



## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade English Language Arts Unit 5: Determining Themes

Anchor  
Text(s)

*The Color of Water* by James McBride

Pacing

7 weeks

### Unit Overview

James McBride wrote *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to his White Mother* in order to understand his past and explore his identity. The memoir alternates between two first-person voices; chapters alternate between James's mother Ruth recalling her Orthodox Jewish upbringing in the South and James recounting his experiences growing up as one of twelve biracial children struggling to understand their place in the world. Throughout the novel, we learn more and more about Ruth's past, which helps us to better understand the woman she became and the impact she had on her children's lives and identities.

These two parallel stories confront issues of race, prejudice, opportunity, education, identity, religion, and the past. The raw and honest tone that accompanies both stories creates a unique experience for readers to learn about Ruth and James's complicated paths to discovering their identities. The book deals extensively with the desire to fit in and to define who you are in relation to those around you, as both James and Ruth grapple with feelings of uncertainty about where they truly "belong." The author struggles with these feelings largely within the context of building his own racial identity, but the challenges extend well beyond race and provide ample entry points to discussion and meaning making.

Throughout the unit, students will examine how and why McBride digs deeply into his family's past, and students will explore the impact of race, religion, and family on McBride's development of self. In the beginning of the unit, students will analyze how the first-person point of view and unique structure of the book develops our understanding of James and Ruth. The text's unique structure also allows readers to make connections between emotions and experiences Ruth and James both had while growing up in different places and times. Students will analyze the impact of setting on a person's growth, and explore how the past impacts the present and future. Another major goal of this unit is to determine themes that we as readers can pull out of this memoir and apply to our own lives. By gradually learning about how two people came to terms with the past and developed a sense of self, students will make connections to their own lives at a critical turning point for them – the transition to high school.

Supplemental texts are included in some weeks to build knowledge or to provide additional context for themes and ideas. Guidance on how and when these texts should be used can be found in the notes and teaching points. In the unit's final two weeks, students will complete two writing tasks to synthesize understanding of the memoir itself and the themes it conveys. There is no MCLASS assessment required for this unit. Each week, students should have opportunities to write for various purposes in response to readings, and to participate in a range of discussions about the story's events, author's craft, and developing themes.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

Essential Questions	Genre and Standards-Based Vocabulary	Cutting to the Core
<p><u>Standards-Based Essential Questions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. How can a story’s structural elements and point of view help us better understand an authors themes?</li> <li>II. How can setting (historical and cultural characteristics of a time or place) influence people and events?</li> <li>III. How can we analyze a character’s response to internal and external conflicts to better understand who they are?</li> <li>IV. What are characteristics of a memoir, and how are memoirs unique from other genres? What makes a memoir worth reading?</li> </ol> <p><u>Thematic Essential Questions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. How does the past impact the present and future? What are the benefits and risks of digging into the past?</li> <li>II. What role do family, religion, and race play in a person’s identity formation? What other factors do we use to define who we are?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• genre</li> <li>• memoir</li> <li>• infer</li> <li>• synthesize</li> <li>• explicit vs. implicit meaning</li> <li>• theme</li> <li>• development</li> <li>• dialogue</li> <li>• incident</li> <li>• turning point</li> <li>• characterization</li> <li>• provoke</li> <li>• structure</li> <li>• alternating</li> <li>• point of view</li> <li>• font</li> <li>• style</li> <li>• tone</li> <li>• refine</li> <li>• determine</li> <li>• analyze</li> <li>• purpose</li> <li>• conflict (internal and external)</li> <li>• motivation</li> <li>• intrinsic</li> <li>• compare</li> <li>• evaluate</li> <li>• impact</li> <li>• influence</li> <li>• recurring</li> <li>• concept</li> <li>• symbol</li> <li>• drive (as in “drives the story forward”)</li> <li>• identity</li> </ul>	<p><b>I: Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>“Students need to be grounded in information about the world around them if they are to develop the strong general knowledge and vocabulary they need to become successful readers”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>II: Reading and writing grounded in evidence from the text</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>“Quality text-based questions, unlike low-level “search and find” questions, require close reading and deep understanding of the text”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>III: Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>“The ability to comprehend complex texts is the most significant factor differentiating college-ready from non-college-ready readers. This shift toward complex text requires practice, supported through close reading”</i></li> </ul>

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### Common Core State Standards *(Including how the standards progress across grade levels)*

RL.7.1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	<b>RL/RI.8.1:</b> Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	RL.9.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
RL.7.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.	<b>RL.8.2:</b> Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.	RL.9.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
RL.7.3: Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).	<b>RL.8.3:</b> Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.	RL.9.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
RL.7.6: Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.	<b>RL.8.6:</b> Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.	RL.9.6: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
RI.7.2: Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.	<b>RI.8.2:</b> Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.	RI.9.2: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
RI.7.3: Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).	<b>RI.8.3:</b> Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).	RI.9.3: Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.
RI.7.5: Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.	<b>RI.8.5:</b> Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.	RI.9.5: Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

<p>RI.7.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.</p>	<p>RI.8.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.</p>	<p>RI.8.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.</p>
<p>RI.7.9: Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.</p>	<p>RI.8.9: Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.</p>	<p>RI.9.9: Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), including how they address related themes and concepts.</p>
<p>W.7.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.</li> <li>Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.</li> <li>Establish and maintain a formal style.</li> <li>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</li> </ol>	<p>W.8.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.</li> <li>Support claims with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</li> <li>Establish and maintain a formal style.</li> <li>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</li> </ol>	<p>W.9.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</li> <li>Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.</li> <li>Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.</li> <li>Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.</li> <li>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.</li> </ol>

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

<p>W.7.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>	<p>W.8.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>	<p>W.9.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>
<p>W.7.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.</p>	<p>W.8.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.</p>	<p>W.9.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.</p>
<p>SL.7.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.</li> <li>b. Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.</li> <li>c. Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.</li> <li>d. Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.</li> </ol>	<p>SL.8.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.</li> <li>b. Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.</li> <li>c. Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.</li> <li>d. Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.</li> </ol>	<p>SL.9.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.</li> <li>b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.</li> <li>c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.</li> <li>d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.</li> </ol>

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

**L.7.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

**L.8.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on grade 8 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

**L.9.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9-10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### Anchor Text: *The Color of Water* by James McBride

