

**Interboro High School**  
**Ninth Grade Summer Reading Packet**

Please complete the assignment prior to the start of English class for the 2020-2021 school year.

Dear Parent or Guardian:

This summer, 9th grade students will be reading *The Color of Water* by James McBride. The book is an autobiographical/biographical endeavor on the part of the author, James McBride, as he discovers his mother's past and, through her experiences, himself. We are excited to get to know our new students through memoirs they will write about their own lives based on the themes within the book.

Please read through the enclosed summer reading requirements for your student to complete this summer. The purpose of this activity is to encourage our students to read for enjoyment while maintaining essential literacy skills that we have covered throughout the school year. Please refer to the instructions at the bottom of this page for more details. Thank you for your help and support with this important activity!

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I understand that my child must read **one** book this summer, *The Color of Water* by James McBride, in order to receive full credit on his or her summer reading grade. I have read the enclosed summer reading requirements, and my child has read the following title for summer reading this year:

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Students will read the **one required book** and **complete the included activity** for the book.
  - \*CP Students will read excerpts from Chapters 1-4.
  - \*Honors Students will read the book in its entirety.
2. In addition to the above, students will complete an assessment on the book. Date to be determined by the teacher.
3. Fill in the front page of this reading packet, including the parent or guardian signature as proof of completion. All summer reading activities are part of the first marking period English grade.

## 9<sup>th</sup> grade Honors Summer Reading Activity

### *The Color of Water* - Interview Project

In *The Color of Water*, James McBride sits down and interviews his mother, Ruth, about her life. His purpose in interviewing her was to ultimately understand his place in the world, and how that place has been influenced by her life experiences as well as his own. No one is created in a bubble, we are an amalgam of our parents' and grandparents' values and perspectives, as well as many other people we encounter in our lives.

Your culminating assignment is in the same vein as McBride's task. You are to interview a parent or grandparent about aspects of their upbringing and how his/her experiences have shaped who he/she is and how it has affected your upbringing.

You are to focus on three of the the following themes found in the book:

Love - can include first love, love for a sibling, parental love

Family - brothers, sisters, grandparents, etc.

School/Education - values about, inequalities in, importance of

Social Revolution - issues of importance, issues worth fighting for

Prejudice - experience with, attempts to change

Friendship - value of, changes in

Religion - finding spirit, beliefs

Identity - what makes us who we are

You may choose a different theme covered in the story if you would like. The interview should focus on a defining moment in your parent's/grandparent's youth that made him/her realize his/her place in the world. As you read with Ruth and James, many of her experiences affect the way she interacts with the world around them and how she parented her children.

After you interview your parent/grandparent, you are to then sit down and write your own stories on the same themes. Each story should be approximately one page long, double spaced and typed. Your parent's/grandparent's story should be italicized, and yours should be in regular font.

## 9<sup>th</sup> grade College Prep Summer Reading Activity

### *The Color of Water*

James McBride

There comes a time in every child's life when he or she realizes that his parent was a person before being a parent. This is not to say that our parents are aliens, although sometimes we wonder, but that they had lives before us. They went through all the things that we will go through as people growing up. They had best friends, they had fights with their parents, they had first loves, they maybe had siblings that annoyed them, trouble in school, great accomplishments, the list is endless.

This book is a memoir told by two people: James McBride, the author and Ruth McBride Jordan, his mother. Each set of chapters focus on a different theme of growing up told from both of their perspectives. The book itself is a tribute to his mother, but also a journey of James McBride finding himself.

For each chapter set, you will have questions to help guide you and the culminating assignment will be your own memoir focusing on the theme of the chapter set.

We will read the chapters to you, so if you choose to you may listen to them.

Preface:

In this part, James tells the reader that he never knew his mother until he was an adult.

#### *Dead*

1. Why did Ruchel Dwarja Zylska's parents say Kaddish and sit Shiva for her?

2. What inferences can you make about her upbringing from this quote?  
"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".

3. What is Ruth's tone during this chapter? Do you think she has regret about her childhood?

### **The Bicycle**

1. What two hobbies did McBride's mother take up when he was fourteen?

2. What tone is conveyed in the following quote?  
“...I didn't want my friends seeing my white mother out there riding a bicycle. She was already white, that was bad enough...”

3. What was so special to James about going to and from the bus stop everyday for kindergarten?

4. What values was Ruth trying to instill in her children as evidenced from the following quotes?  
“What's money if your mind is empty?”  
“Matters involving race and identity she ignored.”

### **Memoir Writing Activity**

The memoir portion is a creative, personal account. It should be at least one paragraph long (8 - 10 sentences) and should answer the questions about the theme of the chapter sets.

The theme in the first two chapters can be as broad as family, but can be narrowed down to a sense of belonging.

1. Think about a time when you realized that you were different from others in your family.

2. Think of a time when you realized that your family was different from other families.
3. Values that your parents/guardians instilled in you.

Begin with imagery and detail that would be important for your story

Begin with a statement that hooks the audience in to your story (1-2 sentences)

Here are some examples:

- a.) I'll never forget the time...
- b.) My family is very different...
- c.) I realized...

You should describe the person, place or thing using specific details (2-3 sentences)

Tell the beginning, middle and end of the anecdote (mini-story) which illustrates your point (3-5 sentences)

Sum everything up with the moral of the story or what you learned and realized. You could also include the impact on this to your life moving forward.

**Copy and paste all of the pieces above into one whole paragraph below**

A prevalent theme of this next chapter is identity. Oftentimes we identify ourselves by our ethnic background, religion, race, sexual orientation or gender. These two chapters focus on how Ruth and James define who they are growing up in very different circumstances.

### ***Kosher***

1. Considering how Ruth's mother escaped Europe, how was her father's threat especially cruel?

2. How does Ruth remember her grandparents?

3. What are some traditions that Ruth remembers from growing up in an Orthodox Jewish home? List at least 4.

4. What was a concern that Ruth had and has continued to have as a result of her grandfather's death?

### **Black Power**

1. What was Ruth's response to her children when they asked where she came from and whether or not she was white?

2. How does James' older brother tease him?

3. What was Black Power and why was James frightened by it?

4. What was the “world” that Mommy created in the home?

5. How does James describe his parents’ philosophy on life and success in the United States?

6. Do you agree with this philosophy? Why or why not?

### Memoir Writing Activity

The memoir portion is a creative, personal account. It should be at least one paragraph long (8 - 10 sentences) and should answer the questions about the theme of the chapter sets.

The theme of the chapter set is Identity. How we identify ourselves, be it through gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, family dynamics, is very important in shaping who we become, and sometimes how we interact with and react to others.

When starting to write, think about some of the ideas below and how they apply to you:

1. When you meet someone, how do you identify yourself? What is important for you to tell that person about yourself?
2. Where is your family from? What are traditions and cultural activities that are important for your family to continue?
3. Where do you fall in the structure of your family? Are you the youngest, middle, oldest, or an only child, and how has this affected you?

Begin with imagery and detail that would be important for your story

Begin with a statement that hooks the audience in to your story (1-2 sentences)

Here are some examples:

- a.) Whenever I meet someone, I always make sure...
- b.) My family has traditions going back to...
- c.) Being the oldest/youngest \_\_\_\_\_ in my family has made me...

You should describe the person, place or thing using specific details (2-3 sentences)

Tell the beginning, middle and end of the anecdote (mini-story) which illustrates your point (3-5 sentences)

Sum everything up with the moral of the story or what you learned and realized. You could also include the impact on this to your life moving forward.

**Copy and paste all of the pieces above into one whole paragraph below**