

Grade 8: Unit 2

To Kill a Mockingbird: Connected Text Seminars

Seminar 1: Connected Texts

What Does Success Look Like?

Scholars explain the writers' messages about violence and injustice that are fueled by racism.

Seminar 1:

“Black Lives, White Lies and Emmett Till” by *The New York Times* Editorial Board (Nonfiction) and “Letter to My Son” from *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (Nonfiction)

Do Now — 10 minutes

- Play classical or jazz music to establish a calm work environment.
- Scholars revise their Exit Tickets from the previous seminar based on the feedback you gave them.

Launch — 2 minutes

- Tell scholars that today, they will be reading two texts: “Black Lives, White Lies, and Emmett Till” and “Letter to My Son” from *Between the World and Me*. Build excitement by telling scholars that both texts will develop their background knowledge about concepts important in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Read and Discuss 1 — 35 minutes

Display “Black Lives, White Lies, and Emmett Till.”

Preview the Text (2 minutes):

- Have scholars read the title and scan the article to frame their thinking.
- Call on scholars to share what they noticed about the text and what they will think about as they are reading.

Read (10 minutes):

- Say: *As you are reading, think, “What is this text mostly about?”*
- Read the text aloud while scholars follow along on their digital copies.

Discuss (3 minutes):

Scholars discuss the following question in pairs: What is this text mostly about? Call on pairs to share out. Insist that scholars back up their claims with evidence from the text.

Read (10 minutes):

- Say: *As you are rereading, think, “Why did the author write this text?”*
- Read the article aloud as scholars follow along on their digital copies. While reading aloud, pause to ask the questions below:
 - Stop after line 19, “...extensive investigation by the F.B.I.”
 - Partner Talk: What is the significance of the book *The Blood of Emmett Till*?
 - Stop after line 30, “...mangled remains of her child.”
 - Partner Talk: How did Emmett Till’s mother ensure his brutal death was recognized?
 - Stop after line 39, “...to inspire the modern civil rights movement.”
 - Partner Talk: How did the court justify Emmett Till’s death?
 - Stop after line 49, “...weighs heavily on the nation.”
 - Partner Talk: What does Ms. Bryant’s admission suggest?
 - Discuss: Why did the author write this text?

Main Idea Jot (2 minutes):

- Scholars jot a main idea in a comment next to the title of the text.
- While scholars are working, circulate to determine which scholars have a bull’s-eye main idea jot and which do not.

Discuss (6 minutes):

- Scholars discuss the following questions as a whole class:
 - What is the author’s argument about the justice system prior to and during the civil rights movement?
 - How does the author convey his argument to readers?

Give scholars 2 minutes to revise their main idea jots based on the discussion.

Write — 10 minutes

Write an essay of no more than 200 words:

- What is the significance of the title phrase “Black Lives, White Lies” in the article? Justify your argument with at least **two** concrete pieces of evidence from “Black Lives, White Lies, and Emmett Till.”

Wrap-up — 5 minutes

- Show an exemplar essay to scholars. Have scholars discuss what makes the claim clear and compelling. Set your expectations for what scholars must do differently when approaching the next text.

Read and Discuss 2 — 30 minutes

Display “Letter to My Son” from *Between the World and Me*.

Preview the Text (2 minutes):

- Have scholars read the title and scan the passage to frame their thinking.
- Call on scholars to share what they noticed about the text and what they will think about as they are reading.

Read (10 minutes):

- Say: *As you are reading, think, “What is this text mostly about? Why did the author write this text?”*
- Scholars independently read and annotate the text on their Chromebooks. When they are finished, they jot a main idea in a comment next to the title of the text.
- While scholars work, circulate to determine the major trend in scholars’ work and conference with two to three scholars.

Discuss (5 minutes):

- Scholars discuss the following questions in pairs: What is this text mostly about? Why did the author write this text? Call on pairs to share out. Insist that scholars back up their claims with evidence from the text.

Give scholars 2 minutes to revise their main idea jots based on the discussion.

Read (6 minutes):

- Say: *As you are rereading, think, “What is Coates’s message to his son?”*
- Reread lines 58–84 with scholars.

Discuss (5 minutes):

- Scholars discuss the following question as a whole class: What is Coates’s message to his son?

Exit Ticket — 8 minutes

Write an essay of no more than 200 words:

- After describing cases of excessive white violence against black bodies, Coates writes that “there is nothing uniquely evil in these destroyers or even in this moment” (line 69). What does Coates believe is truly responsible in these cases? Justify your

argument with at least **two** concrete pieces of evidence from “Letter to My Son’ from *Between the World and Me.*”