Overview	Important Considerations for Instruction
<p><i>The Color of Water</i> doubles as a memoir that reflects on James McBride's own life and as a tribute to the life of his mother, Ruth McBride. Through alternating chapters and voices, readers learn how both Ruth and her son James struggled to find a sense of identity in a confusing and unpredictable world full of challenges.</p> <p>Ruth, who grew up adhering strictly to Jewish religion and culture, immigrated to the United States with her family from Poland when she was only two years old. After arriving in America, Ruth's family eventually settled in Suffolk, Virginia. Ruth's father opened a store in the mostly black section of town, where he took advantage of his customers and overtly expressed his racist prejudices. When Ruth was just a child, her family dynamic was extremely strained due to the abusive behavior of her father. Due to a variety of circumstances, Ruth's brother Sam left home at age fifteen, and soon after, Ruth too felt compelled to leave home to escape the oppression of her family and the Jim Crow South.</p> <p>Ruth then moved to Harlem and met Dennis, the father of James and seven of his twelve siblings. Ruth fell deeply in love, married Dennis, and converted to Christianity. Ruth became very involved in church activities, and eventually she and Dennis founded their own church. The couple endured significant prejudice and discrimination due to their interracial marriage; however, Ruth recalls these years as her happiest ones.</p> <p>Throughout her story and as the two narratives in this memoir intersect, it becomes clear that Ruth's strong will and</p>	<p><b>I. Text Complexity:</b> At a Lexile level of 1240L, <i>The Color of Water</i> is challenging for an end-of-year 8<sup>th</sup> grader. The most complex aspects of this text are its multiple narrators and alternating points of view, paired with its non-linear structure. Additionally, themes are complex and mature, and they develop gradually throughout the text.</p> <p><b>II. Big Ideas/Themes:</b> The most prominent theme in the books revolves around identity; specifically, how confusing and isolating it can feel to figure out your "place," and the impact of race, religion, and family on its formation. Additional themes McBride explores include the power of family love, the complicated relationship between the past and present, and the impact of prejudice and discrimination (primarily for racial or religious reasons).</p> <p><b>III. Text Structure:</b> The book is constructed of a 25 chapters and an epilogue. The chapters alternate between James and his mother Ruth's first-person point of view. As a result, time and place shift frequently and unpredictably between and within chapters; it may be challenging for students to sequence life events and turning points chronologically without a visual aid and close reading. The stories told by the two interwoven voices eventually collide in the memoir's final chapters. It will be very important for students to describe and analyze McBride's moves around structure, as his intentional choices reflect and support the memoir's themes.</p> <p><b>III. Real World Connections:</b> Most people, especially adolescents and adults, can relate to themes in McBride's memoir (coming of age, identity crisis, race and racism, prejudice, religion, family, education). Students and teachers both may identify with the struggle to navigate the world in the hopes of figuring out where you "belong." The memoir also contains countless allusions to historical events, leaders, and time periods, including but not limited to: the Holocaust, the Ku Klux Klan, Malcolm X, Black Panthers, Jackie Robinson, and other famous cultural or political influences. You do not need to explain every single allusion in order to understand the text; however, knowledge and analysis of these references will enhance their understanding of external impacts on James and Ruth's personal development.</p>

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

philosophies on race, religion, and education influenced James greatly. Ruth always sent her children to the best schools, no matter the commute or cost, to ensure they received the best possible educations and opportunities. Ruth demanded respect and hard work from her children, and always treated them – although strict and direct – tenderly and with love. Ruth had an unwavering faith in God and strong moral convictions.

James weaves his own life story into his mother’s story, and we as readers get to hear their stories from their individual voices. In James’s chapters, we learn about how difficult it was for him to understand why he and his mother did not look alike, and also to understand how to construct a sense of his identity from forces including family, religion, race, and the history being made in the world around him. As the memoir unfolds, readers can make connections between Ruth and James that help us better understand their life paths and lessons learned.

**IV. Potential Challenges:** Students who are unfamiliar with religious and cultural aspects of Judaism will have difficulty understanding Ruth’s descriptions of her upbringing and her family’s customs. Similarly, we must intentionally build knowledge about (or explain in context) an array of historical time periods, figures, etc. (Jim Crow, the Black Panthers, etc.) in order for students to understand the external pressures weighing on both James and Ruth as they try to make sense of how they fit into the larger world. Teachers should also be aware that there are instances of profane or derogatory language, along with references to sexual abuse, prostitution, abortion, and drugs. Reading carefully ahead of time and planning how to encounter these instances with students will be important.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### Instructional Calendar

Weekly Focus	Teaching Points	Texts and Resources	Suggestions for Implementation
<p><b>Week 1:</b></p> <p><b>I:</b> RI.2, RL.5</p> <p><b>II:</b> RL.3, RI.6</p> <p><b>III:</b> RI.2, RI/RL.5</p>	<p><b>I. Introduction to the Genre: Memoir</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unit Hook/Launch: Six-Word Memoirs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Genre: Define and unpack “memoir” as “a <u>self-written</u> and <u>selective</u> story of a person’s life, typically focused on <u>meaningful incidents</u> within a certain time span, which relies heavily on the author’s <u>memories</u>, <u>feelings</u>, and <u>interpretations</u> of events’ significance.”</li> <li>○ Share a few six-word memoirs (found in Appendix D) and challenge students to write their own six-word memoirs to kick off the unit and to begin exploring the heart of this genre – the self.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• (Beginning of Week) Supplemental Text: Read the AP informational text called “Autobiography and Memoir” to determine characteristics that define and distinguish the two similar genres.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Using text evidence, students should be able to compare and contrast the genres, explaining benefits and limitations of each.</li> <li>○ Based on the article, students should draw conclusions about why an author might choose to write an autobiography instead of a memoir, or vice versa.</li> <li>○ Zoom in on this sentence: “Memoir writers have been criticized for using composite and invented characters, altered chronology, imagined dialogue and scenes, factual omissions, and subjective emphasis.” What does this sentence suggest readers must consider while reading a memoir?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• (End of Week) After reading Chapter 4, revisit this text to answer questions that explore the genre of <i>The Color of Water</i>:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Based on what you’ve read so far, does the <u>structure</u> of <i>The Color of Water</i> seem more aligned with an autobiography or a memoir? Why?</li> <li>○ Based on what you’ve read so far, does the <u>style and tone</u> of narration in <i>The Color of Water</i> seem more aligned with an autobiography or a memoir? Why?</li> <li>○ Which elements of <i>The Color of Water</i> cannot cleanly fit into</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Anchor Text:</b> <i>The Color of Water</i> Chapters 1 – 4 (Pgs. 1-36)</p> <p><b>Supplemental Texts (Appendix B)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Autobiography and Memoir”</li> </ul> <p><b>Supplemental Resources (Appendix D)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six-Word Memoirs: Examples</li> <li>• Common Core Standards: Question Stems</li> <li>• The Color of Water: General Resource Guide (glossary of terms, sample chapter questions, etc.)</li> </ul> <p><i>NOTE about Questions included in this Resource Guide: Many of these are low-level checks for understanding, or they may not be relevant to your big idea. You can use these as a</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom Environment: Create an anchor chart with the definition of “memoir” included in Teaching Point I. Add to it as you encounter elements or sentences in <i>The Color of Water</i> that are characteristic of memoirs.</li> <li>• The six-word memoir task is meant as a “hook” for the unit and the new genre; you should plan to spend only about 15-20 minutes on this before launching into the text. It does not need its own lesson.</li> <li>• Student Engagement and Productive Struggle: When analyzing questions such as those listed to the left (end of week – Memoir), provide time for students to grapple with these through discussion, writing,</li> </ul>

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

either of these genres as defined by the AP text? Why?

