



ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC ACADEMY

Hello 10th Grade Student,

As your teacher, I welcome you to St. Joseph Catholic Academy's fine tradition of excellence.

This year, you will encounter a number of adventurous learning experiences; you will have the opportunity to enrich your vocabulary, improve writing and grammar skills, and explore various works and genres of literature from all over.

To prepare for our year together, your first requirement is to begin your summer assignments. All reading is to be done during the summer. All assignments are expected to be complete and ready to turn in on the 1st day of class.

Summer Reading Novel:

The Color of Water by James McBride (summer reading)

- During the first week of school, students will need a version of the summer novel readily available, whether it is print or digital.
 - If a student would like to purchase and use their own text(s), they are more than welcome.

If you have any question or concerns over the summer, please feel free to e-mail me at tbetker@sjcawi.org .

Sincerely,

Mrs. Betker



ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC ACADEMY

The Color of Water by James McBride

These questions will be a beginning point upon our return in August; they are due the first day back. There will be a test on the entire novel (after some review).

There are several questions for each chapter, you need only complete 2 questions per chapter. YOU pick ANY two to answer for EACH chapter. Answer the questions on paper (in a notebook or on loose-leaf, not laptop); be sure to answer your chosen questions thoroughly. You do not have to rewrite each question; simply number your answers with the corresponding question.

Chapter Questions

Color of Water Questions

Chapter 1 “Dead”

1. Why does Ruth say she’s dead? 1
2. Why did Rachel Shilsky have to die? 2
3. Why doesn’t Ruth like the Jewish religion? 2
4. What was Ruth’s father like? 3
5. What was her mother like? 3

Chapter 2 “Bicycle”

1. What two hobbies did Ruth take-up when James was fourteen? 5
2. What was James’ stepfather like? 6
3. How did James react to and deal with his stepfather’s death?
4. How did Ruth deal with her husband’s death? 7
5. How does James describe his mother’s physical appearance? 7
6. Why does James say whites and blacks hate his mother? 8
7. Why doesn’t James want his mother to ride the bike?
8. What does James begin to notice about his mother? 12

Chapter 3 “Kosher”

1. Why does Ruth say her father married her mother? 15
2. What would Ruth’s father threaten her with? 16
3. How did the Russians treat the Jews? 16
4. What activities were not allowed on the Sabbath? 17
5. Why was Ruth so confused about death? 18
6. What does Ruth fear about death? 19

Chapter 4 “Black Power”

1. How does James learn about his mother? 21-22
2. How did James and his siblings deal with the “realities we had no control over”? 22
3. Why may Ruth have gotten upset when the teachers would ask her if her children were adopted? 23

4. Why may James' teachers have asked Ruth if James was adopted?
5. Why do you think Ruth avoids talking about her past with her children? 24-25
6. Why did James fear for his mother's safety? 25
7. How did the media effect James' perception of the Black Panthers? 27
8. Why do you think Ruth was so adamant about her children staying at home and keeping their business private? 27
9. According to James, what is the immigrant mentality? 29
10. What did James' parents believe was the way out of poverty? 29
11. Do you agree with the above? Explain.
12. Why is it contradicting that his mother sends him to white schools?
13. Where does James' mother like to hang out? 31
14. How was Ruth treated by white people?
15. How was Ruth treated by black people?
16. Why is James so afraid of the Black Panthers? 36
17. Why did James sock the boy? 36
18. Who is more violent, James or the Black Panther? Explain your answer.

Chapter 5, "The Old Testament"

1. What did Ruth's father do for a living? 37
2. Why did Ruth's family move so much? 37
3. Why does Ruth say people noticed her? 38
4. Why didn't Ruth's mom want to move Suffolk? 39
5. Why did the Jews get mad at Ruth's father? 40
6. How did Tatch treat his wife? 41
7. What did Ruth's father do to her? 42-43

Chapter 6 "The New Testament"

1. What does James compare his mother's singing to? 45

2. What can you infer about the Reverend's education based on the trouble he has with reading? 47
3. What two similes do the author use while explaining the Reverend's sermons? 47
4. What doesn't mom like to hear about in a sermon? 48
5. Why do **you** think James' mother only cries in church? 50
6. Why does **James** think his mother cries? 50
7. Why does mom say God is the color of water? 51
8. Why do you think Richie gets so mad at the white picture of Jesus? 52

