

Common Book Discussion Questions

The diversity you encounter as you become part of the Bruin community is one of our strengths, and we are committed to developing a community that values and learns from the richness of our experiences, histories, dreams, and contributions. The Common Book experience provides a great opportunity for reflection, conversation and learning about each other. As you read *Between the World and Me*, please consider the following introductory questions, created by members of our Faculty in Residence program. We encourage you to reflect on the questions and the issues raised, and prepare for enlightening conversations with other Bruins.

1. Coates is careful to avoid assuming that whiteness is a given. Rather, he calls attention to the constructedness of race when he describes families and individuals who “believe themselves to be white” or children who are “raised to be white” (10). At the same time, whiteness is a powerful social force, a descriptor for a community of those who have “maximum power and minimum responsibility,” those who have the power to take the lives of others without punishment (80). What role does race play in your self-understanding? How does your understanding of yourself and your identities connect to the social and historical consequences Coates discusses?
2. Coates writes that “...race is the child of racism, not the father” (7). What does the author mean by this? How does this assertion compel us to think about the history of race and racism in the United States? How does this apparent reversal of common sense compel us to rethink the history of race and racism in the United States?
3. Coates writes of schools that “were not concerned with curiosity. They were concerned with compliance” (26). How does the author see the education system as complicit with a power that continues to divide America into separate worlds? Do you have personal experience with a school that was or was not concerned with curiosity?
5. What does Coates mean by “the Dream”? Why does he urge himself to be “wary of every Dream” (53)? What do you think the author means when he writes that “the Dreamers...would rather live white than live free” (143)? Against the Dream, what does it mean to be “conscious citizen[s] of the terrible world” (108)?
6. What is Coates’ definition of race on p. 115? Do you agree? What other populations might this definition apply to globally, beyond those in the United States? If race is not a biological reality, then what is it?
7. In what ways does history, or the media, tell us who or what matters? Who counts and who does not? Give examples. As a member of the Bruin community, what is your role in shaping/affirming/complicating/confronting these messages?