### II. Analyze how James's descriptions of his mother, paired with first-hand accounts told in her own voice, characterize Mommy in the first 3 chapters.

- Students should identify significant descriptions or details that they think reveal something about Mommy/Ruth as a person. They should collect evidence from Chapters 1 and 3 (told in Mommy's voice), and also from Ch. 2 and 4 (told from James's point of view). Challenge students to synthesize evidence from both chapters and also to identify inconsistencies or differences between James and Ruth's perspectives.
  - Pay attention to specific words that contribute to Mommy's tone. What does her tone and attitude (especially in Chapter 1) reveal about her? What kind of a woman and mother is she?
  - Analyze how James perceives his mother's choices and behavior, particularly in terms of her seeming "ignorance" to the fact that she's the only white woman in an all-black community, and her refusal to discuss or acknowledge her past.
    - Also analyze the nature of James's relationship with his mother based on anecdotes conveyed in these opening chapters. What makes their relationship complex? Why is James so afraid for and protective of his mother when she conveys none of the same fears for herself?

### III. Analyze how McBride's structural and text layout choices in *The Color of Water* reflect central ideas and build meaning.

- Infer the meaning behind McBride's font and text formatting choices. What does italicized text represent? Why did he choose to italicize these sections? What are the main differences between the italicized and non-italicized passages?
- Analyze how each chapter title holds symbolic meaning and/or reflects important messages and ideas in that chapter.
  - Chapter 1: Why did McBride call Chapter 1 "Dead?" Who or what is dead, and why? What is the effect of titling the first chapter "Dead?" Why did McBride choose this as the first chapter?
  - Chapter 2: Throughout reading, students should track how and when James describes or mentions the bicycle. Why does he repeatedly mention this bicycle, and what feelings and memories

*reference but you will always need to supplement them with strategic analysis questions building to your big idea (or exclude those that don't align).*

and revision. Be clear about how you expect them to collaborate and what work product will hold them accountable for.

- The questions included in these teaching points can and should be used in lessons. Based on your lesson plan, determine which question(s) best apply to your big idea/goal for the day, and then supplement them with additional CFU and analysis questions to support readers.
- Throughout this book, the author alludes to historical people, time periods, and uses religious terminology. As needed, provide glossaries and pull in short informational video clips or additional texts meant to build knowledge about the most significant or critical allusions.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

does he attach to it? What does the bicycle symbolize about young James's perception of his mother?

- In Chapter 3 "Kosher" and Chapter 4 "Black Power," the title serves to highlight an external force that had impact on the character during a specific time in his/her life. Analyze:
  - How did Ruth's adherence to Jewish culture and customs impact her childhood? (*Kosher*)
  - How did the ongoing Black Power movement in the 1960s (and his siblings' attention and response to it) impact James in his childhood?
  - Evaluate: Do these titles represent the most important themes and ideas in each chapter? Why or why not? If not, what might a more appropriate title be? Defend your reasoning with evidence.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### Week 2:

I: RL.2

II: RL.3

III: RI.2,  
RI.3, RI.6,  
RI.9

### I. Exploring Theme Development: Identity

- Analyze ideas in cartoons and visuals to better understand the factors that contribute to a person’s sense of identity, and what it means to experience an “identity crisis.” Explain how each visual represents either a depiction of how an individual’s identity is constructed, or what it feels like and means to have an “identity crisis.”
  - Then, analyze how aspects of each picture (and the emotions they invoke) connect to James’s experiences so far. What factors are contributing to his identity crisis? Be specific and use text evidence when making connections.
  - Finally, consider how people in the real world grapple with identity. What makes an individual’s personal identity hard to discover, define, understand, and stay true to?
- While reading this week’s chapters, collect evidence to show how James and Ruth both grapple to understand who they are and struggle to form a strong sense of identity in their early years.
  - Draw conclusions about the factors both Ruth and James consider when trying to define their identity, including race, family, politics, and religion.

### II. Identify internal and external conflicts, and analyze how they impact characters and serve as turning points that drive the story’s momentum forward.

- In chapters 5, 7, and 9, students should identify external conflicts that exist between members of Ruth’s family and community, and then infer how those situations led to long-lasting internal conflict for Ruth.
  - Ex: Students may identify the external conflict between Ruth and her father, then analyze how his abuse impacted her in the short and long term (*Ex. “I had very low self-esteem as a child, which I kept for many, many years; and even now I don’t want to be around anyone domineering or pushing me around…” 42-43*). They may also identify the societal conflict between races and religions in the south where Ruth grew up, and examine the impact of widespread prejudicial hatred on Ruth and others.
  - As we learn more about Ruth’s past, continue to have students make connections between Ruth’s past and present self (as described in James’s chapters). Frequently explore the question:

### Anchor Text:

*The Color of Water*  
Chapters 5 – 9  
(Pgs. 47-83)

### Supplemental Texts (Appendix B)

- “Identity” Cartoons and Visuals
- “Discovering Books” by Richard Wright

### Supplemental Resources (Appendix D)

- Conflict One-Pager
- Gallery Walk Protocol

- Note: In Chapter 5, Ruth reveals that she was sexually abused by her father. Prepare students for this content and request their mature and empathetic responses.
- Consider holding a gallery walk using the images about identity. Students can have written conversations on the charts. See Appendix D for protocols.
- Note: When analyzing Author’s Purpose, avoid boxing students in to an acronym or strategy such as PIES; by middle school, students’ analysis must be specific to the text itself and to the author’s particular context when describing purpose in a nuanced way.
- At this point in the unit, students will likely not have too deep an understanding of

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

“How have Ruth’s past experiences shaped who she is and what she believes today?”

- In chapters 6 and 8, describe the internal conflict James and his siblings struggle with: “Why doesn’t my mother look like me?” They also struggle with Mommy’s refusal to have open conversations with them about their race, identity, or political situations.
  - Analyze more generally how specific passages in these chapters help to develop themes about the internal conflict people experience when they’re trying to form a sense of identity in a confusing world. Strong zoom-in passages include:
    - Ex: Pages 50-51: Passage that alludes to the book’s title, *The Color of Water* and religion’s role in identity.
    - Ex: Pages 52-53: Passage that reveals Richie’s internal conflict and his response to questioning Jesus’s race.
    - Excerpts from pages 72-79: What motivates Helen to leave home? How might her struggle to define her identity have caused her to make certain decisions?
    - General: What impact does Mommy’s secrecy have on James and his siblings? What motivates Mommy to keep so much private? What are her secrecy’s intended and unintended consequences for her children?