Chapter 7 "Sam"

9. How does Mameh react to the sailors? 57
10. Why do you think she reacts this way? 58
11. Why was Ruth's family uneasy in Suffolk? 59
12. What is ironic about Tateh's worries that he will be robbed by his black customers? 59
13. Why is Ruth afraid of guns? 60
14. What were living conditions like back then according to Ruth? 60
15. What phrase does she use to describe black people's lives in the south? 61
16. According to Ruth, what made the black folks happy where she lived? 61
17. Why do you think her dad hated black people so much? 61
18. What was the only thing that made Sam smile? 63
19. What happened to Sam? 63
20. What was her aunt's response when she asked for help? 63

Chapter 8 "Brothers and Sisters"

21. What did the kids eat for dinner? 67
22. What is mom's top priority? 70
23. Why did Helen quit school? 73

24. What is fair of mom to lay the responsibility of making Helen stay on the kids?

25. Why do you think Helen ran away and refused to come home?

Chapter 9 “Shul”

26. How was Ruth/Rachel treated by the other kids in Suffolk? 80

27. Why didn't Ruth/Rachel have any Jewish friends in Suffolk? 81

28. How did Frances and her family treat Rachel? 81

29. How does mom say being poor was different back then as compared to nowadays? 82

30. What were some of the things people ate back then? 83

31. In what way was Ruth starving when she was a child? 83

Chapter 10 “School”

1. What do we find out about their education? 87

2. How does James react to the racism towards him? 90

3. What does James use to escape? 90

4. How is the boy in the mirror different from James? 91

5. What is mom's bean story about? 93

6. What does Mom do to keep the kids busy?

7. Why do you think his mom ignored the outside world when they would go out?100

8. Why doesn't James want to go places with his mother anymore?100

9. How does the store owner react to James' mother?102

10. How does James' interest in independence backfire?103

11. Do you think Ruth over reacted?103

12. How has growing up in a dual-race household affected James as an adult?104

13. What does the statement “I belong to the world of one God, one people” tell you about James' views on race and identity now?104

Chapter 11 “Boys”

1. Why did Ruth fall in love with a black man?107

2. What would they do to interracial couples back then according to Ruth?107
3. Why do you think Tatch spent his family time slaughtering chickens?108
4. Why won't Tatch buy his children new clothes?109
5. What does Ruth say she loves about "black folks"?109
6. How did Peter win Ruth over?110
7. What did Peter risk in dating Ruth?110
8. What does Ruth say about the South?111
9. Why won't Ruth eat crab?111
10. Who knows Ruth is pregnant?114
11. Why do you think mom wants her to go to New York?

Chapter 12 "Daddy"

1. What does Hunter do for a living? 118
2. Who does James know as his father? 118
3. What is the irony of Hunter spending his life savings on the house? 119
4. Why didn't Hunter live at the St. Alban's house?119
5. How do the stepfather and mom's priorities match?124
6. What happened with the brownstone?125
7. Why do you think James avoided visiting him?126
8. How does "Daddy" mention race?127
9. Why doesn't James tell his stepfather how he felt about him?127

Chapter 13 "New York"

1. How does her extended family treat Ruth? 130
2. What does Ruth say she loves about NY? 130
3. How does Aunt Mary treat her? 133
4. What did she do about the pregnancy? 134
5. What was most important to Mameh's sisters? 135

6. How does her family deal with their feelings?
7. Explain the metaphor "If you throw water on the floor it will find a hole" 135

Chapter 14 "Chicken Man"

1. What is James' reaction to his mother's piano playing?138
2. How does James take advantage of this situation?138
3. Why does he want to get away from his mom?138
4. What does mom do with all her money?141
5. How does James earn money?141
6. How does James deal with his pain?142
7. How is he like his Jewish aunts? (in the way he deals with his pain)142
8. Why does James like the corner?147
9. Why does Jack send James to the corner?
10. What is the lesson behind "Chicken Man's" death?

