotation	Page	What I learned...
"...happy people did not seem to cry like she did. Mommy's tears seemed to come from somewhere else, a place far away ...and even as a boy I felt there was pain behind them."	50	
"All my siblings, myself included, had some sort of color confusion at one time or another..."	52	
"If they put Jesus in this picture here, and He ain't white and He ain't black, they should make Him gray. Jesus should be gray."	53	
"He was robbing these folks blind, charging them a hundred percent markup on his cheap goods, and he was worried about them stealing from him!"	59	
"Tateh hated black people. "Look at them laughing...they don't have a dime in their pocket and they're always laughing."	61	
"Stay out of our lives. You've been out. Stay out."	63	
"I know what it feels like when people laugh at your walking down the street, or snicker when they hear you speaking Yiddish, or just look at you with hate in their eyes."	80-81	
"I was starving for love and affection. I didn't get none of that."	83	

Dialectical Journal *Color of Water, Chapters 10-13***Directions:** Tell what you learned about the character based on the quotation.

Quotation	Page	What I learned...
"I thought Jews were something that was in the Bible. I told Ma I didn't know they were still around."	85	
"She never spoke about Jewish people as white. She spoke about them as Jews, which made them somehow different."	86	
"I felt the blood rush to my face and sank low in my chair, seething inside, yet I did nothing. I imagined what my siblings would have done. They would have gone wild."	90	
"The boy in the mirror, he didn't seem to have an ache. He was free. He was never hungry...and his mother wasn't white. I hated him."	91	
"...happy to feel accepted, to be part of their faces, the clever smiles, laughing at the oddity of it, and I felt the same ache I felt when I gazed at the boy in the mirror."	105	
"I could not understand such anger. I could not understand why she didn't just give up the milk."	103	
"I don't belong to any of those groups. I belong to the world of one God, one people."	104	
"I wanted to tell him that I loved him, that I hoped with all my heart that he would get better, but I could not formulate the words in my mouth. We had never spoken than way to one another."	128	

Your Turn: Find quotes throughout the assigned chapters, that you find interesting or important to the areas of conflict, figurative language and tone/mood. List them below and explain what you learned about that character. Please note that the areas are separated, but encompass all the chapters from 14-25.

Dialectical Journal *Color of Water*, Chapters 14-25

Directions: Tell what you learned about any conflicts based in these chapters.

Quotations	Page	What I learned

Dialectical Journal *Color of Water*, Chapters 14-25

Directions: Tell what you learned about use of figurative language in these chapters.

Quotations	Page	What I learned...

Dialectical Journal *Color of Water*, Chapters 14-25

Directions: Tell what you learned about the mood/tone based in these chapters.

Quotations	Page	What I learned...