### III. Exploring Themes: The Power of Knowledge and Education

- Dedicate one class period this week to a close read of “Discovering Books” to analyze Wright’s purpose and point of view about reading to learn. The goal is that with purposeful repeated readings, students will uncover aspects of the text’s depth invisible to them from the first read. Explain to students that this text is an excerpt from another memoir written by Wright. Follow this process for close reading (you will need to create supporting student materials):
  - *First Read (teacher-led)*: Conduct a fluent read aloud of the text, pausing to ask questions that check for student understanding.
  - *Second Read (collaborative)*: Analyze Wright’s motivation for pursuing his own education through books, and also to analyze the conflicts and challenges he overcame in order to do so. What can you infer about Wright based on how he responds to these challenges?
    - Note: You can direct students to select excerpts for this

emerging themes, their connections may be surface-level, and/or it may be hard for them to speak eloquently about themes yet. Be transparent with them that we will come back again and again to refine and improve our thinking about these emerging themes as we continue to read, and that you expect their theories to become more nuanced and detailed over time.

- The question referenced in Teaching Point I (“How have Ruth’s past experiences shaped who she is and what she believes today?”) is central to the memoir’s theme about history and past v. present. Write this question at the top of an anchor chart, and allow students to add examples and evidence that helps them answer it

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

second read to focus their thinking and evidence collection.

- *Third Read (collaborative)*: Return to the second half of the text to draw conclusions about the impact Wright's prolific reading and education had on his view of the people around him (particularly white people) and on his place in the world.
  - How did all that he learned lead to an internal conflict for Wright?
- *Fourth Read (mostly independent)*: Based on your analysis, draw conclusions about Wright's purpose for writing this essay. What big ideas does he convey to readers?
- After reading the supplemental text closely as outlined above, allow students to make explicit connections between Wright's essay and Ruth's point of view about education that emerges in this week's chapters.
  - How are their philosophies similar and different? How are their methods of conveying their ideas similar and different?

throughout the unit.

- As an extension activity, students can compare the structure and style/tone of Wright's and McBride's memoirs. Compare and contrast the authorial decisions each writer makes to convey something about his past.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

**Week 3:**

**I:** RL.3, RL.6

**II:** RL.2,  
SL.1, W.1

**I. Infer a character's motivations (internal and external) that contribute to an important decision. Then, analyze the short and long-term impact of that choice on a person's life and development.**

- Identify moments or choices that act as significant "turning points."
  - For example, students may identify Ruth's decision to date Peter as a turning point. They may also identify smaller moments of significance, such as when James chooses to dance in front of his classmates and has extremely conflicted emotions about what he's done and why.
  - In addition to identifying turning points, students should articulate why this moment of change was significant to the character using evidence.
- Infer a person's motivations for making a significant choice, and analyze what their behavior/decision/thought process reveals about them.
  - Make sure that students consider both internal factors (i.e. love, desire, fear, anger, etc.) and external factors (i.e. historical context, social norms and laws, pressure from family, etc.) when analyzing motivations. The two supplemental texts should help students consider historical context when analyzing Ruth's motivations.
- Finally, explain the cause and effect relationship of these moments to later moments in the person's life. What impact did this choice have on future events and experiences? What makes this choice a significant turning point? How might their life have been different had they made a different choice?
  - For this purpose, direct students to draw on information from previous chapters to support their claims about impact.

**II. Identify repeated ideas or recurring patterns in a story, and analyze how they develop important themes.**

- Repeated Ideas: Throughout Chapter 10, track lines and paragraphs where McBride conveys ideas or tells anecdotes that address recurring ideas in the story, including religion, race, family, and any other ideas they identify that repeat throughout sections of text.
  - After collecting evidence, students should analyze the evidence to draw conclusions about central themes McBride develops. How does each idea relate to James's growing sense of identity? What

**Anchor Text:**  
*The Color of Water*  
Chapters 10 - 13  
(Pgs. 85-135)

**Supplemental Texts  
(Appendix B)**

- Loving v. Virginia court case summary (context for Ch. 11)
- Jim Crow Laws (context for Ch. 11)

- The purposes of the Loving v. Virginia summary and the list of Jim Crow Laws are to build knowledge about the historical context surrounding Ruth's relationship with Peter. Pair these texts with Chapter 11 "Boys," particularly with the passage on pages 110-111 where Ruth describes the danger surrounding their courtship. It will also help students identify external factors that impact Ruth. Do not spend a whole class period on these supplemental texts in isolation.
- By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students should typically formulate their own opinions and collect relevant evidence independently and in writing before discussions. This will ensure autonomy in their thinking and provide higher-quality practice. Provide graphic

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

- does he want to convey about these recurring ideas?
- Writing and Speaking/Listening Connection: Have students make a claim about the following connection, and defend their argument using evidence and by addressing/responding to counter claims: *"Which factor most strongly influences James as he develops his identity: race, religion, or family?"*
  - Recurring Patterns: Students should begin making connections between Ruth and James's experiences to determine themes.
    - I.e. In chapter 10, students should notice similarities between the hostility and bullying James experiences as an "outsider" (the only black student in his school) and the way Ruth's classmates treated her (a Jewish girl) when she was growing up. How do these parallel experiences convey a theme about tolerance and discrimination, both racially and religiously?
    - I.e. In chapters 11-12, students should notice patterns amongst the descriptions of different parent-child relationships. Analyze the relationships between James and Ruth, Ruth and Mameh, James and Daddy, and Ruth and Tateh. Compare and contrast aspects of these relationships. How do they convey themes about family love and the family's role in identity formation?