Chapter 15 "Graduation"

1. How was the school in New York different than the one in Suffolk?153
2. Why did Ruth go back to Suffolk?153
3. What does she find out about Peter?154
4. How does she react to the news about Peter?154
5. Why does she go to her graduation?155
6. Why didn't her parents go to graduation?157
7. Why doesn't Ruth enter the church?

Chapter 16 "Driving"

1. What turned James around?161
2. Why does James continue to smoke pot?163
3. Why is mom always on the go?164
4. What keeps his mom going (from going insane).165
5. What does the driving incident tell us about Ruth?

Chapter 17 “Lost in Harlem”

1. Why was Ruth afraid of Uncle Isaac? 170
2. What was Aunt Mary up to?170
3. How does she describe Andrew McBride?171
4. Why won't they give her a job in Harlem?172
5. Why does Ruth say she went out with Rocky?174
6. What are Rocky's plans for Ruth?175
7. Who steered Ruth away from Rocky?176

Chapter 18 “Lost in Delaware”

1. Why does mom want to move?177
2. Why does James think it's best he move?177
3. Why don't his younger siblings want to move?178
4. Why do the older brothers say they should move?178
5. Why are they lost in Delaware?180
6. Why does mom hate Delaware?181
7. What does mom feel guilty about?182
8. Why has James become a butler?184
9. How does he feel about this?
10. Why do you think she pushes her children away?
11. Why do you think mom hides her emotions from her kids?

Chapter 19 “The Promise”

1. Why didn't Ruth want James to be a musician?194
2. How do people react to seeing Dennis and Ruth together?195
3. Why doesn't Dennis marry Ruth?196
4. Why did Ruth go back home?197
5. What's her dad up to?198

6. Why did the parents get a divorce?200
7. What is the promise and what do we find out about it?201

Chapter 20 “Old Man Shilsky”

1. Why did he quit his job and the Boston Globe?204
2. What other reasons did he feel he had to leave Boston? (not related to work)204
3. Why do you think his mother refuses to talk about her past?206
4. Why do you think the old man is laughing so hard at James?207
5. How does Eddie describe Shilsky?209
6. How does Eddie describe Rachel?

Chapter 21 “A Bird Who Flies”

1. How do Mameh’s sisters tell her Bube had died?
2. What is your reaction to the way they broke the news?
3. Why do you think Ruth hears her mom’s crying in her head?
4. Why can’t Ruth stay in Suffolk?
5. What do you think Ruth should do?
6. Do you think Ruth should feel guilty about leaving her mom? Y/N why?
7. How do you think her life would have been different if she would have stayed?
8. Who is the “Bird Who Flies”

Chapter 22 “A Jew Discovered”

1. Why doesn’t James track Dee Dee down?
2. How was James treated the first time he asked to see the synagogue?
3. How did the Jewish people in Suffolk treat James?
4. Why do you think it was for the best that he wasn’t raised Jewish?
5. Why didn’t James play Aubrey’s greeting to his mother?
6. Do you agree with James’ statement near the end of the chapter about life?

Chapter 23 “Dennis”

1. What were some of the hardships Ruth and Dennis faced being a couple?

2. Why did they finally get married?
3. Why can't Ruth go south with Dennis?
4. Why was their wedding a secret?
5. How did Dennis change?
6. Do you think Ruth should have taken the kids to see Dennis inside the hospital? Explain.
7. How did the community respond to Dennis' death?
8. Do you think Ruth 's family should have helped her out? Why or why not?
9. Who was Ruth's "family" through her hardships?

Chapter 24 "New Brown"

1. Do you agree with Dennis' statement? 250
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3. Why doesn't Ruth want to come to the 40th anniversary dinner for the church? 252
4. What does he compare his mother's memory to? 253
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4. How does James view his white female editors?263
5. What does James consider growing up privileged?264
6. Why doesn't Ruth encourage James to work in the music business?266
7. What affect does talking about her past have on Ruth?269
8. What two things does James compare himself to?270
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10. How does Ruth act when she goes to visit Frances?274

Epilogue

1. What does he mean "he didn't wear it on his sleeve"?280
2. Why does James think his mom won't go to the wedding?281



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