- organizers and/or page numbers as scaffolds.
- When analyzing themes at this point, it's expected and okay for students to be in the early stages of developing theories about this. The goal is for them to think critically about the author's purpose and ideas, and to connect his personal experiences and development with the real world. Holding discussion groups or a seminar to dig into the evidence and start creating theories about themes will help students process their ideas.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### Week 4:

**I:** RL.2,  
RL.3, RL.6

**II:** RL.2,  
RL.3, RL.6

**III:** RL.2,  
RL.5, RL.6

### **I. Compare the impact of Dennis's death on both James and Ruth, analyzing how each person copes similarly and differently. What lessons and themes can we extract from a comparison of their reactions and experiences?**

- While reading Chapter 14, collect evidence about how James describes his response to Daddy's death and to his mother's struggle to cope.
- Using the evidence, infer themes about loss, secrecy, identity, and/or the motif of "running" (movement) by zooming in on the sentences below. What lessons can we learn from James's experiences? How does the older James McBride feel about his responses at this time in his life, and what in the text supports your claim?
  - Page 138: "Just like Mommy did years before me, I began my own process of running, emotionally disconnecting myself from her, as if by doing so I could keep her suffering from touching me."
  - Page 142: "I had no feelings. I had smothered them. Every time they surged up, I shoved them back down inside me the way you stuff closing in a drawer and shut it."
  - Page 147: "[The men on the corner's] lives just seemed complete without the white man. I liked that. Their world was **insular**, away from the real world that I was running from....I could hide. No one knew me. No one knew my past, my white mother, my dead father, nothing. It was perfect. My problems seemed far, far away."
- Challenge students to compare and contrast James's responses and motivations with his mother's. How do they cope with the past, loss, and other challenges both similarly and differently? How can you explain these similarities and differences?
- In Chapter 16, continue to compare and contrast James's development and coping methods with Ruth's. How does this particular anecdote about "Driving" highlight and expose similarities and differences?

### **II. Explain the internal conflicts Ruth faces in Chapter 15, and analyze how they continue to develop themes about identity, religion, and family.**

- Chapter 15, "Graduation," is short, but it is rich with meaning and plays a pivotal role in Ruth's coming of age. Students should identify the two major internal conflicts Ruth grapples with throughout the chapter:
  - 1) whether or not she should leave her family and Suffolk forever,
  - 2) whether or not she should walk in her graduation ceremony.

**Anchor Text:**  
*The Color of Water*  
Chapters 14 - 18  
(Pgs. 137-191)

- Note: Chapter 14 ("Chicken Man") includes mature content and language, including references to sex, drugs, and violence. Explain to students that McBride included this content to represent his experiences and environment accurately, and that we can read them maturely through the lens of learning about his personal experience.
- Note: Chapter 17 contains mature language and content, as we discover that Ruth's new "friend" Rocky has really been taking advantage of her vulnerability and is recruiting her to become a prostitute. You can focus conversations during this chapter around why Ruth might have allowed this to go on so long, and how the experience develops themes about the

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

- For each internal conflict, explain the conflicting forces that make each decision exceptionally difficult for Ruth.
  - Then, analyze why Ruth resolved each conflict in the way she did. Using evidence, students should draw conclusions about the impact of each choice in the long run, and infer how Ruth felt about her choices.
  - Finally, make connections between the two internal conflicts. The last sentence in the paragraph suggests a relationship between the two events: “I walked home sobbing in my cap and gown and caught a Greyhound bus for New York the very next day.” How does her first decision to back out of the graduation ceremony impact her next decision to leave home? What do these choices symbolize about Ruth’s personal development and growth?
  - Extension (RL.5): Why did McBride title this chapter “Graduation?” How might this title have multiple meanings in the context of this chapter and the memoir as a whole?

### **III. Explain the significance of the chapter titles “Lost in Harlem” (Ch. 17) and “Lost in Delaware” (Ch.18), and analyze how these particular sections fit into the novel’s structure as a whole.**

- First, read the chapters to determine their central ideas and to extract key details that connect to each title. Explore the multiple meaning of the word “lost” as it relates to characters’ situations and emotions.
- Then, analyze why McBride titled these chapters in a similar way.
  - *What is the effect of his repeated use of the word “lost?”*
  - *Which characters are lost, and why?*
  - *What are they trying to find in each chapter?*
  - *How do specific details within each chapter contribute to our understanding of the title’s meaning and the memoir’s themes?*
- Students should make text-based connections between the events, emotions, and challenges presented across both chapters. How do these paired chapters develop the reader’s understanding of similarities between mother and son?

desire to be included, a part of something bigger even at great personal cost.

- Note about Teaching Point III: Repetition of the word “Lost” in both titles emphasizes the extreme difficulty of figuring out your true identity, no matter where you are physically or geographically, and no matter how old you are; Ruth and James experience feelings of being lost as a child, teenager, and adult.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### Week 5:

**I:** RL.3,  
RL.5, RL.6

**II:** RL.2,  
RL.4

**III:** RL.4,  
RL.5, RL.2

### I. Determine why James travels to Suffolk, explain what he learns and discovers while there, and analyze how the trip impacts & changes him.

- While reading these two chapters, students should collect evidence that helps them make and support claims about the following three guiding questions:
  - What motivates James to travel to Suffolk?
    - *Push students to identify more than one motivation; i.e. his desire to uncover his mother's past, his desire to better understand who he is and why, his confusion about his next career move, general curiosity stemming from a childhood of not knowing family history, etc.*
  - What does James learn and discover while he is there?
    - *What does he learn about himself, his mother, his grandparents, his heritage, Judaism, the South, etc? What new understandings does he leave with?*
  - How does this trip impact James? How does it change him?
    - Zoom-In Passage to explore the trip's impact: Pages 228-229  
*"As I sat on the steps of the synagogue...a new pain and a new awareness were born inside me...happy in the knowledge that my grandmother had not suffered and died for nothing."*
      - Ask TDQs to lead students to an understanding that, in this moment, James simultaneously feels a strong connection to and identification with his past and his grandmother, yet also feels finally at peace with it, and in a place where he can move past it. Students should recognize this as a significant turning point for James, and explain why.

### II. Interpret the symbolism of the chapter title, "A Bird Who Flies," and analyze how its symbolic meaning connects to the story as a whole.

- In literature, a symbol is an object or action that has multiple layers of meaning. Symbols have deeper, metaphorical meaning other than its literal meaning in the text. Often symbols are concealed on the first read, but through careful close reading and analysis, good readers interpret symbols to uncover an author's themes.
- James McBride uses a symbol in Chapter 21 to reveal important ideas about characters and themes. Zoom in on the last paragraph of the

### Anchor Text:

*The Color of Water*  
Chapters 19 - 22  
(Pgs. 193-229)

### Supplemental Texts (Appendix B)

- "Alone" (poem) by Maya Angelou

- Note for Teachers (Teaching Point I): This trip (detailed in chapters 20 and 22) is the first time James's and Ruth's stories directly intersect. It also marks a significant turning point and progression for James on his path to self-discovery. Don't reveal this to students ahead of time; instead, plan your questions to lead students to this big understanding.
- Eventually we want students to be able to identify symbols themselves. However, as a scaffold, you can reveal the "bird who flew" as a symbol and focus time in class on supporting student interpretation of the symbol's meaning and its impact on theme development.
- The questions included in these teaching points can

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

chapter on page 218 (after Mameh's death) to complete a close reading using text-dependent questions such as:

- *Explain the Jewish ritual Ruth's family participated in each Yom Kippur. What do Jewish people believe this custom represents?*
- *How did Ruth and her siblings feel about this annual event?*
- *How does Mameh justify the killing of the chicken?*
- *According to Mameh, why is it okay to perform this ritual on a chicken but not another type of bird?*
- *Describe Mameh's relationship with the birds at her window. How are her feelings about these birds different from her feelings about the chicken used for the ritual?*
- *What does Mameh's treatment of the birds reveal about her?*
- After reading the chapter and close reading, analyze the symbolism in the chapter's title:
  - Who or what does the title refer to in a literal sense?
  - Who or what does the title refer to in a metaphorical sense? What does the bird represent? What does its "flying" represent – in this chapter and in the memoir as a whole?
    - *Push students to think outside the box and uncover multiple potential metaphorical meanings of this symbol. Is there evidence to support it might symbolize more than one person or idea?*
  - How does this metaphor convey themes that apply in our lives and the outside world? What lesson are we learning through the author's use of this symbol?

### **III. Analyze how a poem's word choice, repetition, and structure develop its central themes, and make thematic connections to *The Color of Water*.**

- Closely read Maya Angelou's poem titled "Alone" following this close-reading protocol (you'll need to create corresponding student materials):
  - *First Read:* Students read silently and independently, and jot down their initial thoughts about what the poem is trying to say.
  - *Second Read:* Fluent teacher read-aloud. Instruct students to follow along as you read, and to circle each time Angelou uses the word "alone." Students should consider text-specific questions such as:
    - *How many times does she repeat "alone?" What does this word mean in the context of each line?*

and should be used in lessons. Based on your lesson plan, determine which question(s) best apply to your big idea/goal for the day, and then supplement them with additional CFU and analysis questions to support readers.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

- *What other word does Angelou repeat multiple times? (nobody) How would you describe the relationship between the words “nobody” and “alone?”*
- *Why does Angelou repeat these two specific words so many times? What effect does this choice have on the poem’s tone?*
- *Third Read:* Fluent teacher read-aloud. This time, students should put a box around any whole stanzas that repeat.
  - *What pattern do you notice in the poem’s structure? How would you describe the way this poem is organized?*
  - *Paraphrase the stanza that repeats three times. What does the word “here” refer to?*
  - *What emotional impact does the poem’s repetitive structure have on you as a reader?*
- *Fourth Read:* Allow students to go back and reread the poem again collaboratively with a partner. Provide them with time to discuss the literal and metaphorical/symbolic meanings of important lines (and record their findings in a graphic organizer), such as:
  - “Lying, thinking / Last night / How to find my soul a home”
  - “Storm clouds are gathering / The wind is gonna blow”
  - “The race of man is suffering / And I can hear the moan”
- *Fifth Read:* Students read silently and independently to determine the poem’s central themes (about the world, facing challenges, isolation, self-sufficiency, etc.) and to make connections to *The Color of Water*. After reading and collecting evidence, students should express their understanding of themes and connections to McBride’s memoir in writing.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

<p><b>Week 6:</b></p> <p><b>I:</b> RL.2, RL.6</p> <p><b>II:</b> RI/RL.5</p> <p><b>III:</b> RL.2, RL.4, RL.5, W.4, W.10</p>	<p><b>I. Exploring Themes: Religion and Belonging (“Insiders” v. “Outsiders”)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Chapter 23:</b> While reading, students should focus on the repeated attention to religion, specifically as it relates to Ruth’s religious faith.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze why Ruth decides to convert to Christianity, and what impact her conversion has on her sense of self and community. How does her Christian faith provide Ruth with things she’s always longed for?</li> <li>Compare characteristics of Ruth’s life with Dennis with characteristics of her life growing up with her family. Why does Ruth consider these years with Dennis and the New Brown Church the happiest of her life, despite their poverty?</li> <li>Analyze how Ruth’s use of first person point of view impacts our understanding of how she coped with her husband’s death. What role did religion play in her life with Dennis and her response when he died?</li> </ul> </li> <li> <p><b>Chapter 24:</b> While reading, students should focus on the differences between Mommy’s two visits to New Brown to determine themes about divisions between people and belonging to a group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Zoom-In Passage #1:</b> Analyze what caused the extreme hurt Mommy felt the first time she returned to church with the new minister. Then, connect these specific feelings and pain to other situations earlier in the memoir. What similarities exist between this situation in church (on pages 252-253) and other moments throughout both James and Ruth’s lives?</li> <li><b>Zoom-In Passage #2:</b> Compare Ruth’s visit to New Brown (on pages 256-258) with the previous passage’s visit. What has changed? How have Mommy’s feelings toward the new minister changed, and how do you know? Finally, what lessons can we as readers learn from Mommy in this chapter and throughout the book?</li> </ul> </li> <li> <p><b>Takeaway:</b> When ideas come up again and again in a text (like “religion” and “belonging” in <i>The Color of Water</i>), the author typically is trying to convey a theme or lesson about it. In these chapters, student analysis should end with extended writing so they can synthesize their analysis of Ruth’s experiences and beliefs to determine central themes about religion, faith, and what it means to be an “insider” or an “outsider” of a group.</p> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Anchor Text:</b> <i>The Color of Water</i> Chapters 23 - 25 (Pgs. 231-278)</p> <p><b>Supplemental Texts (Appendix B)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excerpt from “The Things They Carried” (<i>model text for writing</i>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Supplemental Resources (Appendix D)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The Things They Carried” Writing Task: Planning Pages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Before reading “The Things They Carried” excerpt this week as a model text for writing, provide some context for students about the larger work it comes from: the book is a war story that explores the personal experiences of soldiers during the Vietnam War.</li> <li>Through this week’s writing task (“The Things They Carried”), you also have opportunities to explore reading standards RL.4 (tone, word choice) and RL.6 (noticing and analyzing differences between first-person and third-person narration).</li> <li>Speaking/Listening Connection (to writing prompt): If time permits, allow students to “perform” their writing as a way to share work with others and work on presentation skills.</li> </ul>
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## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### II. Structure: How does the final chapter (Ch. 25) fit into the novel's structure as a whole? Analyze its purpose and function as a conclusion to the memoir.

- The entire book was written about the past, until this chapter. In chapter 25, McBride returns to the present and explains the “resolutions” of both his mother’s and his own confrontation and acceptance of their pasts.
- Allow students to discuss the purpose of this final chapter as a conclusion to the memoir. Are the conflicts and personal quests for identity raised throughout the memoir resolved, or are questions left unanswered? Explain.
- Analyze the author’s purpose for writing this memoir (using evidence from Chapter 25), and analyze his purpose for including the catalogued list of his siblings’ names and educational accomplishments. What does he want to emphasize in these closing pages about his mother?

### III. Writing: Using the excerpt from “The Things They Carried” as a model text, write a similarly structured paragraph about the things James and Ruth “carried” throughout their lives.

- Step 1: Read and analyze the model text: “The Things They Carried”
  - Provide the background information about the context of this excerpt and the book it came from before reading the text. Allow students to read the text first, share their first impressions and initial understanding of what it means, before conducting a fluent teacher read-aloud.
  - Discuss the multiple meanings of the word “carry” – what is the difference between carrying something in a physical sense vs. an emotional or psychological sense?
    - Go back into the model text, and color-code or annotate using symbols: Which things are the soldiers carrying physically? Which do they carry emotionally or psychologically?
  - Analyze the structure of the model text. What phrases are repeated throughout? What is the effect of repeating these phrases? Why did the author choose to do this, and how does it convey central ideas?
- Step 2: Using the planning sheets (Appendix D) and evidence from throughout *The Color of Water*, students should draft their own piece of writing entitled “The Things They Carried” that reflects the experiences of both Ruth and James.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

<p><b>Week 7:</b></p> <p><b>I:</b> RL.3, RI.5, RI.6</p> <p><b>II:</b> RI.5, RI.6</p> <p><b>III:</b> RI.2, RI.6, RI.8, W.1</p>	<p><b>I. Analyze and evaluate McBride’s purpose for including this particular anecdote (describing the time his mother agreed to attend David Preston’s Jewish wedding) as the memoir’s epilogue.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An epilogue is a section at the end of a book serving as a conclusion or to comment on the larger work as a whole.</li> <li>As you read McBride’s epilogue, first determine Ruth’s motivations for attending the wedding and collect evidence about her reactions to being back in a synagogue. Notice how Ruth has changed since her youth and early adulthood in terms of her relationship to Jewish faith. Pay special attention to Ruth’s dialogue and her actions as described by James. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Then, think about why McBride selected this particular anecdote to serve as the epilogue. How does this section contribute to ideas and themes? How does it serve as a conclusion or tie up loose ends for readers?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Finally, evaluate McBride’s choices around the epilogue and their impact on readers. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>What feelings and final message did this anecdote leave you with as a reader? Do you think this anecdote accomplished what McBride hoped it would in the epilogue?</i></li> <li><i>Would you have been more or less satisfied with the memoir’s ending had the epilogue not been included, and why?</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>II. Analyze how the story’s alternating structure and points of view develop meaning and support the author’s purpose for writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After finishing the memoir, students should describe the overall structure of this book. They should address how time passes and how McBride chose to alternate points of view, along with considering why he decided to preserve his mother’s first-person voice in chapters that detail her past.</li> <li>Allow students to discuss the benefits and limitations of structuring a memoir in this way. Why do you think James McBride made this decision? What was his purpose in writing this book in this way? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How effective was this structure in conveying his life story and central messages? What does he hope his readers will get out of this memoir? How might our understanding of their lives been different if James told both stories from his own point of view?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Anchor Text:</b> <i>The Color of Water</i> Epilogue and Afterword (Pgs. 279-295)</p> <p><b>Supplemental Texts (Appendix B)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The Problem with Memoirs”</li> </ul> <p><b>Supplemental Resources (Appendix D)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Argument Writing: Planning Graphic Organizer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note about Teaching Point II: This teaching point is not connected to particular text, as we want students to describe and analyze the structure of the text as a whole. However, to scaffold this teaching point, feel free to focus student analysis around a few selected chapters from across the text.</li> <li>Suggested pacing this week: Spend 2 days finishing the book and analyzing the text’s structure (I and II). Reserve the final three days to read and analyze the op-ed, and to complete the culminating on-demand writing prompt.</li> <li>Speaking/Listening Connection (SL.1): If time permits, hold a seminar or discussion groups during or after students write their critical essays to hear and evaluate their</li> </ul>
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## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### III. Determine an author's central argument in an op-ed essay, and trace/evaluate the strength of his evidence: "The Problem with Memoirs"

- Read the op-ed piece from the New York Times called "The Problem With Memoirs" to identify the author's central argument. Challenge students to articulate all aspects of his central argument in their own words before moving on.
  - Then, students should go back into the text to trace the evidence and determine the strategies the author uses to defend his position (i.e. anecdotes and examples from specific memoirs he's read himself, sarcasm, a structure/numbered list of "guidelines" that establish him as the authority on the matter, etc.).
  - They should be able to articulate his four main "guidelines" for writing good memoirs in their own words and select the best and most relevant evidence he provides for each one.
    - Direct students to the title that has been published as an illustration. After considering the author's argument and evidence, how does this illustration support his point? Pay attention to nuances and identify 2-3 ways this visual supports his argument.
  - Have students rank the strength of the author's audience from 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong), and defend their reasoning in pairs or small discussion groups.
- **Unit Culminating Writing Prompt:** How would the author of "The Problem With Memoirs" evaluate the quality and value of *The Color of Water*? Make a strong claim, and support your argument with evidence from both the article and the memoir. You should reference and address McBride's level of adherence to at least three of the author's four "guidelines" in your response.
  - *Note: This is meant to be an "on-demand" writing prompt that students complete in class. Provide time for students to form claims, collect relevant evidence, and organize their thinking in the graphic organizer included in Appendix D before beginning to write on-demand. Based on student needs, feel free to allow structured peer feedback on the strength of claims and evidence selection before they begin to write.*

peers' arguments.

- Note: There is no required MCLASS Assessment for this unit.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

### Appendix A: Unpacked Standards Guide

Source: Public Schools of North Carolina NCDPI Collaborative Workspace

Standard	Explanation and Example
<p><b>RL/RI.8.1:</b> Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p>	<p>Eighth grade students will analyze a text for a central theme or idea and support their analysis with strong textual evidence. Students will learn that evidence is considered strong when it both convinces the reader and effectively expresses the central ideas or theme(s) of the text. To achieve this, students will first read closely to determine both explicit and inferred meanings of a text. This process involves determining the author's purpose and overall message of the text. Students may choose to mark the text as they read to guide their thinking. For example, students may mark, annotate, or highlight repeated ideas or patterns and inferred meanings as they read. Based upon their analysis, students may then determine the author's purpose, overall message of the text, and which details best support this meaning. Work like this may involve students sorting textual evidence and using only the strongest segments; specifically, those which directly connect with and uphold the central idea or theme. Once students are able to distinguish between the varying levels of textual strength, they move toward mastering the standard independently. Repeated modeling through think-alouds and guided practice will aid students in this process.</p>
<p><b>RL.8.2:</b> Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.</p>	<p>Students need to be able to determine the central idea or theme of a text. To do this work, students will record repeated messages or patterns they observe within various story elements. Students will note how recurring interpersonal conflicts between characters, changing settings, and plot twists all influence/shape the theme and guide the reader toward realizing the theme in its entirety. As students begin to realize the central idea, they should reflect on how the writer used such recurring patterns through the subtle avenues of setting, characterization and plot to slowly reveal it indirectly. Students will then be able to write objective summaries revealing the sequential development of a theme through description of characters, setting, and plot. Students may use a story map as a guide to outlining the story's thematic development.</p>
<p><b>RL.8.3:</b> Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.</p>	<p>To master this, students will be able to determine how specific events or dialogue significantly impact the development of a story. Students may demonstrate this knowledge by determining critical turning points of the plot, analyzing choices made by characters, or examining external and internal conflicts -- all of which build the momentum of the story. Once students have determined these critical moments, they should be able to explain the cause/effect result in relation to the story's plot or development. To do this work, students may work together in groups and highlight or mark the text those moments and/or scenes which they consider turning points (and explain why).</p>

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

**RL.8.6:** Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

Students will understand the role of point-of-view in a given text. They should be guided to see how the point-of-view is essentially the lens through which the reader is allowed to see the story. To do this work, students may examine one story from a variety of viewpoints. For each viewpoint they assume, students should determine what “they” (as the character) know versus what other characters know. Once students have mapped out the differing viewpoints, they are ready to discuss the techniques writers use in order to experiment with and even manipulate point-of-view. In turn, placing themselves in the role as the reader, students can discuss how these techniques create specific tones and moods within the piece.

**RI.8.2:** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

Students will first determine the central idea or focus of a text. This involves becoming aware of and recording repeated understandings or messages as they read. Students are encouraged to actively read and take note of how recurring examples, images, and conclusions drawn by the writer support and build the central idea of the text. Once students realize the central idea, they should reflect on how the writer used repetition to slowly reveal it to the reader. Therefore, summaries should reveal the ways the central ideas develops. For example, analysis may include examining a writer’s choice of structure, features, and support.

**RI.8.3:** Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

Eighth grade students will analyze a writer’s style and presentation to determine the relationship between individuals, ideas, or events. To achieve this, students will first understand how different text structures present and link information. For instance, using graphic organizers, students could read brief pieces that present information using a variety of structures including comparisons, analogies, and categories. Students could then reflect on how the writer’s choice of structure relates to the overall central idea or purpose. To further explore this concept, students could generalize how specific genres of informational texts tend to rely on particular structures to determine relationships between individuals, ideas, or events.

**RI.8.5:** Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

Students will understand how writers go about crafting paragraphs in order to build meaning. They will recognize how topic sentences, support, and elaboration work together to develop a concept for the reader. Examples include separating sentences of well-constructed paragraphs and asking students to place the manipulatives in the order that best builds meaning for them as a reader. Following this activity, students may reflect, using their own language and impressions, on the role each sentence served in the paragraph. Additional exposure across a variety of texts will aid students in recognizing paragraph patterns and structures.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

**RI.8.6:** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

Students will recognize how an author's perspective presents itself within a text. This process may involve examining a text for overall purpose, personal bias, and opposing viewpoints. Students will examine argumentative/evaluative texts such as editorials and persuasive speeches. Students may outline the perspective presented by the writer including key ideas, supporting details, and counterarguments. Students may then consider how someone of an opposing viewpoint may respond to the examples, data, or support offered in the original text. Students' analysis may also focus on examining the author's tone, word choice, and use of persuasive language.

**RI.8.9:** Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.

Eighth grade students will understand how two or more texts may present the same topic from differing viewpoints. Specifically, students should be able to cite instances of disagreement and analyze the basis for these discrepancies. This work may include examining argumentative/evaluative texts, including editorials and political campaign documents. As students read each text, they should note the support established by each writer and how those details relate to the writer's overall message. For instance, students may consider whether the details serve to sensationalize the issue, address the counterargument, or inform the reader. In addition, students should consider the source of these supporting details and their overall credibility in regard to the given topic. Evidence of this standard may include seminars and debates as well as reflections.

**W.8.1:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

Students must be able to construct a particular claim based on an issue within a text, consider all counterclaims, and then search for textual evidence to support the claims in a persuasive manner. Work may include examining a literary text or closely reading articles/journals and other sources identified as legitimate or not, depending on the assignment. Once students have established a strong foundation in the defining features of editorials, including controversial topics, structures, and word choice, they are then prepared to create their own editorials. Instruction may focus on how to recognize and use evidence from the text in order to prove a given claim, in a 'voice' that is both authoritative and rational. In effect, students will then, in proper order, logically tie all claims/counterclaims, evidence, and closing remarks together to produce a well-supported argument.

**W.8.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

To demonstrate understanding, students may first practice identifying defining characteristics of argumentative, informative/evaluative, and narrative writing. Students may benefit from anchor charts that serve as reminders for each genre. As students approach these categories of writing, they may receive additional instruction on how to effectively approach their specific task, purpose, and audience. Instruction may focus on choosing a text structure or format, using language that is precise and powerful, and creating a tone that is appropriate for one's audience.

## Unit 8.5: Determining Themes - *The Color of Water*

**W.8.10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

To become skilled writers, students must practice writing in a myriad of situations. Writing assignments should be woven naturally and routinely into instructional lessons. Writing opportunities may include warm-up assignments that activate prior knowledge, longer writing assignments that involve the writing process, and reflections that serve as both checks for introspection and understanding.

**SL.8.1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Eighth grade students will work together in groups in an effort to collaborate and 'bounce ideas' off one another on various issues within a text, in order to reach a common understanding. To show mastery, students may participate in activities including book clubs, Socratic seminars, and philosophical chairs. To prepare for discussions and debates such as these, students must read a text closely and with predetermined purpose(s). Students then come together, under the guidelines of a specific structure, and probe for deeper meanings beneath the text. They should ask pointed questions, actively listen for and gauge other students' responses, and reflect on and re-evaluate their initial belief or stance. This process encourages students to practice skills such as active listening, connecting to others' ideas, and seeking to construct a higher truth or synthesis on whatever topic of discussion/debate is at hand.

**L.8.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on grade 8 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

Eighth grade students will use their familiarity with language and its structure as a tool to aid their reading comprehension. To achieve this, students will draw from a variety of skills including using context and function to determine a word's meaning, analyzing unknown words using knowledge of Greek and Latin roots, and developing the skills to use reference tools when necessary. Possible activities to attain this goal include practice with analogies in order to understand how function can serve as a clue to an unknown word and word studies of common roots. As students refine these skills, they should be asked routinely to apply their knowledge in authentic reading, writing, and speaking contexts.